

Sermon Text 2 Peter 1:1–8

1 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 for 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 Through these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust.

5 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.

8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian Virtue

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Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:19-24

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When Benjamin Franklin was 27 years old, he decided he would take control of his life. He selected 12 **virtues** he wanted to acquire and kept a daily chart of his progress in the development of each one. Whenever he missed the mark, he put a black dot beside that **virtue**. His goal was to ultimately have no dots on the chart. This method contributed to Franklin's success as an inventor, publisher, and statesman.

Franklin was intentional in developing the virtues he admired and desired for his own life, and as Christians, we must also be intentional in developing Christian virtues in ourselves for the purpose of being productive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter has much to say about Christian virtue in his second letter to the church where we find our sermon text.

Simon Peter is the author of this letter. Simon is the author's name given by his parents, and Cephas is the name given to him by Jesus when he was called as an apostle of the Lord. How do we get Simon Peter? Peter is the Greek translation of the Aramaic name Cephas. The name that Jesus gave Peter means *stone* or *rock* and refers to Peter's future character.

Peter further identifies himself as the bondservant and apostle of Jesus. The Greek word translated as a bondservant means slave. The fact that Peter is an apostle of Jesus Christ means that he is a special messenger of Jesus. So, Peter is a slave and a special messenger of Jesus. Some might be shocked at the notion that Peter considered himself to be a slave to Jesus, but the Apostle Paul says the same thing in Romans 1:1, also calling himself a bondservant of Jesus Christ who had been set apart to proclaim the gospel.

Peter and Paul were slaves to Jesus, not under compulsion but out of loving devotion to their Master. Peter knew the truth of who Jesus was. When Jesus says to Peter in Matthew 16:8, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter responds to Jesus, saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And when Jesus asked the disciples if, like the fickle crowds, they would also leave Him, Peter responds to Jesus in John 6:68, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." And when Peter had denied Jesus three times, he experienced forgiveness and restoration.

Similarly, before his conversion, Paul's zealotry as a Pharisee drove him to persecute some of Jesus's early disciples. Despite all this, Jesus forgave and restored Paul and called him

to proclaim the gospel. Peter and Paul's devotion to Jesus was complete; thus, they had freely enslaved themselves to Jesus because of their total commitment to Him. Peter and Paul had met the author of life and the only means of salvation for humans everywhere. They had a life-changing encounter with God's Messiah. How could their devotion to Him be anything less than complete?

Like Peter and Paul, each one of us must feel the bondage that Jesus exerts upon our souls. As Peter implies and Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

¹⁹ ... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and *that* you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Jesus, by His sacrifice on the cross, purchased us by His blood, saving us from eternal separation from God. When we realize this and truly believe it, we will use all that we are and all that God has given us to glorify Him. There is no greater work than to work for the Lord. There is no greater mission than the Great Commission. There is no higher love than the love that God has poured out on us through His Son, Jesus. We should count opportunities to serve the Lord as blessings because when we serve God, our work has eternal purpose and meaning, which will bring us joy.

In the early years of the church, false teachers and false beliefs and doctrines were out there and on the horizon, but Peter is writing to true believers in Jesus, who were one in faith with the apostles, and thus their faith was built on the teaching of the apostles and rooted in the bedrock that is Jesus Christ. Peter wrote that they had the same faith and beliefs as the Apostles, which are encapsulated in the Apostle's Creed and our Statement of Faith. In short, Peter's audience held to the essential truths of the Christian faith.

Then, in verse 2, Peter writes a blessing to his audience, saying, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Peter is saying something very important to us. The blessing of grace and peace will multiply in us when we have knowledge of God and Jesus. The Greek word translated as knowledge here implies an intimate personal relationship with God and His Son Jesus. When we have this kind of relationship with Jesus, we will be able to live the life that Peter describes in verse 3, where because of our relationship with God and His Son, the divine power of God makes it possible for us to overcome the corruption in the world and evil desires in us and live a godly life. All of this is by the power of God that is at work in us and is something that we could never achieve in our own strength.

