

A Growth That Endures...



A VERSE BY
VERSE
EXPOSITION
OF THE
EPISTLE OF
2ND PETER

Adorning One's Profession of the Gospel 2 Peter 1:5-7 (718)

The introduction of doctrinal error and reckless living was beginning to undermine the stability of the community of faith. 2 Peter was written to counter this deadly influence. Peter's strategy is to establish believers so firmly in the gospel - to familiarize them so thoroughly with the truth - that error (either in doctrine or practice) would be readily detected and resisted. Indeed, the point of this entire letter is this: **growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error.** Peter's aim, then, is to stabilize Christians. 2 Peter 1:1-4 review what God has done to this end.

2 Peter 1:1-4 (NASB) *Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent*

promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. God has granted to us a righteousness that is outside ourselves - a righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith in Christ (Phil. 3:9). God has supplied us with everything we need to live the life to which He has called us. God has granted to us His very great promises to the encouragement of our souls.

Today, in verses 5-7, the focus shifts to our response to the gracious initiatives and provision of God. Here's my point this morning: gratitude for grace is expressed by growth in grace. **2 Peter 1:5-7** (NASB) *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; ⁶ and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*

Now for this very reason. Let's say you are a professional football player. Before the season opener your team is given a promise that you will play in and win the Super Bowl. This promise is made by someone who actually has the power to accomplish such a thing. What impact would that have? Would you be inclined to slack off or to call off practices? On the contrary such a promise would probably be in incredible boost to your confidence. It would serve as motivation to work even harder. Such a promise would foster endurance, continuance, and courage when things were going badly. Such assurance would be a source of great joy as you labored hard from game to game.

God has designed His promises to do the same thing in our lives. God has not given His precious and magnificent promises to foster slothfulness, self-

indulgence, or neglect in us. Gospel promises never promote sin. Promises stimulate growth in grace. This is how Peter can write **applying all diligence in your faith supply**. I want to break this phrase down into three parts.

First, these people possessed saving faith (*in your faith*). God, by His grace, had called them. Persuaded and enabled by the Holy Spirit they had embraced Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, for rescue from the wrath of God, and for strength to live in obedience.

Second, they were being exhorted to personal endeavor in the Christian life (*applying all diligence*). Paul uses this word in **II Timothy 4:21** where he encourages Timothy to *make every effort to come before winter*. So we're talking about the application of effort - the expenditure of energy.

This point raises a crucial question – a question that must be answered if we are to understand and approach the Christian life correctly. What is your role, if any, in salvation? What part do you play in this life to which God has graciously called you? As Calvinists we believe that salvation is all of God's grace. The redemption of a sinner is not 50% God's effort and 50% man's effort. Let me say clearly. We do not create or generate faith. Saving faith is the gift of God (**Eph. 2:8**). We do not ultimately preserve or sustain ourselves in faith (**Phil. 1:6; I Pet. 1:5**). The issue boils down to the difference between justification and sanctification. It is worth a minute or two to make this distinction. We go to our confession of faith for assistance in understanding this distinction.

In the chapter on justification (XI) Westminster teaches that "Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as

righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone ... but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God." Justification, then, occurs outside of the sinner. It is a gracious, free, sovereign, forensic work of God. The gospel is pure offer, pure invitation. It is for the sinner but to receive the offer of Christ much like a starving man might reach out his hand to receive a piece of bread offered to him.

Faith is not the end-all of the Christian life any more than a wedding ceremony is the end-all of a marriage. Faith is the beginning of one's life in Christ. Upon receiving Christ we enter into the life-long process of sanctification.

Other phrases in other Chapters of the Confession affirm the responsibility of effort on the part of the justified believer. Take, for example, Chapter XVI, *Of Good Works*, paragraphs II and III. "These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are ... Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ. And that they may be enabled thereunto, beside the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will, and to do, of his good pleasure: yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them."

