

2Peter 1:5-11

Be Diligent to Grow in the Faith

Do you struggle with a sense that your Christian faith is not working?

There can be several hindrances to spiritual growth, but one stumbling block is a misconception that spiritual growth and maturity is automatic, that there is no need for diligence and discipline on our part.

There is a common misconception among many Christians that calling for the application of diligence, effort, discipline, and self-control to the Christian life is legalism. They say it is a form of putting believers under the law if we urge them to exercise diligence, or call them to make every effort, or to strive to show themselves approved.

But that is only true if these virtues, diligence, effort, discipline, and self-control are seen as what we must generate out of our own resources; or if they are our contribution—God does His part, but now we have to come up with our part that we are going to contribute.

However, a right understanding of grace recognizes that grace is God's gift to us, and it includes all the power and energy needed to live a Christ-like life. However, the nature of grace is that it must be received by us, and we must choose to apply His grace to each and every situation we face.

God will never force His grace upon us, and the enemy will oppose us partaking of the divine nature, so there needs to be some God-ward exertion on our part. We must partake of His gift and choose to use it.

As we used the analogy last week of receiving a smart phone that is loaded with unlimited features that we must choose to use, otherwise the abilities of the device are useless to us if we ignore them.

Likewise, the power and gifts of God's grace are useless to us if we do not intentionally draw upon them and apply them.

So, verses 1 to 4 of this first chapter describe to us the unlimited grace of God that has been lavishly handed to us, grace and peace being multiplied to us in verse 2;

All that is needed for life and godliness has been freely given to us in verse 3;

And we have been made partakers of His divine nature—His very life has been placed inside of us, and has been united with our life, making us children of God in verse 4.

Now that we have been given all of these amazing gifts, in verses 5 to 11, we are *exhorted*—we are *urged* to make good use of what we are given.

Use the diligence, effort, discipline and self-control He gives you to apply all the other gifts of grace in our lives.

Use His gifts as much as possible! Draw upon His grace constantly! Don't set them aside, don't try something else, don't forget about what you have been given in Christ!

2Peter 1:5, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge...”

Diligence is steady application; constant engagement to accomplish a task; without unnecessary delay or procrastination. Don't be off and on about it.

The Amplified Bible puts it this way, “... employ every effort in exercising your faith to develop virtue...”

The NLT says, “...Make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce moral excellence...”

Or, as the NASB95 translates it, “applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence.”

Or as Paul said in ***Colossians 1:29***, “... *striving with all the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles and works within me...*”

Along with our salvation comes everything needed to make it excel, we need to make every effort to exercise that faith God has given us, and as we put that faith to work, it will produce moral excellence in our lives.

There are actually seven examples of the divine nature that are listed in verses 5 to 7, and all of them are produced in our lives by God when we strive, with all diligence to exercise the faith God has given us. We exert His energy, but we must choose to make that exertion.

The Christian life is not automatically developed—it requires our cooperation and our consent, not just once, but moment by moment, day by day, I must choose, by an act of my will, to trust the Lord, and to let the Lord have His way in that situation.

These verses we are studying clearly teach that none of these seven characteristics will be developed in our lives if we are not diligent in making every effort to exercise faith.

If you are lazy, or unmotivated, or passively waiting for God to zap you into spiritual maturity, you will never see these characteristics grow in your life.

The first characteristic of the divine nature, we looked at last Sunday, is virtue.

Virtue means, excellence in becoming the ideal of what we are supposed to be as people, or the ideal of acting as we are supposed to act. (*Michael Green, 2Peter and Jude*, p. 76-77)

The second characteristic is knowledge. As you exercise your faith toward Christ-like excellence, you will find yourself growing in knowledge.

This is a personal knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing what is right does not result in doing what is right, but intimately knowing the Lord does result in being led by Him into doing what is right. (*Gene Green, p. 193*)

It includes a right understanding and comprehension of the scriptures, unlike the religious Scribes and Pharisees who knew what the Bible said, but neither understood what it meant, nor did what it taught.

