

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part four

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket

IS IT EASY OR HARD TO BE A CHRISTIAN? - APPLYING ALL DILIGENCE TO YOUR FAITH (continued)

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."

I think deep in our hearts most of us know that the Christian walk isn't automatic. It is ***supernatural***. But that's not the same thing as being ***automatic***. But not many of us take the time to sort out the process of how faith is specifically nourished and maintained.

So we should be grateful for the way Peter - who certainly knew all about the highs and lows of following Jesus - takes us through this very down-to-earth faith maintenance process. As we saw last week, there is always the need for the reminder to "***make every effort***" to supplement our faith (5). Faith isn't self-sustaining. It must be ***morally virtuous*** and dynamic. It must be fed by ***knowledge***. And knowledge must be made useful through ***self-control***. That's because our own unguarded reflex desires will lead us into error before the knowledge we have in our heads gets enough of a voice and gains enough momentum to make a difference.

This is such important stuff. Today we continue with Peter's examination of how spiritual health is sustained both by the work of the Holy Spirit and also our determination to "***make every effort***" to supplement our faith's supernatural beginning.

1) **TRUE FAITH MUST CONSTANTLY BRACE FOR THE LONG HAUL**

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, and self-control with ***steadfastness....***"

Faith is more of a ***process*** than a ***single event***. Again, I wonder if Peter was thinking about his own life. He had made such great professions about never forsaking the Lord. Others may let Jesus down, but Peter, never. There's a world of difference between making claims and living them out. Words can be spoken in an instant but following Jesus is for a lifetime.

Also, it's easy to grow tired. There are always going to be problems that don't go away. Paul says one can become "***weary in well doing***." So, part of the ***knowledge*** we should be adding to our faith will be the deep understanding that we must be prepared to "***make every effort***" to supplement our faith ***over a longer period of time*** than is convenient or comfortable.

In fact, it must be the case that we have a hard time learning this truth because the Bible re-teaches this same lesson over and over again: **James 5:7-8** - "***Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. [8] You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.***"

Profound words, these. The coming of the Lord, says James, is "***at hand***"(8). It's coming, but not here ***yet***. By definition, the Christian life - at least much of it - is lived ***waiting*** for something else.

Steadfastness is required to do this well because everything else in this world is designed to speed up the results of everything else. Consider the way so much ***less*** patience is required in so many ways - ***email - immediate texting - fast foods - delivered groceries - on-line banking - instant on-line shopping - streaming your favorite show rather than waiting for the network to broadcast it.***

But there's a huge problem developing here. Prayer still takes patience. Communion with the Holy Spirit still takes patience. Meditating on God's Word still required patience and stillness. A good marriage still requires much patience.

But where is this training for patience to be found in this world? All the false gods respond immediately. And that means we need to, in Peter's words, "***make every effort***," to lean into our waiting faith rather than the immediate fulfillment of our inward desires.

Three times in two verses the Apostle James repeats the same two words - **“Be patient!”** And then he finally says it is patience that **establishes** our hearts. He’s not talking here about just having Jesus **“in your heart.”** He’s talking about how our faith - how the **roots** of our faith - get more firmly established over time. He’s talking about how the roots of our faith are nurtured to get more and more nourishment out of the same relationship with Jesus over the passing of time.

This is precious stuff. Steadfastness is to your soul what a hard work-out is to your heart. Steadfastness increases **soul health**. James is saying you can no more be a good **Christian** without patience than you can be a good **farmer** without patience. He’s saying that Christian strength and growth come, as a rule, at about the **same pace** as crops grow out of the ground.

2) **MAKE GOD HIMSELF THE CENTER OF YOUR DESIRES - NOT MERELY SELF-IMPROVEMENT**

2 Peter 1:6 - “... and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness...”

This emphasis on godliness at this central point of Peter’s list is of such great importance. It’s there for a specific and timely reminder. **Virtuous traits of character only have value as they are related to God Himself.** Peter is saying, “Effort is important, but in **“making every effort,”** don’t fall into the trap of thinking only about yourself and how you can improve yourself. All of your effort is not directed toward self at all. Your pursuit, in all of these areas is the **glory and honor of God.**

There is nothing distinctly Christian about pursuing the betterment of self. Everyone does that. But remember that all our righteousness (that’s the **good** stuff we do!) is just filthy rags in the eyes of God.

So, in our diligence, we aren’t just pursuing self-discipline as the goal. Our eyes are on Jesus. We focus on the promise of His coming. We think about His judgement. We think of His rewards. We think about the great gift of redemption.