Peter challenges us to take full advantage of what Jesus has granted us through His divine power, enabling us to overcome corruption and sin. We will grow in godliness when we truly know Jesus. Here, Peter is saying that the power of Christ will be supplied in our lives to overcome the corruption of the world when we are in intimate relationship with Jesus. And we are called to a life of godliness by the glory and excellence of Christ.

In verse 4, Peter describes the result of an intimate relationship with God and His Son. Because of Christ's glory and excellence, we have been granted a magnificent promise, and who could deny that eternal life in the presence of the Creator of the universe is a magnificent promise? Furthermore, Peter says that we will become partakers of God's divine nature because out of our love for Him, we will have removed, rejected, and purged sin from our lives, having put to death lust for worldly things.

When we are in an intimate, loving relationship with our Lord, we will prioritize holiness in our lives. Our God is perfectly holy, and like Him, we will seek to be holy and separate ourselves from the sin that so easily ensnares us. Because of our love for God, true believers seek to remove sin from their lives so that they can be in more perfect communion with Him and more fully experience Him.

Because of God's divine goodness and holiness, who has saved us through His Son, we will endeavor in our lives to become more like Him and conform all things to Jesus' example. This is what sanctification in the life of a believer is all about with the help and power of the Holy Spirit. Peter then continues in our sermon text with a beautiful paragraph describing a path to becoming more like Jesus involving intentional growth in seven Christian virtues. Let me read verses 5-7 again. Peter writes,

2 Peter 1:5-7

⁵ 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.

One Bible commentator says this about this passage and sums it up well.

In this beautiful paragraph Peter orchestrates a symphony of grace. To the melody line of faith he leads believers to add harmony in a blend of seven Christian virtues which he lists...A carnal Christian has spiritual myopia (v. 9), but a spiritual Christian is both effective and productive (v. 8) in his understanding of the Lord Jesus and his application of biblical principles to daily life.¹

When we abound in the virtues that Peter describes, we will grow and be productive in our relationship with Jesus Christ. In my estimation, this is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible because it describes the correct response of the believer to the greatness and glory of our God. As we grow in our understanding of the grandeur and magnificence of our God, we will strive in our lives to be more like Jesus, and we will be fully motivated by our love for Him. We can't continue to wallow in the pigsty of corruption we find in this world when we apprehend the perfection of our God. So, brothers and sisters, we must pray for Christ's guidance in nurturing and developing these important Christian virtues in our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit God has given us.

A group of tourists visiting a picturesque village walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a patronizing way, one tourist asked him, "Were any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

Every person converted to Christ starts life as a baby in Christ. Whether the new convert is six or sixty, that person is still a new Christian and needs to grow in the Lord. A Christian who is still a baby Christian 20 or thirty years after they have been saved is a tragedy. God intends for us to grow and mature so that we can be a positive influence in the lives of others. Until we learn to dig into God's Word for ourselves, we will never grow. But through prayer, worship, and study of the Word, every Christian can grow to be more productive in their walk with Christ.

So, let's break down Peter's teaching on Christian virtues and see what we learn, briefly considering each virtue along the way. Spiritual growth is not on autopilot, nor is it automatic. Peter calls us to apply all diligence, making every effort to grow in the virtues he describes. Growing in these virtues should be a central concern to Christians and it should be fueled by our faith. For if we have true faith we will desire to be more like Jesus so that we grow in our relationship with him.

First, Peter calls us to live a life of moral excellence. God has given us His moral code, but in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals a clearer picture of true holiness. Yes, we must keep the Ten Commandments, but to be more like Jesus, we must not only refrain from murder, but we must never be angry with our brother. Not only must we refrain from adultery, but we must also refrain from lust. Not only must we love our neighbor, we must love our enemy. Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe writes: "True virtue in the Christian life is not "polishing"

human qualities, no matter how fine they may be, but producing *divine* qualities that make the person more like Jesus Christ.”²

Second, our faith should spur on a desire to grow in knowledge. Peter is not calling us to gain worldly knowledge but rather spiritual knowledge under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who illuminates our reading of the Word of God to increase our knowledge of the Father and the Son. If you are a believer, you should hunger for the Word, which will result in you intentionally studying the Word of God. When I was in the corporate world, if we hired a person with ten years of experience, we wanted those ten years to demonstrate progressive growth. We didn't want to hire someone who had one year of experience ten times. In the same way, Jesus does not want us to get stuck in the place where we first believed in Him. He wants us to grow in our relationship with Him throughout our lives through the process of sanctification.

