

Week 3 - Growing in Godliness - 2Peter 1:5-11

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:32-39

Introduction

In the movie, The Mosquito Coast, the protagonist, played by Harrison Ford, insisted on always traveling upstream because, he said, "Only dead things float downstream."

In his mind, healthy, living things are always moving forward against the current

Another old saying is "healthy things grow," and that is generally true, but growth isn't always a sure sign of health because the reality is that unhealthy things also grow - and sometimes more rapidly than healthy things

And there are different ways to measure growth

For instance, a church could measure growth by the number of people in a church service or the amount of money given each week - counting nickels and noses, as the old saying goes

But while it may be necessary and informative to track those metrics, they are far from the most important kind of growth for the individual Christ-follower or even for the church as a whole

The most vital growth from a biblical perspective is spiritual growth or sanctification - becoming more like Christ

I once worked with a toolmaker who, although he had been a toolmaker for a long time, seemed to never progress in knowledge or skill in the trade

He consistently asked the same questions and made the same mistakes no matter how much time passed

He was stuck, and although he would claim to have ten years of experience, in reality, he had had one year of experience ten times

God doesn't want you to be stuck; he wants you to grow in godliness

And, since we want to please God, the natural question we should ask is, "How do I do that?"

We will be looking at Peter's answer to that question this morning as we take a look at 2Peter 1:5-11

And, while it's true that spiritual growth is God's job, we have a part to play in it and we must put forth effort and intentionally seek to grow spiritually

Follow along in your Bible as I read through our passage [2Peter 1:5-11]

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you are taking notes, we will begin by looking at the basis of godliness

Then we will spend some time looking at the behaviors that lead to growth in godliness

And, lastly, we will see the benefits of godliness

As we begin, we see there is a link to God's benevolence in giving us all that we need for godliness in the expression "For this very reason"

Christ-followers are under a moral imperative because of what God has done and is doing for them and Peter calls on his readers to demonstrate diligent action and to expend significant effort in their advancement in moral virtue

Basically, Peter's message in these verses is:

Since God has given us new spiritual life and everything we need to live it successfully, we should earnestly strive to grow in godliness

In this we see the basis for godliness

I. The basis of godliness

It might seem overly obvious but it may well be so obvious that we overlook it like missing the forest because of all the trees but one cannot participate in godliness until they have accepted Christ

It's simply not possible to grow in Christ and godliness until you have been planted anew in Christ

When a person puts their complete trust for salvation in Christ and relies on him alone to reconcile them to God, God immediately supplies them with everything they need to live a godly life

There is nothing lacking in the salvation provided

We see this in **Ephesians 1:7-8** which says:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

And Peter points out this fact in his first letter where we read in **1Peter 2:9-10**

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Salvation is complete according to the riches of God's grace and cannot be earned through our efforts

Still, paradoxically, God requires that we put forth effort because of our salvation

Paul mentions this in his letter to the church at Philippi when he tells them [**Philippians 2:12-13**]:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Paul and Peter are both talking not about earning salvation - because that cannot be done - but about living as saved individuals and growing in sanctification becoming more like Christ through putting forth effort

So Peter writes in verse 5 [**2Peter 1:5**] "*make every effort to supplement your faith*"

And, of course, the faith he is referring to is saving faith because complete trust and reliance in Christ is the only soil in which the fruit of sanctification germinates and grows

The biblical formula is then neither "let go and let God" nor "God has done his part and now it's all up to you" but rather, "since God has given you all that you need and is powerfully at work in you, you must make every effort"

Growth in godliness or spiritual maturity is based on the resources God provides and it is supplemented by our diligent effort and you will not grow in godliness unless you put in the work

But we always need to remember that our efforts are subordinate to and find their supply, power, and effectiveness in the work of God

And Peter continues with a list or catalog of virtues to which we will now turn our attention

Peter's list isn't the only list of its type in the New Testament and you can find similar lists that contain some overlap with Peter's list in Romans 5:3-5, James 1:3-4, and Galatians 5:22-23

II. The behaviors that lead to growth

However, you will notice that I have labeled this point with the term “behaviors” because all of the virtues that Peter lists require activity for their presence to be evident in our lives

They are more than mere characteristics as they all must do more than simply exist; they must be practiced

And Peter says that his readers must “make every effort” in their practice which implies the idea of acting with haste as well as energy - these are things to be practiced eagerly and with intensity

I have already said the faith that Peter is speaking of here is saving faith but there is another aspect of faith that would have been readily understood by Peter’s original audience that we need to consider

Within the framework of a list of moral virtues, faith carries with it the sense of *faithfulness* or *reliability* or *fidelity*

And faithfulness was one of the principal ways that patronage relationships were described in the Greco-Roman world of Peter’s day

When a client was received into the care of a stronger patron, they were in and under the faithful care of that patron

Additionally, the client was expected to be completely faithful to their patron and Peter’s original audience would have understood that Peter was calling on them to maintain loyalty to God as their benefactor

And to violate that obligation would have been a most serious moral breach on their part

So, in a sense, faith is also the first item on Peter’s list of virtues to practice

This is significant given the fact that there were heretics among them who were trying to lead them astray

