

The Importance of Spiritual Growth 2 Peter 1:5-11

If you run into someone you haven't seen in years and they say, "You haven't changed a bit!" – you'd probably take that as compliment (they don't notice the gray hair, the circles under the eyes, etc)

- Facebook four years ago: announced that we were buying this property. One close friend said, "You look sooooo much different!" "Your beard is so gray!" You've aged like a president!"
- Hearing, "You haven't changed a bit" is encouraging, but if someone says that about a your spiritual life, then it's problematic.
- Imagine Jesus saying to a person who professes to have faith, "You haven't changed a bit."
- That would be profoundly disturbing.
- Our faith in Christ should lead to growth and fruitfulness.
- This passage is a wake up call on these things.

Last week we looked at various aspects of our **salvation** (1:3-4: right standing, knowledge of God; divine power, experience of the salvific promises, and how sin's power doesn't have dominion over us). This is what God has done for us!

This passage (1.5-11) is about some of the **basics of spiritual growth**.

It begins with *faith* in Christ, it leads to Christ-like traits, which leads to a *fruitful* life, which ultimately leads to entrance into Christ's kingdom.

- The **indicatives precede and empower the imperatives**: who we are, moving to how we are to live.
- **Because** we have right standing with God; **because** we have divine power; **because** we have eschatological hope, we're to make every effort to pursue spiritual maturity..
- And because these things are true about us, a **Christian wants to mature in the faith**.
 - **So we shouldn't envision the Christian life as believing on Jesus and then relaxing in a recliner, waiting to go heaven. There should be growth in between.**

Peter is not advocating works salvation, but rather a *salvation that works*.

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Spiritual growth is vitally important because Peter says apart from it, we're ineffective, and we're living as if we haven't been converted, and have thus no assurance of entrance into God's kingdom. O

(1) **effort**, (2) **effectiveness**, and (3) **entrance**.

Effort: He gives us eight virtues that we should pursue.

Effectiveness: Here is why we should seek to be a growing Christian.

Entrance: Here is the what we look forward to as we grow in this life.

#1: Effort (1:5-7)

Pursue spiritual growth diligently!

We're struck immediately by this chain of virtues.

Some have called it the ladder of faith/virtues.

A few guiding thoughts as we look at it:

A. We shouldn't think that these are the only virtues to pursue. There are various virtue lists in the NT with various virtues noted. But these are important qualities for all of us to pursue.

B. While I don't think Peter has a reason for the ordering of them (like: "do this one, and then you can work on the next one, and so on – I don't take them as sequential), I do agree with most scholars that it's significant that he begins with **faith and ends with **love**.**

- All virtue flows from our faith in Jesus.
 - That's the beginning point of godliness.
 - When we experience the saving grace of Jesus, we're changed.
- And love is the crowing virtue of the Christian life. This fact is made plain in several passages. If people don't see love manifested in us then we're not living as Jesus' disciples.
 - "faith expressing itself in love" (Gal 5:6)
 - "Faith is the beginning, love is the goal" (Ignatius to the Ephesians)

C. This list was characteristic of Hellenistic ethics, but it's given a distinctively Christian emphasis.

Verse 5

"For this reason"

- In light of all that God has done for us in Christ... in light of the fact that He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness...

"make every effort"

- *Effort* is not a bad word for the Christian life; earning is.
- Peter is fond of this word: **1:10, 3:14**.
 - **NT images: Running, striving, training, wrestling, boxing**
- Effort doesn't make God's grace unnecessary; God's grace makes our effort possible.
- **Coaches say, "Effort please!" "Pick it up!"**
- Consistent effort: not a fad, and not sporadic.
- **Don't live on yesterday's godliness/victories.**
- **Don't "rest on your laurels" (not bottom, but your wins)**
- Phil 3 — I forget as I run... failures/successes

(1) to supplement your faith (*pistis*)

"**supplement**" means "to provide at one's own expense."

- spiritual growth requires time and investment and energy!
- WE don't drift into Christ-likeness, but diligently pursue it.

- Pastor this week: “I’m Concerned about spiritual apathy over these six months ... Too many have been immersed in talk radio or political debates, neglecting their soul.”
- Are you investing time and energy in your spiritual life?

Faith

- Our faith in the gospel is the basis for the Christian life.
- It’s the root of all the other virtues.

