

A Growth That Endures...



**A verse by
Verse
Exposition
of the
epistle of
2nd Peter**

Do I Really Possess Grace? 2 Peter 1:8-9 (725)

It has been some time since we were in II Peter. I want to begin this morning with a brief review of 1:1-7 before we address our text for today, verses 8 and 9. II Peter begins with these words: *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 (1:1-2 NASB).*

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. In **2 Peter 1:3-4** Peter reviews what God has done to this end.

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 supplied us with everything we need to live the life to which He has called us. 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 granted to us His very great promises to the encouragement of our souls.

In **verses 57** the focus shifts to our response to the gracious initiatives and provision of God. Here's the point of these two verses: 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.*

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***. 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. John MacArthur calls it "making maximum effort." He says, "the Christian life is not lived to the honor of God without effort. Even though God has poured His divine power into the believer, the Christian himself is

required to make every disciplined effort alongside of what God has done” (see Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:28-29) (*MacArthur Study Bible*, p. 1952).

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 (election), called, and given new life (regeneration). We’ve been granted the gifts of repentance and faith (conversion). We’ve been justified? We’ve been adopted into God’s family. Our labor (work, effort) 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 these graces 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 become evident.

Peter lists seven of these virtues - *moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love*. **Moral excellence.** The excellence of a Christian is to reflect something of the attractive and winsome character of our Lord Jesus in every thought, word, and deed. **Knowledge.** Now, there is the initial saving knowledge of Christ gained in conversion. This knowledge, however, 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, studying, reflecting upon, and applying the Scriptures. It makes sense that to such knowledge we would add **self-control**. Self-control is that grace whereby a believer’s affections and passions are governed and kept within the lawful bounds of God’s Word. 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). **Godliness.** I think one commentator has it right when he says, “Godliness is a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life” (Lucas and Green, *2 Peter*, p. 60). It is this abiding consciousness of God that produces a certain reverence in a man’s actions, speech, and demeanor. To this godliness we add **brotherly kindness.** You will display a gracious and tender affection toward all as those created in the image of God. This kindness will be evident as you sympathize with them in trouble, supply their needs, edify their souls, and (as you have opportunity and ability) promote their spiritual and temporal welfare (see Nisbet, p. 228). To this brotherly kindness we add **love.** 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 of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person’s good” (*II Peter*, p. 80).

Now we are ready to deal with **verses 8 and 9.** *For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.* Here’s what I want to argue this morning: **true, saving faith is confirmed by the reality (are yours) and vitality (increasing) of the graces that attend it.** Genuine faith is not an empty, hollow, void, isolated thing. Indeed, it is full *of*, it is accompanied *by*, it is adorned *with* those virtues that God has ordained and that the Holy Spirit produces. The reality of faith is confirmed by the fruit it produces. The Bible is abundantly clear at this point (see Ps. 1:2-3; Matt. 7:15-23, 12:33; Gal. 5:22-24; James 3:12).

Now, Peter uses the language of possession. **For if these qualities are yours (1:8).** This doesn’t mean that a man can possess these graces like he would

possess a car or a dog. It means that he has them as attributes, as part of his makeup as a new creation in Christ.

Is Peter suggesting that we can possess and manifest them fully? No, beloved. Christian growth is a continual process. We never “arrive” in terms of our sanctification do we? Indeed, we are always maturing. We possess these virtues in “increasing” measure. *For if these qualities are yours **and are increasing***. We are becoming, by the grace of God, more self-controlled, more godly, more knowledgeable, more loving, and so on (see Shorter Catechism, Q. 35).

Peter insists that the presence or absence of these virtues tells us something of deep spiritual significance. In **1:8b** he speaks to the presence of these virtues. **They render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Peter incorporates a literary device called *litotes* here in verse 8 when he says *neither useless nor unfruitful*. Litotes is an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*). An English example would be to say, “he’s not a bad singer.” That’s a negative way of saying, “he’s a pretty good singer.”