Third, we must grow in self-control as Christians. We must not be controlled by our passions. Later in this letter, Peter condemns the false teachers who were spreading heresies about Jesus. They were liars, living sensual, greedy lifestyles and misleading many. The false teachers had no self-control, but the true followers of Jesus must nurture it. We, too, are surrounded by false religions and teachings, and we are immersed in a world filled with corruption and sensuality. Thus, we must grow in our self-control to avoid being corrupted by the world.

Fourth, Peter calls us to persevere in faith in the face of adversity and when we are barraged by false teachers and worldly ideas and beliefs. As Paul says in Galatians 1:8, “...even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!” There is no other way of salvation, and there is no other source of salvation other than Jesus Christ. No matter what false religions teach, we have it on good authority that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the bedrock truth that we can build our lives and future. As Jesus says in John 14:6, “...I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus is the only way, and so we must persevere in our faith in Him.

Fifth, we must cultivate godliness in our lives. Godliness simply means God-likeness and describes a person who is in right relationship with God and with other human beings. Such an individual rises above the petty things in life, exemplifies grace under pressure, seeks to do God's will, and looks out for the welfare of others.

Sixth, Peter calls us to brotherly kindness, meaning that we must be especially kind to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Greek word here that is translated as brotherly kindness is *philadelphian*, the word from which the city of Philadelphia gets its name. You might recall that Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love because that is literally what its name means. We must be *philadelphians* demonstrating practical concern and a fervent attitude toward caring for others.

Seventh, in this symphony of virtues is love. This kind of love is the highest love. It is love that desires and works for the highest good for others, and it is exemplified by the love God showed to sinners by sending His Son as a sacrifice to save them. When we share the gospel with those who do not know Jesus, we exemplify this kind of love for others because we show that we care about their eternal destiny.

Notice that Peter begins this passage with faith and ends it with love. Faith and love serve as bookends to this passage of Christian virtues. This is fitting because, in Hebrews 11:6, we learn that without faith, it is impossible to please God. And so, too, Jesus teaches in John 13:35 that we will be known as His disciples by our love.

Peter closes our text by saying that if we are growing and increasing in these Christian virtues, we will not be unproductive or ineffective in our knowledge of Jesus. Christians are in possession of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and as we grow in our relationship with Christ, we will

become more effective servants of God for making Jesus known in the world. We must not remain spiritual infants in our walk with Christ. We must grow each day in our walk so that our growth is not stunted and our time on this Earth is not wasted.

I think the person in the New Testament who best exemplifies the devotion to Jesus that He is worthy of is the Apostle Paul. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was incredibly productive. After his vision of Jesus and his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, Paul gave his life to spreading the gospel and establishing the church. Paul's commitment to Jesus was complete, and he describes the suffering he endured in serving his Lord in 2 Corinthians 11. Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 11:24–28

²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent *adrift* at sea. ²⁶ *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; ²⁷ *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.

Here are three observations regarding this passage. First, Paul suffered all these things because he truly believed he had seen the resurrected Christ, and he went to his death proclaiming it. No one dies for something they know to be a lie, so we can take Paul's actions as solid evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. Second, those who truly know Christ will persevere in the face of great adversity in serving their Lord. And third, we need to be more like Paul in our service to the Lord willing to suffer if that becomes necessary.

True believers work with the help of the Holy Spirit to grow and excel in the Christian virtues Peter describes in this letter and become mature Christians on fire to serve their Lord and make Him known. Amen.

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel, "[2 Peter](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 865.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 438.