

## SOUL-SHAPING - How The New Testament Preaches to Christians - Part one

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Teaching #2063 - Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, 10:00 a.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket

### MAKE YOUR CALLING SURE AND NEVER FALL

**2 Peter 1:8-11** - "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. [9] For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. [10] Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. [11] For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We're going to spend three Sunday mornings in the first chapter of 2 Peter. To pick up the thread of thought properly, we must look back to **verses 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."

Whenever someone says - "I'm going to ask you to do something, and in order to do it, you're going to have to work very hard. You're going to have to **"make every effort"** if you're ever going to accomplish this task," - you know, more than likely, you will not immediately *feel* like doing what they are about to suggest. That's why you will have to **"make every effort"** (5).

So in **verses 8-11** Peter gives these people encouragement - *enticements to stir them up to the task*. There are enormous benefits to making every effort in adding to your faith those precious ingredients in **verses 5 through 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."

These verses have nothing to do with *earning your standing before God with acts of righteousness*. Peter has already stated that the Christian's righteousness is *supplied righteousness*. It comes from God Himself, through Jesus Christ - "....To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ...."(1). So it's not *human* righteousness at all. It's the "righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

So, why do we need to add to it? What are the reasons, the benefits, of **"making every effort"** adding these virtues to our faith? That's what Peter will deal with in these next four verses.

#### 1) THESE QUALITIES WILL KEEP YOUR LIFE FROM BECOMING USELESS OR FRUITLESS

**2 Peter 1:8** - "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."

It takes a high degree of humility to read those words with an open heart. Most of us don't want to ever think of our lives - our *Christian lives* - as described with those two adjectives - *ineffective* and *unfruitful*. In fact, we get so accustomed to measuring our Christian walk with the Lord by how *generous He has been with us* - "So, what's the Lord been doing in your life lately?" - that we don't even think in terms of how *useful and how fruitful we have been for Him*.

But Peter states the possibility that a Christian can become *useless* for the Lord who redeemed him. His faith can become all creed, all subscription to certain views about God and Jesus.

Think about that in slow motion. *"ineffective."* Peter specifically uses that word - *"ineffective."* It's not enough for me to *hold proper beliefs*. I have to be *effective*. Peter says I have to catch my mind's attention, at least once in a while, and ask how *useful* my Christian life is to God. How much of His work, His purpose for this lost world, am I carrying out? How much of my energy goes into this? How much of my time goes into this? How much of my money goes into this?

Look at the person Peter describes in **verse 8** again - "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."

He outlines this horrible contradiction. He describes this person who, far from being an outsider, has a knowledge of Jesus Christ - and even uses the proper designation of "**Lord**" when referring to Jesus.

If only fruitfulness were measured by how much we *knew*. Or by how much we *professed*. Or how religious our parents were. Or how long they had been involved in the church. But those things aren't enough. Living faith is measured by *usefulness* and by *fruitfulness*.

Notice the conditions Peter lists in **verse 8** - "**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.**"

Here's the real deal - faith that is *personal* ("*yours*") and *growing* ("*increasing*"). Peter says your faith has to be *yours*, and it has to be *increasing*. It has to be *constantly pruning and redirecting more and more of your life away from greed and self-interest, into the purposes of God*. It has to be *constantly replacing more and more of your initial, natural instincts of pride and self-will and self-attainment*. This process never stops.

The question here is very direct - *what am I doing with what I know?* Is my knowledge of Christ a *fruitful knowledge*? The issue isn't just whether or not it's a *saving knowledge*. Is it a *working knowledge*? In a way that almost sounds like a contradiction Peter says we must make every *effort* to the work God has *initiated* in our hearts. It takes constant monitoring. It takes constant nourishment. But if we make the effort there are eternal benefits. The first of which is *we will experience constant growth and fruitfulness in our knowledge of the Lord*. Our faith will be an expanding faith.

## 2) GROWING FAITH MUST RESIST SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS AND FORGETFULNESS

I worded that point negatively because that's the way Peter puts it:

**2 Peter 1:9** - "For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is *blind*, having *forgotten* that he was cleansed from his former sins."