The Greek word for **useless** is *argos*. *Argos* means idle or barren due to inactivity. This same word is used in **James 2:20**, *faith without works is **argos*** – useless, barren. **Unfruitful** means just that. Julia has planted a bunch of irises in our front planting beds. The whole purpose for planting and maintaining them is to enjoy those beautiful bursts of color in early Spring. Last year they simply didn’t bloom. They were “unfruitful.”

So what Peter is saying is that the possession and increase of these graces will render you both useful and fruitful. Paul states in pretty clearly in **I Corinthians 15:58**, you will be *steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*. Truly, you will serve the purpose for which you have been called and redeemed. Your own soul will be comforted. Others will benefit as you do them good. God Himself will be glorified in and through your life. True, saving faith is confirmed by the reality and vitality of the graces that attend it.

Now in **verse 9** Peter speaks to the absence of these virtues. **For he who lacks these qualities**. In contrast to the man in verse 8 this fellow does not have these graces as attributes. They are not part of his makeup. He may be a kind, honest, and generous man but these spiritual graces are, like a pair of misplaced glasses, missing. An honest search for them yields nothing. You drop the bucket down this guy's spiritual well and it comes up dry.

Peter says this guy is **blind or shortsighted**. Here we have another pair of words that are more or less synonymous. MacArthur suggests that such a man is unable "to discern his true spiritual condition and thus can have no assurance of his salvation" (p. 1953). Indeed, such a man has forgotten or lost sight of his **purification from his former sins**. Whoa! Now, who are we talking about here? A professing Christian or a possessing Christian? In view here is the guy who made a public profession of faith and who had received Christian baptism giving "him and others the right to suppose that he was in possession of grace."

Now, I believe that a true believer can [for a time] neglect to cultivate these graces. Indeed, he can suffer spiritual atrophy or decline for a season. Our own Confession of Faith affirms this very thing. "The assurance true believers have of

their salvation may be shaken, lessened, or interrupted for various reasons ...” (Modern Version of Chapter XVIII, *Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation*). This will produce a “spiritual amnesia” (MacArthur, p. 1953). This believer will have little or no confidence with respect to his profession of faith. He will live in fear and doubt. He will know little joy in the Lord and so on. It is a wretched, miserable condition.

In essence, he has forgotten the gospel (purification). Sin has, for a time, clouded, obscured his vision of the character of God (perfections), the condition of sinners, the condescension of God in providing a Savior, the cross of Christ where full and perfect atonement for sin was rendered, the call of God, the cleansing from sin promised in the gospel, the covering of righteousness, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. All is forgotten and he slides further into despair.

Now, the true believer will emerge from such a state. Again the Confession says, “out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived” (ibid). But the danger lies in this: what if this process of declension is never arrested? Peter insists that “the absence or decay of these graces can eventually confirm the want of them leading of course to eternal damnation” (see Nisbet, pp. 229-30). It can and will lead to what we call apostasy or falling away. This is exactly what the writer of **Hebrews** is saying in **6:6**, *and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*. Such a man can reach a point of no return; a point known only to the counsel of God.

I am borrowing heavily at this point from Ligon Duncan, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Jackson, Mississippi. Of **Hebrews 6:6** he says, “We see a stout warning delivered about the danger of someone who professes

to be a believer, but who does not show the fruit of commitment to Christ. Here we learn that Christians must heed God's warnings against apostasy. Now the author of Hebrews in this passage is issuing us a very clear warning about apostasy. Apostasy means falling away from the faith ... apostasy means falling away from or deserting our original profession of Christ."

"Let me say several things by way of qualification. When we use the term "apostasy", we do not mean that a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is capable of losing his or her salvation. But since the Scripture uses this term "falling away", there has to be substantive content to it. This isn't just a phantom warning. So what is he talking about? He is talking about someone who has made what looks like a credible outward profession of faith in Christ and yet at some point down the line has repudiated, has turned his back on Christ. This is a person who has outwardly professed Christ. His profession looks very similar, if not identical to the profession of other true believers in the congregation. And yet, at some point, he turns his back on Christ."

