

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part three

Studies in 2 Peter - Sunday, February 3rd, 2019 - Teaching #2106
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IS IT EASY OR HARD TO BE A CHRISTIAN? - APPLYING ALL DILIGENCE TO YOUR FAITH

2 Peter 1:5-7 - "For this very reason, *make every effort* to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."

Peter has just made some bold claims about the yeast-like power of the promises of God, once they get into our system. He says they can actually deliver us from the corruption that is in the world (1:4). They can break the bondage of our own fallen desires. They can unleash the force - the power - of the very divine nature of God in our lives - **2 Peter 1:4** - "...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

The reason they can accomplish that in my life is that God has put His own power and life into those promises - "...His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence..."(1:3).

Now, in the text of this message, Peter says something that seems to contradict what he taught in the first four verses of this first chapter. If the first four verses stress the greatness of God's work in us, these next three teach the worthlessness of all of that unless we do our part to furnish this faith out in daily living - "For this very reason, *make every effort to supplement your faith...*"(1:5).

There are all sorts of Christians who stress the greatness of what God has done and is doing in our lives through the power of Christ. "You can't do anything worth while by your own strength. Don't put yourself under bondage to regulations and rules. Just rest in the Lord. Let Him do the work. Don't worry about being so religious. Just love Jesus."

Then there are others who make the Christian life little more than the exercise of will power. The Christian life is not all that different from human resolve. You *make* yourself a Christian by *living* like a Christian.

But Peter is taking neither of these two positions. The important words in **verse 5** are "For this very reason..." Those words link up what he is about to say with what he said in **verses 3 and 4**.

You must start with what God has already done for us in Christ. He has initiated the whole thing. He came, in Jesus Christ, and supplied both *forgiveness* and the *power for holy living*. The Christian faith starts with *God's action*, not *man's action* - "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

But Peter recognizes that, while the gospel *starts* with what God has supplied and accomplished, it never *ends* with what God has done. "For this very reason" - because of what God has provided on the inside - we are to "make every effort..." God's work enables our willing. But it never *by-passes* it.

How do you know you have saving faith? Isn't that a fair question? The Bible talks about assuring our hearts in His presence. How do you do that? The Bible talks about many people who acknowledge Jesus as Lord and do works in His Name. Then it says that they will one day stand before Jesus, and He will say that He *never even knew them!* So surely, this is a worthwhile question. *How do you know you actually have saving faith?*

That is what Peter is dealing with in our text. Because he says there *is* a way to know. You can be sure. There is actual evidence of saving faith in the heart.

1) **GENUINE FAITH ALWAYS PRODUCES A PASSION FOR SPIRITUAL PURSUITS**

When God's work and God's Word are accomplishing what they should be accomplishing in my life I will not rest with my present spiritual state - whatever that state is. Saving faith produces *effort*. As if that weren't enough, Peter says it makes *every* effort.

Paul says the life of faith is like a **race**. It's like running a **long race**. And what counts in a race isn't how close you got to the finish line. What counts is **how hard you are running**. And what counts is that you **don't stop running!**

That's what Peter means by making **every** effort. You concentrate on this. You shed your life of any distracting elements. You become more single in purpose and focus. Jesus said you **"strive to enter the narrow gate."**

Now this message is increasingly at odds with the tone of the age - even in the church. Churches strive to find more and more ways to make the practice of religion **more convenient** to the plans and schedules of the people who come. We paraphrase the Bible so people don't have to think so hard when they read it. We try to make sure that music fits in with what they hear on the radio so it appeals to their tastes.

Church-goers don't **like** to change their tastes. And we do everything we can to make sure churchgoers don't **have** to change their tastes. We will **accommodate** their tastes. We'll find ways to accommodate people's schedules so they aren't inconvenienced by church services. After all, they're busier than they used to be. We'll make sure the sermons aren't too long, or too theological. People aren't interested in doctrine. They want "talks" that sell the message in a way that appeals and attracts.