But, in the list proper, the first item is “**virtue**” which means “moral excellence” or “outstanding goodness”

Virtue is likewise a social characteristic as it is demonstrated in public and marks the person who possesses it as a person of profound excellence worthy of public recognition

They are the kind of person whose meritorious way of life goes beyond what societal norms call for

However, this again shouldn’t be understood as simply recognition of an internal attitude of the heart

Rather, the emphasis is on character that is demonstrated by virtuous, praiseworthy deeds carried out openly

Next on the list is “**knowledge**”

And, again, Peter doesn’t have in mind here some form of theoretical or philosophical knowledge

He also isn’t talking about the esoteric knowledge of the mysterious that the false teachers would have been promoting

Peter is talking about the personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ that results in salvation - experiential knowledge

Personal and relational knowledge of God through Christ is essential if one wants to grow in moral virtue it will govern the way you live

Simply knowing right doesn’t mean doing right, whereas knowing God results in righteous conduct and as we experience more of God our lifestyle cannot help but reflect that knowledge

Then, in verse 6, Peter says to supplement our knowledge with “**self-control**”

Self-control points to dominion or control over oneself - it speaks of the power to restrain one’s emotions and desires

The question of Peter’s day just as it often is in ours is whether one would follow their passions or pursue virtue

I spoke last week of the concept of “standing in the gap” between stimulus and response and how we have the ability to determine how we are going to respond

Remember, Peter’s original audience had been saved out of paganism and the pull to return to their former practices was quite strong

While we are free from the power of sin as followers of Christ and can choose to resist sin, we still have the potential to sin and our appetite for sin lays dormant ready to be reactivated at any time and we have to constantly contend with it. And while the unrestrained man does things he knows to be evil while under the influence of passion, the self-controlled man, knowing his desires are evil, refuses to satisfy them on principle.

Honestly, this is a fight we are doomed to lose far too often if we merely rely on our own strength but Paul points out in **Galatians 5:16** that there is a path to victory over the desires of the flesh - relying on the Holy Spirit every moment.

Still, the struggle is real and seemingly without end and so we will also need to practice “**steadfastness**” or endurance. This is the ability to hold out or to bear up in the face of difficulty.

The person with steadfastness is able to demonstrate the capacity to persevere in the face of suffering and temptation.

In Peter’s day, classical thought held that the ability to endure was linked to courage - kind of a self-generated mental toughness.

But for the Christ-follower the source of endurance is confidence in God.

Endurance then doesn’t describe an attitude of grim determination or, conversely, a Stoic attitude of grin and bear it but a triumphant facing of difficult circumstances knowing that God will supply the victory and use them for our ultimate good.

It’s the ability to remain under whatever hardships, challenges, tests, trials, and afflictions life throws at us while remaining confident that, since we are in God’s hand and God is in control, all is well with us.

And steadfastness doesn’t just occur naturally it too has to be worked at as we face difficulty.

James shows us the formula for developing steadfastness in **James 1:2-4** where he writes:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

I’m sure Peter had in mind the attempt of the false teachers to draw the faithful to join them in their error and the endurance that would be needed to withstand the temptation when he included this one on his list.

Next on Peter’s list is “**godliness**” which means a holy way of life.

Literally, the word used here means “well worship” and reflects an attitude of one’s life to live with a sense of God’s presence.

Godliness is the inner response of Christ-followers to the things of God which shows itself in reverence and loyalty to God - again, it’s an attitude that results in action.

Not merely saying things that sound godly but actually living with a practical awareness of God in every aspect of life.

Far too many people believe godliness is faithfully attending church each Sunday and living however they please the other six days of the week.

But true godliness introduces the presence of God into all of life.

Godliness also doesn’t just happen but takes conscious effort and discipline as Paul instructed Timothy to “*train [himself] for godliness*” in **1 Timothy 4:7**.

The person who practices godliness thinks about the will of God in all the matters of life and does what they know pleases God.

Next on Peter’s list is “**brotherly affection**” which is just what it sounds like - the love that family members extend to each other - love of the brethren.

In the New Testament this term was used to describe the love that Christ-followers were to have for one another because their unity in Christ made them members of God's family and, therefore, spiritual siblings

It was a mark of corporate solidarity that was typically not demonstrated to those who were outside the family

We could say it was the fabric of the community of the church that the heretics were trying to unravel

And then Peter rounds out his list with "**love**" or *agape* which is the unconditional, sacrificial love that is one of the characteristics of God

It's affection shown to all, even those who are outside the church and whose source and model are found in the love that God demonstrated to humanity even in their hostility against him when he sent his Son as their sacrifice

Love of this kind may or may not involve emotion but it always involves action

Peter's list presents faith as the foundation of Christian character while love is its culmination and each of the characteristics in the list may be present at different levels at different times in the Christ-follower's life

But they are all necessary facets that cannot be ignored if we want to grow in spiritual maturity

Next, in verses 8-11, Peter turns his attention to the benefits of godliness

III. The benefits of godliness

And he lists four specific benefits

We find the first two in verses 8-9 as he contrasts the condition of those who practice and progress in the virtues on his list with those who do not