"And so, of course, this warning reminds us that there is such a thing as a false profession. There is such a thing as claiming to be a believer, and yet not being a believer. So it is vital for us to recognize that distinction and recognize that that requires of us self-examination. What is it that Peter tells us in II Peter 1:10,11? That we are to make our calling and election sure."

"What does he mean by falling away? Departing from their profession of Christ. Abandoning the divine rule and way of Christ. Rejecting Christ. That's what he means in verse 6 when he speaks of falling away. And what is the result of falling away? A spiritual hardening that leads to a permanent soul deadness."

“What is the evidence of this spiritual apostasy? ... Spiritual fruitlessness. That’s the evidence and proof that they have fallen away. They do not bear fruit ... [So] what we must seek for is the fruit, the product of the gifts of the Spirit, the work of grace in our hearts, producing love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control and those glorious characteristics of a believer listed for us in the New Testament. We ought to be aiming for the fruit of the Spirit” (*A Warning About Falling Away*).

Apostasy is not simply a matter of forgetfulness of a reality once possessed. We have all experienced such a thing at one time or another, to one degree or another. Apostasy is the ultimate state of repudiation of a faith once professed. This is the ultimate danger Peter has in view. This is why he urges these folks in **verse 10**, *be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you*. You see, the false teachers about whom he is warning his readers have arrived at this terrible, tragic state. In **2:1** Peter says *they have denied the Master who bought them*. According to **2:20** they had in some sense *escaped the defilements of the world*. According to **2:21** they had in some sense *known the way of righteousness*. By their profession and in their baptism they gave all, including themselves, every reason to believe that they were in possession of true saving grace. But alas, they repudiated that which they had once professed.

Peter’s design is to arouse us to diligence in pursuit of our calling by way of a warning. This is not wrong. How grateful we should be when a smoke alarm warns us of a fire in the house. How grateful we should be when a siren warns us of an approaching tornado. Peter calls us to examine our lives. To examine them not in terms of Biblical or theological knowledge. Not in terms of religious

emotions that come and go. Not in terms of our agreement with the raw facts of the gospel. He urges us to examine our lives in terms of the presence or absence of those graces that are inherent in true, genuine, saving faith.

My friend, it may be that you recognize that you have never possessed graces such as we have talked about this morning. The answer, my friend, is not to try harder to be such a person on your own. The answer is to sincerely place your trust in Jesus Christ alone as He is offered to you in the gospel. I invite you to do just that this morning.

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Peter's strategy is to establish believers so firmly in the _____ - to familiarize them so thoroughly with the _____ - that error (either in doctrine or practice) would be readily detected and resisted.

Indeed, the point of this entire letter is this: _____ **in the truth of the gospel**
_____ **the church against the destabilizing**
influence of _____.

Peter's aim, then, is to _____ Christians.

Verses 5-7

Here's the point of these two verses: _____ *for* grace is expressed by
_____ *in* grace.

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) those virtues that beautify, that commend, that _____ our profession of the gospel of grace.

Peter lists seven of these virtues - *moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.*

Verses 8-9

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

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James 3:12).

For if these qualities are yours (1:8). It means that he has them as attributes,
as part of his _____ as a *new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17)*.

Q. Is Peter suggesting that we can possess and manifest them fully?
Christian growth is a continual _____.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing (1:8)

In **1:8b** he speaks to the _____ of these virtues.

**They render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true
knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:8)**

NOTE: Peter incorporates a literary device called *litotes* here in verse 8 when he says *neither
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**Is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification
from his former sins (1:9)**

In view here is the guy who made a public profession of faith and who had received
Christian baptism giving him and others the right to suppose that he was in possession
of grace.

But the danger lies in this: what if this process of declension is never arrested?
It can and will lead to what we call _____ or *falling away* (see **Heb. 6:6**).

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