Do you see what Peter is doing with his emphasis on adding godliness to our faith? He’s reminding all of us that we’re not just here creating a **system**. We’re certainly going to have a certain lifestyle as believers, but we’re not primarily even fussing over just a **lifestyle**. We’re not even just trying to be **good** people. God is in our hearts. We have been redeemed from our old futile ways of life by the precious blood of Jesus Christ:

1 Peter 1:17-19 - “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, [18] knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

“Conduct yourselves in your time of exile.” But why? To be better persons? To have a better self-image? No. That will be the outcome, for sure, but only incidentally. The process is rooted in a mind focused on the death of Christ. **Redemption** is the fuel for **transformation**. That’s what Peter means with those all-important words, **“...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ....”**

There is no other acceptable root and motive for my acts of righteousness. All other motives are offensive to God. That’s why you will find Paul constantly referring to the Christian’s righteousness as the **fruit** of a commitment to Christ Jesus - **Philippians 1:9-11 - “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”**

God’s plan through my life is always to **make much of Christ**. Anything that makes much of Don Horban robs Christ of His glory and is offensive to Father God.

In addition, we also look **forward** to the judgment of Christ at the end of this age - **1 Peter 1:17 - “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...”** Again, the heart’s motive for righteous acts is rooted in God Himself. He’s **Father**, but He’s also **Judge**. So remember your past acts in **redemption** and His future work in **judgment**.

So there is both **faith** in what He has already done for us and there is **hope** in our hearts about His coming and eternal kingdom. Good deeds that aren't aimed at the glory of God and the greatness of His redemption in Christ Jesus are what the Bible calls **dead works**. We are people who are drawing near to God through Christ Jesus.

3) **TRUE FAITH IN GOD MUST SPILL OVER IN LOVING ACTIONS TO FELLOW CHRISTIANS AND MANKIND IN GENERAL**

2 Peter 1:7 - "...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."

Again, there is a linking together of truths here. This is more than just a list of separate, unrelated virtues. Each one balances and affects the others. **Before** Peter talks about love or kindness in general he lists godliness. Godliness must come first. We are probably getting less comfortable with this truth because of the bombardment of the spirit of the age, but the clear teaching of the Scriptures is that mere benevolence, mere philanthropy, mere commitment to the needs of others, is of no eternal value when detached from a desire to glorify God in those actions.

That's what Peter means when he shows that kindness must **flow out of** godliness. He doesn't mean that brotherly kindness **creates** godliness. Peter has already explained that in the last part of **verse 1** - "**Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ...**"

Righteousness is **generated - created** - by God Himself through Jesus Christ. We were powerless to create this faith with our own efforts. Now, Peter is teaching that this faith must be **manifested - fleshed out** - in actions to our brothers and neighbors. Those actions don't **create** saving faith. They **demonstrate** saving faith. Without faith in Jesus Christ, those actions, however kind and helpful, are just **dead works**. No one will get to heaven by being humanitarian.

The Apostle Paul underlined the same principle in **1 Corinthians 13:3** - "**If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.**" Benevolence has to flow **out of** devotion to God. It's the **result** of the relationship with God through Christ, not the **source** of a relationship to God through Christ.

What I'm trying to say is this. Even good deeds, if done not as a **response** to God's saving grace but as a **means of establishing** access or acceptance with God, become **offensive** to God rather than **pleasing** to Him. **Righteousness** and **morality** aren't the same thing. **Righteousness** is the fruit of the inward relationship of grace through Christ Jesus. **Morality** is the man-made structure of reform and improvement. This is why the person **outside** of saving faith can't do **anything** acceptable in God's sight.

Back to Peter:

- a) **Peter says we must apply all diligence to show brotherly affection.** He reminds us of this because it is sometimes harder to be kindly disposed to fellow Christians than anyone else. We tend to place **higher expectations** on Christians than non-Christians.

It sometimes makes us feel **righteous** when we're the ones who spot the hypocrisy of another Christian. Sometimes we can feel proud of our **"discernment"** in seeing through and exposing what others have missed.

Let me give you what I feel is almost a rule of thumb for sound Christian growth. Usually, discernment is given to help me **pray** for someone more than it's given to make me **mean** to someone.

- b) **Then Peter says we must make every effort to show love to all people.** "... and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love(7). It starts with the people of faith. That's where we practice our love. That's where we develop it. But then we reach out in love to our world.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 - "Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, [12] and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, [13] so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."