Third, we are called to glad cooperation with what the Spirit of God is doing (*supply* or *add to your faith*). The Greek word Peter uses here has an interesting background. Its noun form is a theatrical term that referred to someone who provided money to underwrite a stage production. It came to refer more generally to a generous city benefactor. You can see how the idea of cooperation came to be associated with the word. So it can be said that we *supply*, we *furnish*, we *add to* our faith in the sense that we prayerfully, diligently, willingly, and joyfully cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing.

What is the real focus of our application of effort in the Christian life? What are we to work hard at? We've been chosen, called, and regenerated. We've been granted repentance and faith (conversion). We've been justified? We've been adopted into God's family. Our "labor" is to pursue (with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength) those virtues that beautify, that commend, that adorn our profession of the gospel of grace. We do not "create" these beautiful qualities. They are not added to the gospel as if there's some deficiency in it. We cultivate them as inherent in saving faith. A seed is the first stage of the growth of a plant. All of the characteristics of the plant are inherent in that seed. It must, however, be cultivated to ultimate maturity where those characteristics are evident.

Peter lists seven of these virtues - *moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love*. Let's consider them one at a time.

First, Peter mentions **goodness**. The New American Standard translates this word, *moral excellence*. Excellence is a good term. Something is excellent to the

degree that it fulfills its purpose. A knife is excellent if it cuts well. A thoroughbred is excellent if he runs well. Excellent describes a superior example of a particular kind of thing. My Uncle Jack used to raise beagle hounds. Sometimes he'd point to a particular dog and say, "Now he's an excellent rabbit dog." Uncle Jack was saying that he was a first class hound dog; that he was a superior example of what a beagle hound ought to be. The excellence of a Christian is to reflect something of the attractive and winsome character of our Lord Jesus in every room and closet of life.

To this goodness we add **knowledge**. Now, there is the initial saving knowledge of Christ gained in conversion. By the law we come to know of our sin and of the deserved wrath that hangs over us on account of it. By the gospel we come to know Christ as our Savior and Deliverer from sin and wrath.

But what kind of knowledge are we to *furnish* or *add*? Let's not complicate this. Knowledge refers to "information about Jesus Christ and what pleases Him" (Lucas and Green, p. 59). Peter has in mind the kind of knowledge that comes from reading, reflecting upon, and applying the Scriptures. You may be thinking, "Pastor, that can't be right. It's just too simple." Beloved, we are those who "learn" Christ. And our textbook is the Word of God, the Bible. Look at these verses from **Psalm 119:97-100, 104** *O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.* ⁹⁸ *Thy commandments **make me wiser** than my enemies, For they are ever mine.* ⁹⁹ *I **have more insight** than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation.* ¹⁰⁰ *I **understand** more than the aged, Because I have observed Thy precepts ...* ¹⁰² *I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, For Thou Thyself hast **taught me** ...* ¹⁰⁴ *From Thy precepts I get **understanding**; Therefore I hate every false way.*

So from the Word we gain an ever-increasing and deepening knowledge of Jesus and of what is pleasing to Him. To know Him becomes our greatest desire (**Ps. 73:25-28**). To know and follow His ways, our greatest delight. It makes sense that to such knowledge we would add **self-control**. Even in the best of us there reside, like so many undisciplined children, many unruly affections and passions ready to burst out beyond lawful bounds. Our affections are always ready to be set upon wrong objects. Our passions of anger, lust, greed, and so on are always ready to break out into all sorts of sinful behavior and attitudes. Self-control is that grace whereby a believer's affections and passions are governed and kept within the lawful bounds of God's Word. Because he has gained the knowledge of Christ as his greatest desire the Christian exercises moderation with regard to all good things. Because he has gained the knowledge of the precepts of Christ as his greatest delight the Christian more and more mortifies or puts to death his sinful passions.

And to this self-control we add **perseverance**. "Perseverance is the willingness to put up with tough times because of the promise [of future grace]" (Lucas and Green, p. 59). A man perseveres when he keeps going until the end. In other words, he continues in the faith and in obedience. As Christians we grow in our submission under trial knowing that we deserve worse, knowing that the difficulty reaches us having passed through the sieve of God's love, and knowing that the hardships all work together for our spiritual and eternal good.