2Peter 1:6, “[add to your] knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness...”

Self-control means, instead of being controlled by your appetites and the desires of your flesh, you, by faith, bring those desires under the lordship and control of Jesus Christ. (2Corinthians 10:5)

Self-control, for the Christian, means submitting to being controlled by the indwelling life of Christ. No longer my will, but Christ’s will be done.

In that time of temptation, to whisper to Jesus, “Please take this thought captive and make it obedient to You, my Master.”

2Peter 1:6, “... [add to] self-control perseverance...”

Perseverance, or endurance, is a determined and habitual fixing of your mind and setting the focus of your faith on Jesus Christ, so that you are unmoved by opposition from the world, or attacks from Satan, or enticements from your own flesh.

Perseverance is that strength from God to never give up, no matter how difficult the trial.

2Peter 1:6, “... [add to] perseverance godliness...”

Godliness is Christ-likeness in actions. It is to demonstrate a loyalty to God, and loyalty to rightly display His character to those around you. And it is characterized by consistency, in the good times and in the bad.

2Peter 1:7, “[add to] godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.”

Brotherly kindness describes the love that family members show to each other. This is the loyalty of family to one another.

Like the saying, blood is thicker than water, there is a love between family members (in a healthy family) that is much stronger than the love for those who are unrelated.

Among Christians, this strong bond of love and loyalty as family, like the rest of this list, is not automatic, but grows in us as we partake of the divine nature.

2Peter 1:7, “... and [add to] brotherly kindness love.”

This is agape, God’s love. Brotherly kindness is love for the members of the family of God. Agape, is love for everyone, even for your enemy, and for those who hate you and hurt you.

This unconditional love, that is described for us in 1Corinthians 13, is the ultimate evidence of faith and the crowning characteristic of Christianity.

John 13:35, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love [agape—God’s love] for one another.”

2Peter 1:8, “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“For if these things are yours...” If you are a born-again follower of Jesus, these things are all yours—they are part of the “all things” verse 3 talked about that have been given to us for life and godliness.

Now here is where we get into discovering why it is important to put effort into cultivating your faith.

Why must we buffet our body and make it our slave?

Why must we run with perseverance and not casually stroll?

Why must we deny ourselves daily and take up our cross?

“For if these things are yours and abound [Meaning they are abundant in your life. They will abound if you are giving all diligence and making every effort to exercise your faith, to partake of the divine nature—to constantly call upon and put into use that which you have been given—that life of Christ who is in you] ***you will be neither barren*** [empty and wasted] ***nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

Notice that the characteristics which we are urged to diligently make every effort to exercise and trust God for, are not describing ministry performance—they describe inner character.

It is not about how many souls you led to Christ, or how many sermons you preached, or how many books you’ve written, or how many online followers you have.

But all seven characteristics describe inner character and reflect close relationship with Jesus.

And if we are diligently exercising these inner characteristics, by trusting God for them, as we need them, day by day, then the Bible says that our lives will not be wasted but they will be fruitful

We will finish well; we will hear our Master say, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

But God does not force us to be fruitful; we are not robots; we must exercise our will. If you are not making every effort to exercise your faith, you will be barren, and unfruitful.

2Peter 1:9, “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

What does verse 3 tell us about these things? Do we Christians have them or do we lack them? “His divine power has given to us all things [needed] for life and godliness.”

Therefore, he who lacks these virtues described in verses 5 to 7, is shortsighted, even to blindness, meaning he is not in the faith—he is not a child of God and cannot understand the things of God.

2Corinthians 4:3-4, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [those who are perishing are then described as those,] whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe...”

They are blind to the truth, and cannot discern between truth and lies, so they are deceived by the enemy.

Jesus referred to the religious Pharisees as blind guides; both fools and blind. (Matthew 23:17-26)

But Peter is not speaking about someone outside the church, he is speaking of someone who is in the church, but who is not displaying these virtues of the Christian life.

He is described as one who have forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

The word translated as “forgotten” means they are willfully ignoring the fact that they were cleansed. (p. 198, Gene Green)

In *2Peter 3:5*, Peter uses the same expression, “For this they willfully forget...”