Since it's been a little while since we read through our passage let's look at those verses again [**2Peter 1:8-9**]

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

First, we see that those who possess and practice the qualities listed **will be fruitful and effective in the knowledge of Christ**

Actually, the word behind our English word "increasing" has the connotation of continually increasing to the point of being super-abundant which obliterates any idea of coasting or being content with enough to get by

I find it interesting that Peter states the benefit in negative terms - "ineffective" and "unfruitful"

"Ineffective" literally means "without work" or "being idle" and always describes something that is inoperative or worthless and accomplishing nothing when used in the New Testament

So those who are ineffective would be the idle folk who are lazy and don't work so that even their words could be considered useless

Jesus referred to himself as the vine and his followers as the branches and every branch should desire to bear fruit and that's what Peter says will be the case for those who are increasing in the listed virtues

That seems obvious enough but there is an aspect to Peter's meaning that we could easily overlook

Scripture tells us that it isn't just a lack of fruit that makes something unfruitful or ineffective but that evil also bears those characteristics

Paul writes of this truth in **Ephesians 5:11** where he commands:

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

So being unfruitful isn't limited to producing nothing or being morally neutral but could also refer to a life that is the opposite of a life filled with good deeds - a state that will be avoided when the virtues are increasing

Then in verse 9, Peter contrasts those who possess and make progress in moral virtue with those whose lives don't demonstrate such character

Peter says those poor souls are so nearsighted they are blind

What he means is that they so lack spiritual understanding that they cannot see or understand the truth

Of course we know that Scripture tells us that those who are without Christ are spiritually blind but that's not who Peter is talking about here as we see from the last part of the verse

He is talking about those who have truly believed but have lost their ability to see or understand spiritual matters due to lack of diligence in godliness

The gospel opens the eyes of a person to the truth of God, but the same person can return to spiritual darkness if they fail to progress in godliness and turn to embrace sin again

That's not to say that they will lose their salvation but their lives can go dark so that they will even forget they were cleansed from their former sins and turn to apostasy

It's a spiritual truth that salvation is evident where moral virtue is present and increasing

But it's also true that where moral virtue is absent or stagnant, there can be a lack of assurance of salvation

And failing to grow in spiritual maturity can cause one to forget they were saved as a kind of spiritual amnesia leading to spiritual drift and suppression of even their desire to do well

Stated positively Peter is saying that possessing and progressing in the virtues he listed will result in **spiritual productivity and assurance**

Then in verses 10-11 he lists two more benefits of growing in godliness - **preservation in this life and provision in the next [2Peter 1:10-11]**

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"Be all the more diligent" again calls for immediate, intense effort and eagerness of spirit

And it's this diligence in continuing to grow spiritually that will solidify the sense that you are indeed a true follower of Christ and a member of God's family

The word translated here as "fall" actually means to "stumble" or to lose one's footing and, typically means to go astray

We need to recognize that there is a vast difference between falling so as to perish and falling so as to injure oneself and it's the latter meaning that Peter intends here because a believer cannot fall utterly so as to lose their salvation

And Peter assures his readers that if they do as he says they won't suffer the fate of stumbling into sin and causing themselves harm in the process or, looking back to verse 9, even to stumble and fall into doubt about their spiritual condition

Then he closes out this section with the statement that the Christ-follower will reap heavenly rewards in proportion to how they abound in godliness in this life

Paul writes of those who will get into heaven as one escaping through the flames of their life's work is burned up by the fire of testing in **1Corinthians 3:15** and Peter here is describing the polar opposite

Both believers will enter heaven but those who abound in the behaviors that lead to spiritual growth will do so abundantly

Conclusion

Ongoing growth in godliness or God-likeness should be the normal pattern of the follower of Jesus Christ

Our modern society has removed much of the patience and persistence from our lives but growing in godliness is a process and there are no shortcuts - it takes time and it takes work

The sad news is that there isn't such a thing as standing still in the Christian life and like we saw in our opening illustration, we are either making progress against the current or we are being floated downstream

We are either reaping the benefits of godliness or we are risking spiritual atrophy and a weakening of spiritual sight, insight, and foresight until we lapse into spiritual blindness

But the good news is that God never expects anything from us that he doesn't provide for and empower

And looking back to verses 3-4 we know that God has given us everything we need that pertain to life and godliness and he has granted us his precious and great promises that will lead us to partake of his divine nature

But as we've seen today that doesn't mean we can simply coast - God wants us to work out our sanctification

And we should want to please him and working diligently, putting his good gifts to work, and striving to grow in likeness to his Son is our only reasonable response

Experiencing growth in virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love in your life affirms that you indeed belong to Christ and reaps rewards both now and in the future

If you desire a fulfilling, rewarding life in this world and abundant reward in the next you cannot rest on your laurels or be content with your past accomplishments but must diligently pursue spiritual growth every day

Let's close with a word of encouragement from the apostle Paul that he wrote to the Philippian believers and make it our watchword as we put God's provision to work and labor diligently toward godliness **[Philippians 3:12-14]**

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let's pray

Hebrews 10:32-39 (page 1007)

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For,

“Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.