Now, please understand, I'm not arguing that we make things as ugly and hard as we possibly can. And I'm certainly not saying we should be insensitive to the needs and problems of people as we live in 2019.

But I **am** saying we need to be very careful lest we try so hard to make something **convenient** that Jesus and Paul and Peter said was **challenging** and required **diligence**. We need to be careful because while we sacrifice almost all reasonable strength and effort to acquire material goods and climb the ladder of success we can, rather quickly, be quite fatigued when pressed in our loyalty to Christ.

I'm not harking back to the good old days. I don't have any desire to go back. And I'm not knocking the genuine improvements and progress that have come into all of life with the passing of time. But I am trying to say that there is a **silent danger** in all of this. **If something comes easily, you don't need effort.**

The Christian faith constantly calls us to come to terms with truths and realities that are totally **outside our culture's mind set**. You can't get to them from the world's point of view. They can only be discovered by **revelation, self-denial and effort - "every effort"- says Peter.**

Consider why Peter says faith **requires** effort. He doesn't mean justification by **works**. He means you can't come to the truths of Christ in such a way that you don't have to adjust your thinking very much to understand them. You must **make room** for the explosive power of Christ in your mind and heart. It's truth for people who **fear God**. Truly received divine grace always **dislocates** what I have previously been relying on in my life.

Real faith makes its beginning in the soul with great impact and power. It begins in the fear of God. And it is fueled by a consuming love for His glory. If it's real, it produces **effort**.

2) TO FAITH MUST BE ADDED VIRTUE OR MORAL EXCELLENCE

2 Peter 1:5 - "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue...."

Translations vary, but the old idea behind the use of that old word **virtue** is **moral power**, spiritual muscle. It's the opposite of a faith that is all talk. Virtue is the opposite of **pretense**. Peter is saying **"make every effort to possess an affective faith, a dominating faith, a forceful faith, a consequential faith."**

In fact, the same word - **virtue** - is also translated **fortitude** in other passages of scripture. Make sure your faith isn't just a **mental concept in your mind or heart**. Make sure yours is **courageous when opposed**. Make sure it isn't the kind of thing that your friends define **for** you. Make sure it isn't easily compromised. See that there is a bold, active quality to it. It should make your whole life stand out and stand apart with the glory of God.

Don't settle for less than this. Make every effort toward it. If it requires more time reading and studying, then do it. If you need different friends and influences, then change them. If you're getting lazy about regular worship then set the alarm

a bit earlier. ***“Make the effort,”*** says Peter. Just get at it. Don’t let complacency creep up on you - **Hebrews 2:1** - ***“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”***

That’s what Peter is talking about. Don’t drift. Don’t let that happen. Be diligent about running the race. Make sure you’re running just as hard now - no, harder - than you did at the beginning.

3) **MAKE SURE YOUR SPIRITUAL ENERGIES ARE WISELY DIRECTED**

2 Peter 1:5 - ***“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge...”***

You can see how each of these traits is related to the one preceding it. Faith needs **effort** to grow, sure enough, but it must be effort **wisely directed**. As Paul would say, it must be a **zeal according to knowledge**. You must apply effort in the areas that will produce fruit. You can’t just spin your tires in spurts of frenetic spiritual frenzy.

We saw this same truth earlier in Peter’s teaching about the power of the life of God in the believer’s heart. It is real and actual. It has the potential to change everything. But it isn’t released **automatically**. Peter says transformation is channeled through the **“precious and very great promises”(4)**. You must **know** those promises. You must **think** about those promises.

So knowledge is strikingly important. There are so many Christians who live their lives waiting to be **moved** spiritually. It’s all passive. They do not read. They do not study. They aren’t interested much in church or doctrine. But if God could just **pour out** some kind of blessing on them they would love that. And God **does** pour out blessing upon His people. But, in most cases, their receiving blessing from God isn’t some kind of cosmic fluke.