Can a person be cleansed of their sins but not be saved?

Matthew 12:43-45 NIV, Jesus said, “When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied [Christ is not living in Him], swept clean [forgiven of sin] and put in order [there was a noticeable change in his life].”

⁴⁵ *Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.'*

Matthew 18:27-35 is another example of a man forgiven but not transformed; cleansed but not filled with new life; forgiven but not saved.

"Then Peter came to [Jesus] and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

²² *Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. ²³ Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

²⁸ *"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'" ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' ³⁴ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.*

³⁵ *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."*

The point of bringing this up here in his teaching is that this whole letter of 2Peter is instruction to the church on how to recognize and avoid being deceived by false teachers in sheep's clothing.

A false teacher will lack these Christian virtues. He may have a testimony of being converted, but he lacks the evidence of Christ living and working in him.

We are not to be judgmental, but neither are we to be naïve in blindly accepting every profession of faith as genuine.

2Peter 1:10, *"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent [apply yourself constantly without stopping or backing off—even be zealous] to make your call and election sure [to confirm your salvation] ..."*

God has not merely called us to be forgiven of our sins, God has called us to enter into a new life—to be partakers of His life.

This is not saying that you can't be sure that you are saved—no, but the opposite. You can be sure that you are saved, and one way to be sure is to start partaking of the divine nature you have received to see it work.

My own testimony – for much of my early Christian life I was striving for excellence in all of the divine characteristics, but it was a striving in the energy of my own flesh.

And the result was chronic failure which produced great doubt in my heart about the effectiveness and certainty of my salvation.

But when I came to discover the principle of Galatians 2:20, and began trusting the indwelling life of Christ to live through me, then I began to experience the certainty of my salvation.

Brethren, take seriously the new life that you have received—exercise it—use it.

Like a kid who has received a new hi-tech toy as a gift. They don't just set it aside, content that they have received it—no they start using it, and exploring all its features, and putting it through the paces to see what it can do.

The thing that makes you a child of God is not that you once prayed a prayer, or that you once mercifully experienced deliverance from sin and evil when you cried out to God, but a Christian is one who has received into their hearts Jesus Christ as your life, and you have been made a partaker of His divine nature.

Verse ten is urging us to therefore make sure you have got the real thing—exercise your faith diligently to see what Christ in you can do.

Exercise your faith to see if virtue works, how about knowledge—can you begin understanding and applying the word? How about self-control? When you exercise faith in the indwelling life of Christ do you see brotherly kindness and love beginning to work in you?

And once you begin to taste and see what the life of Christ in you is like when you begin trusting Him to live through you, you will never want to stop. You will want to go deeper and deeper into it.

2Peter 1:10 concludes with this promise, “...*for if you do these things* [if you diligently exercise faith to cultivate these things] *you will never stumble...*”

The word *stumble* means you will never fall in battle, your life will never fall into ruin. (Gene Green, p. 202)

As **Romans 8:38-39** says, “Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2Peter 1:11, “for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The NLT simply translates the verse this way, “**Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**”

Just as we have freely received, as a gift of God’s grace, Jesus, who is everything we need for life and godliness, so one day we will freely receive, as a gift of God’s grace, a grand welcome into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is our home—that is the kingdom we now belong to. This earth is no longer our home.

In these verses four amazing promises are made, if we will give all diligence to partaking of the divine nature that we have been given:

First, our lives will not be barren, worthless, wasted or without purpose.

Second, our lives will be fruitful—we will be a blessing to others and will bring glory to God.

Third, we will never fall in battle, or stumble into ruin.

Finally, God will give us a grand entrance into His eternal Kingdom, with a hero’s welcome—we will share in the glory of what we have allowed Christ to accomplish through us.

Now knowing that the Christian faith is not just forgiveness, but it is a whole new source of life that we receive by faith, I join with Peter in urging you to make sure that you have received this new life.

And if you have received it, diligently begin partaking of that life. Prove to yourself that it works.

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