Notice those words, "*these qualities*." The qualities Peter is talking about in this verse are the qualities he listed in **verses 5 to 7**. Then in **verse 8** he outlines a benefit of *having* these qualities ("*if these qualities are yours*"). They will keep you from becoming useless and fruitless. Those are the blessings. Now, in **verse 9** he turns the tables and warns us of a danger of *not* having these qualities ("*whoever lacks these qualities*"). Peter says two things in this warning:

a) *First, we will become blind or short-sighted (9) - "...whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind...."*

While not many of us can relate to total blindness, many of us know what it is to be short-sighted. You can see things close up but not far away. Your vision is good, but only good for things *immediately close to you*.

Peter describes a person who has that problem spiritually. He doesn't see things too far into the future. He sees what's on the doorstep, but not what is coming down the road. Because of this, he lives for the moment. His goals are all geared to this earthly life. He takes care to *"make every effort" in terms of this life and its concerns*. But he takes no thought of *eternity, judgement and work to be done in God's kingdom*.

What I mean is, this person sees bits of the *journey*, but never considers the *destination*. He enjoys looking at the scenery out the window, but he's forgotten where he is going. He's started out on a trip, he has the map, but he forgets where he is headed. His attention is focused *short-range* rather than *long-range*.

And this is a huge problem. It's the ultimate example of foolishness. It's, quite simply and literally, the biggest mistake one can make. All the other actions of all the other fools in the world combined don't ever come close to this miscalculation.

Consider the great words of the apostle John - **1 John 3:2-3** - "**Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has *not yet appeared*; but we know that *when he appears we shall be like him*, because *we shall see him as he is*.** [3] **And everyone who thus hopes in him *purifies himself as he is pure*.**"

Please notice the **time sensitive issues** in these verses. There are many things still in the future. They're not here yet. And the reason we're being forced to look them is obvious. Things not yet present in our field of vision may not seem as important as they really are.

So John's call is to **start actually seeing them right now**. I have to make every effort to being **looking at them**.

You can't **live** wise if you don't **think** wise. This is the mark of the person who has his destination in view. He knows Jesus is coming. He thinks about that every day. He keeps this hope alive in his heart. How do you know he is thinking about it? How do you know he has this faith in his heart? **He recognizes that he has no time to waste**. Every second counts.

He labors to keep his life pure and clean. But not just because he wants to be moral, or wants to be a better person. No. **He is thinking about the destination of his life. He knows where he is going and he is constantly getting ready for that moment.**

But there's a second danger Peter warns about if we don't make every effort to build these qualities into our faith:

- b) **Peter warns against forgetfulness of past sins** (9b) - **"...For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."**

Not only can this person not see forward to the end of this age and the coming of Jesus Christ, he has forgotten the **whole point of his conversion and the cross of Jesus**.

The Bible is very clear on the purpose of salvation: **Titus 2:14** - **"...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."**

Careless Christians think that all that was accomplished for them on the cross was **forgiveness**. They think of their lives as one perpetual state of having all their planned moral concessions pre-paid for by Jesus - like a phone card they can use up. They actually think they can live as they please and get forgiveness afterward. That's because, says Peter, they've somehow tragically forgotten they weren't just **forgiven** their past sins, they were **cleansed from their past sins** (2 Peter 1:9).

It was **Lewis Carroll** who famously said, **"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backward."** Peter says, if you don't apply all diligence to add the virtues of **verses 5 to 7** to your faith, you have simply forgotten God's plan in saving you. You can talk about forgiveness of sins, you can partake of communion, you can be baptized, but, unless you keep the **purpose of forgiveness before you**, unless you **stay close to the cross and remember the foulness and ugliness of all sin**, unless you **live every moment with some idea of being bought - being purified - from former sins**, you will never experience the connection between **past forgiveness** and **present purity**.

The Bible makes this a living issue at every communion service. Paul is very clear about the connection between past forgiveness and present purity in his teaching on the cross in **Galatians 6:14** - **"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."**

"I glory in the cross," Paul says, "not just in the sense that I'm happy to be forgiven. I glory in it in the sense that I recognize that through the cross I have been **purified from past sins**. I don't live there anymore. My relationship to the world around me is totally different because I always remember - I always stay close to the cross of Jesus!"