Surely Peter was writing from his own experience here. He was constantly getting himself into trouble, not because he lacked **passion**, but because he lacked **wisdom and knowledge**. He was too impulsive. He would chop off a soldier’s ear when he knew that couldn’t be the way of Jesus. All he had to do was think that through. Peter is going to write a great deal in this very letter about the dangers of false teachers and false teaching. It takes more than **blessing** to know the difference. It takes **understanding and knowledge** to know the difference. God won’t **drop** this knowledge into your life. You have to **“make every effort”** to **add it** or **furnish it** to your faith.

4) **FAITH MUST CONSTANTLY DO BATTLE WITH THE STUBBORNNESS AND DECEITFULNESS OF THE SINFUL NATURE WITHIN**

2 Peter 1:5-6 - ***“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control...”***

Here again, there is a link with what has gone before. Knowledge is so important. But we all have to be aware of a potential problem. Our knowledge is frequently rendered useless by our **desires**. We are not **unbiased** in the way we hold truth in our minds.

All our natural instincts will **excuse our sins**. In our cleverness, we will usually **shift blame away from ourselves**. Peter is saying that, if you aren’t applying **every effort**, all the time, you will constantly miss the real **causes** of your troubles and the real **solutions** to most of your problems. It’s this inward **self** you need to control. It’s the **self** you need to restrain. It’s the **self** you need to keep in check. Knowledge can be completely academic and useless without **self-control**.

Peter has already told us this in the last part of **verse 4** - ***“...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”***

There it is. That’s what is wrong with the world. We are creatures of desires - **sinful desires**. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is precisely at this point. It’s not that the Christian has no fallen desires to battle. The difference is, rather, that the Christian alone **sees that these desires are sinful and the source of the trouble**.

The non-Christian explains the problem differently. The problem is always located in external circumstances. The problem is a lack of money. The problem is lack of instruction. The problem is the kind of environment in which I was raised.

And without belittling those things the Christian knows they aren't the root problem. Yes, there are many other problems in our world and all of them must be tackled in love and wisdom, but man's **chief problem - his chief spiritual problem - is the problem of sin and the fall and the desires of his heart.**

Paul says, "**For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do**" (Galatians 5:17).

True, enough, only God's Spirit can help us win this battle. And Peter knows that as well. But Peter says we must **"make every effort"** about **self-control**. It's not enough to start out in the faith. You won't last unless you **"make every effort"** against the desires of the flesh. Self can't be left unchecked for a minute.

You and I must never think that while we are sitting in church all of these desires are going to be taken out of us. That is not the teaching of the Scriptures. There is something we must do every day of our lives. Paul said he **"died daily."** He said we must constantly live as those who have **"crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"** (Galatians 5:24).

Self-control is a difficult virtue to make work because by its very definition it must be exercised against all our **natural reflex actions and reactions**. This is why Peter forms this immediate link between **knowledge** and **self-control**. Self-control is the very first virtue Peter lists after knowledge. And here's why. **Self-control is holding back the instant, reflex desires of the self long enough for the true, sane, deep knowledge of Biblical truth to get its voice in.**

Just having knowledge in your mental data base doesn't give that knowledge a **voice**. You and I have a thousand corrupt desires that spring into actions before the Holy Spirit can show us the better path. And only self control can push back that riotous crowd of reflex desires long enough for the Spirit to speak to our hearts. Self-control is the queen of virtues for fallen people like you and I.

So we need to wrap this up with this question. How will we grow in these things? And Peter will give only one answer. Yes, you and I must pray about these things. Yes, we must confess our sins and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we must rely on the precious promises of God, as Peter has reminded us.

But to have these things **"multiplied"** in our lives will require something extra from us as well. We will have to **"make ever effort"** to add to our faith - **"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith...."**(1:5).

And, for most of us busy people, putting **more** effort into the growing of our faith will require putting **less** energy somewhere else. So prayerfully make a plan. Honestly measure your spiritual desires. You have as much growth in Christ as you honestly want.