To this perseverance we add **godliness**. This particular word is a rather general term. Given what we just said regarding perseverance I think Lucas and Green may be right when they explain, "Godliness is a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life" (*2 Peter*, p. 60). It is this abiding consciousness of God that

produces a certain reverence in a man's actions, speech, and demeanor. Practically this includes and is expressed in our attendance upon the public and external worship of God and upon the ordinances of the church.

This awareness of God shapes a Christian's relationships with other men. So to this godliness we add **brotherly kindness**. The connection between godliness and brotherly kindness is firmly established in **I John 4:20**. *If any one says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar.* So true godliness cannot exist without brotherly kindness. And indeed, brotherly kindness flows out of godliness. A thriving, growing Christian will possess a consciousness of his duty to his neighbor. He will display a kindly and tender affection toward all as those created in the image of God. This kindness will be evident as he sympathizes with them in trouble, supplies their needs, edifies their souls, and (as he has opportunity and ability) promotes their spiritual and temporal welfare (see Nisbet, p. 228).

To this brotherly kindness we add **love**. Love is not separate from or of equal weight with the other six. Love is the highest or crowning virtue (**I Cor. 13:13**). All the others are encompassed in love as the meat of a nut is encompassed in its shell. It is love that completes all the others as well. Generally speaking human love is "aroused because of what the loved one is" (M. Green, p. 80). In other words, a man may love a woman because of what she is – kind, beautiful, intelligent, her sense of humor, and so on. God's love is different. "God's love ... is evoked not by what we are, but by what He is. [God's love] has its origin in [Himself], not in the object. It is not that we are lovable, but that he is love" (Green, p. 80). **John 3:16** says, *for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.* So the love spoken of by Peter is self-giving for the welfare of

others. Michael Green explains it as “a deliberate desire for the highest good or the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person’s good” (Green, p. 80).

As tender and lovely as this passage is it makes demands on us that we are obligated before God to pursue. Right? In other words, what we have just read is a law passage. We read this list and a measure of despair creeps over our souls doesn’t it? Goodness, self-control, brotherly kindness ... there’s no way. In our despair we run to Christ. We run to the gospel. You see, in the gospel we are reminded that by His perfect obedience Jesus accomplished all for us in our place.

His was perfect moral excellence. **Hebrews 4:15**, *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.* His was perfect knowledge. **Colossians 2:3**, *in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* His was perfect self-control. In **John 8:29** Jesus says, “I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.” His was perfect perseverance. **Hebrews 12:1-3**, *let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.* His was perfect godliness. **Colossians 2:9**, *For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form.* His was perfect brotherly kindness and love. **I John 3:16**, *we know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

Beloved, Christ accomplished for us what we could never do for ourselves. And so out of gratitude for God's kindness to us in Christ we stir up these seven graces. **Gratitude for grace is expressed by growth in grace.** We pursue these virtues, we cultivate them with every ounce of our strength to the adornment of our profession of the gospel, to the comfort and assurance of our souls, to the edification of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and finally to the glory of God who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

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In verses 5-7 the focus shifts to our _____ to the gracious initiatives
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_____ **for grace is expressed by _____ in grace.**

2 Peter 1:5-7 *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; ⁶ and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*

Now for this very reason
applying all diligence in your faith supply

First, these people possessed _____ (in your faith).

Second, they were being exhorted to personal _____ in the Christian life
(*applying all diligence*).

What part do you play in this life to which God has graciously called you?

The issue boils down to the difference between *justification* and *sanctification*.

Third, we are called to glad _____ with what the Spirit of God is doing
(*supply* or *add to your faith*).

What is the real focus of our application of effort in the Christian life?

What are we to work hard at?

Our "labor" is to _____ (with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength)
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The excellence of a Christian is to _____ something of the attractive and
winsome _____ of our Lord Jesus in every room and closet of life.

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Knowledge refers to " _____ about Jesus Christ and what
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Self-control is that grace whereby a believer's affections and passions are
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I John 4:20, *If any one says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar.*

love

John 3:16 says, *for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*