- 3) **IF YOU APPLY ALL DILIGENCE IN ADDING THESE VIRTUES TO YOUR FAITH, YOU WILL GROW IN ASSURANCE AND STABILITY**

**2 Peter 1:10** - **"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall."**

Aren't those last four words filled with wonderful promise? The subject Peter is dealing with in this verse is **certainty** - **"...be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure..."** He's talking about how a Christian can be sure and certain -

how he or she can have **deep assurance about the faith**. And notice that he relates certainty, not just to **knowing truth**, but to **practicing truth** - “....if you practice these qualities....”

Yes, **salvation** is by grace through faith. But **assurance** is never obtained merely by **thinking, or mentally remembering truth**. In the New Testament **grace** is free. **Assurance** isn't. Assurance is almost always linked to **actions**. We become sure as we do, as we obey, as we apply the truth that we already know.

Look at these references and note their consistent teaching:

**1 John 2:3** - “And by this **we know that we have come to know him**, if we keep his commandments.”

**1 John 2:5-6** - “....but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this **we may be sure that we are in him**: [6] whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

**1 John 3:14** - “**We know that we have passed out of death into life**, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”

**1 John 3:18-20** - “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. [19] **By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him**; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”

More passages could be added, but the point should stand out - **God loves us too much to allow us to feel saved when we willfully act unsaved**. Assurance is the right of people who walk in the light, who renounce the flesh, who obey Jesus at all costs. Peter says ***add those virtues to your faith, grow in grace and holiness, apply all diligence to these pursuits, and you will know the joy of confidence before God.***

4) **APPLY ALL DILIGENCE TO ADD THESE VIRTUES TO YOUR FAITH AND YOU WILL FIND GOD'S GRACE ADEQUATE WHEN LIFE ON THIS EARTH FADES AWAY**

**2 Peter 1:11** - “....For in this way there will be **richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Let me sum up this way. In **verse 8** Peter talked about people who were short-sighted as they lived on this earth. Perhaps there is no greater example of that than right here in this eleventh verse.

There comes a time of “**entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord...**”(11). The fact that Peter is not just talking about the initial point of being born again is backed up by the fact that the entrance he is describing is ***still in the future*** - “**will be richly provided for you....**”

Here is the utter folly of the short-sighted man. He is not thinking about the one thing coming at him that is unavoidable and final and decisive. He has to die. He has to leave all his treasures and loved ones behind. He must face God all by himself. And it will be too late to change anything then.

Then Peter describes those who are diligent in faith. Peter says **an entrance will be richly supplied**. Death isn't taking off on some uncharted voyage. It isn't drifting off into the unknown. He is sure of where he is going. A point of entry is ready for him. Because he has been “**making every effort**”(5) to supplement his faith, he has already been embracing that promise about heaven and eternity. He has been planning for heaven. He has been meditating on heaven. He has been purifying in the light of this hope. He has already been setting his affections on things above.

So Lewis Carroll was right. It *is* a very poor sort of memory that only works backwards. Let me close with great words from **Martyn Lloyd-Jones**: “**Abundant entrance. What does it mean? It means something like this. The Christian who has responded to Peter's appeal and who has been giving all diligence to living a full Christian life, does not die full of regrets at his failures and shortcomings. He is rather one who can say with Paul, as he viewed his end, 'I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown.'** That is the way the true Christian dies. He has been giving this diligence, he has been living the life....He does not feel that he has been wasting his time. He does not say, 'If only I could go back, I would do better.' There are no bitter regrets, he is sure of 'the abundant entrance.'”

And so, Peter urges us to apply all diligence growing in the virtues and graces of the Christian life. There are two ways of viewing this plea. Some will say, “It ***costs so much***. It seems to take all the time we have. Life is already busy, how much does God expect from me?”

But wiser people will look at those precious and magnificent promises. They will see the prize - the hope before them. They will sense the reason they were put on this earth, and the reason Jesus came and died. And they will know that, compared to all that this world could ever offer, diligence in faith offers God’s greatest reward in this life and in the life to come.