(2) faith with virtue (*aretē*)

- It appears only in the Christian list of virtues in **Phil 4:8**.
- It can be understood as **moral excellence**.
- It’s the same Greek word found in **verse 3**: “glory and *excellence*”
- We have been called by the grace of the excellent one, and are empowered to now live a virtuous life like him.
- The Greeks used it more as in achievement in **human excellence**; but here the idea is more **about obedience to God**, following the Lord Jesus who did it perfectly.
- It’s often associated with a more frequently found word: righteousness.

(3) virtue with knowledge (*gnosis*)

- Since it comes in the middle of the list, not the beginning, we shouldn’t read it as the basic intimate knowledge of Christ experienced at conversion; and besides this, the word is *gnosis*, not *epignosis* (1:3-4) so Peter may have something more in mind like discernment and the ability to apply God’s word to life. .
- We need **knowledge of God and his will** in order to live virtuous lives.
- We need discernment for applying God’s word to situations.
- Are you growing in knowledge?

Verse 6

(4) knowledge with self-control (*enkrateia*)

- Self-control appears in various other lists in the NT (eg, Gal 5:23)
- It’s often linked to self-control regarding sexual passions but also applies to other passions: taming the tongue, food/drink, anger.
- It was promoted by the Greek philosophers, emphasizing the need to controlling one’s passions rather than being controlled by them.
- Christians understand this as being possible **by the power of the Holy Spirit**.
 - Often when we’re tired and weak we’re more vulnerable to be out of control.
 - **Friend this week: Skunk - Dog, “I never want to see that again. It’s obvious you need rest and a break”**
 - **We need the Spirit’s power to endure skunky situations!**
- This quality (and others in the list) is probably mentioned in light of the context of the **false teachers**.
 - They were advocating a person following their lusts (**2:2, 10, 14, 19, 3:3**) and showing no restraint.
- How you doing with this?

- Are you able to put the remote down?
- Students, are you self-controlled with your phone or video gaming?
 - School Teacher: One student played from 2pm to 6pm two days in a row!
- Food and drink?
- How about your social media engagement?

• Let's grow in self-control.

(5) self-control with steadfastness (*hypomonē*)

- To bear up under the face difficulty. (Rom 5:3-4; Rev 2)
- We persevere with hope, as we trust our God.
- One of the purposes of Scripture is to give us hope-filled endurance, Paul says (Rom 15:4-5)
- In 2 Peter, the call involved enduring the problems presented by the false teachers, by staying focused on Christ and the glory to come.

(6) steadfastness with godliness (*eusebia*)

- Here we see the connection with verses 3-4: we have all we need for godliness, therefore, pursue it!
- This speaks of **reverence and resemblance.**
- As we adore God, we become more like him.

Verse 7: the next two qualities both speak of love...

(7) godliness with brotherly affection (*philadelphia*)

- This speaks of the familial nature of the Christian life.
 - (Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 4:9; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22)
- We're to grow in our love for our brothers and sisters.
- This involves kindness, generosity, courtesy, warmth.

(8) brotherly affection with love (*agape*)

- This chain of qualities climaxes with love.
- The importance of love cannot be overstated.
- It involves a life of service and sacrifice for the good of others.
 - Paul said it is the goal of Christian instruction: "The aim of our charge is love" (1 Tim 1.5)
 - "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (1 Cor 8:1)
 - He said it is "the most excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31; 13:1ff)
 - "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly" (1 Pet 4:8)
 - It sums up all other virtues: "above all put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14)
 - "Let all you do, be done in love" (1 Cor 16:14)
 - "God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5)
- This is how the world will know we are Jesus' disciples. (Jn 13)
- **This means getting to know people, bearing burdens; resisting gossip and division, humbling serving, giving sacrificially, bearing with others; being quick to forgive.**

Application:

- Nurture these qualities in your life.
- Pursue growth in Christ-likeness diligently!
- The issue is not do you have them (you should if you're a Christian), **but are you growing in them?**
- You may have certain qualities in great measure, but you can still grow: "more and more" (1 Thess)
- **Making a birdie in golf for me is progress! Just losing one ball is progress! But not for Phil Mickelson!**
 - But both of us can grow.
- The Christian life is to be dynamic, not static!

#2: Effectiveness (1:8-9)

Spiritual growth results in an effective and fruitful life.

V. 8: "these qualities" (the ones mentioned in verses 5-7) are to be "increasing."

Why? So that we may not be "ineffective and unfruitful."

- Peter states in negatively but could have easily put it positively
- When Christians are growing in these ways, then they will be effective and fruitful.

The word "ineffective" is used elsewhere to speak **of idle workers** who are wasting their time at the marketplace instead of work (Matt 20:3, 6)

- James said faith without works is dead or "ineffective" or useless. (Jam 2:20)
- **Bearing fruit is made possible through our union with Christ (Jn 15).**
- **Someone who professes to be a Christian but isn't bearing fruit needs to examine his or her faith; they're giving no indication that he or she is actually a Christian.**
- Our conversion has ethical consequences.

V. 9: Building on verse 8, he says the person who is ineffective and unfruitful is **blind** and has **forgotten** about their conversion (and perhaps baptism). [read]

- They willfully close their eyes (blind), as in closing their eyes to the truth and to what's important.
- Blindness is a common biblical image for lacking spiritual insight.
- Jesus came to give sight to the blind!
- But these are blinded to the truth, the truth that leads to fruitfulness.

"having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins"

- Throughout history God's people have been prone to forget what God had done for them.
- We're called to always remember his grace.
 - Remembering your sins are forgiven, has a powerful incentive for godliness.
- Here, they're forgetting the cross, living as though it didn't happen.
- This phrase (or similar ones) are found in early Christian literature in the context of baptism liturgies.
- "You have forgotten your baptism" when you're not growing.

- You're **living like unconverted people.**
- The pursuit of godliness is the fruit of truly experiencing God's saving grace.
- If there's no fruit, then one needs to examine if there's no root (true saving faith in Christ).

#3: Entrance (1:10-11)

Those whose faith is effective and fruitful will enter Jesus' eternal kingdom.

The few verses look **back** (before the foundation of the world: election, v. 10), and to the **future** "eternal kingdom" (v. 11)

Verse 10 is tightly connected to verses 8-9 ("**therefore**")

- Those that are growing in godliness are confirming God's calling and choosing of them.
- **We prefer "Confirmed Tickets" verses standby!**

Peter uses language ("**confirm**") that stresses the proven validity of something (Storms).

- We prove our calling and election through a vibrant and growing faith.
 - It's strange in a sense as our calling and election are the ground of our assurance, but Peter says "make secure your security."
 - "Walk worthy of your calling" (Eph 4:1)
- This **calling** was noted in verse 3 – it is an effective calling.
- God brings us to himself; he brings us to life, and this new life is evidenced through spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

Calling and election highlights the grace of God in salvation.

- And this grace has a transforming effect, enabling us to grow in Christ-likeness.
- We confirm this gracious calling and electing by practicing the qualities in verses 5-7.
- **Schreiner: "Peter did not tolerate those who claimed to be Christians but contradicted the claim by their behavior"**
- This verse highlights both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of people.

10b: "for if you practice these qualities you will never fall"

- You will never "**fall**" doesn't mean if you're a true believer you will never sin.
- It means that those who confirm their calling by a life of godliness will not forsake God, or commit apostasy.
- Those who are practicing these qualities have a deep relationship with God and they won't be seduced by false teachers.

11: "For in this way" – that is, for those who have these virtues and are abounding in them.

Eternal kingdom: This looks forward to the future eschatological **hope** of Christ's return, and the new creation; his cosmic reign over all. (3:13)

- This is our blessed hope!
- We have now, faith, hope, and love; that holy triad of our faith.

The entry into this kingdom is **“richly provided”**

- **Same** word as **verse 5**, “supply” *epichorēgeō*).
- Jesus will supply it at his own expense! Grace!
- Do you have any friends/family who always prepare the best meal/event - extremely hospitable and generous? You can't wait to get to their house? It gives you something to look fwd to? At a much greater level, so it is with Christ!
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- It is the gift of grace. He has provided it at the expense of his own life!
- No the risen and reigning Lord of glory assures us of it!
- The Savior has lavished his grace on us in conversion, gives us everything we need for growth in godliness now, and well lavish grace on his people for all eternity.
- Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – His Kingdom will have no end!
 - His kingdom is here but it has not reached consummation like it will in the future.
 - Caesar is not Lord, Jesus is Lord!
 - One of the purposes of our weekly gathering is to gather and say, “Jesus is Lord.”
 - Down all the other lords/gods, and up with our God and Savior, the Lord Jesus!

He will provide us with an eternal kingdom!

- How can you enter it?
- By faith in Jesus.
- This faith is a faith that functions; it's a faith that leads to growth in Christ-likeness.
- And this growth gives us assurance that our faith is real, and our hope is certain.