

**Building Your Christian Life
Faith, Virtue, and Knowledge**

2 Peter 1:5 (05/18/14)

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Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge.... 2 Peter 1:5

Apple has a new advertisement for their latest iPhone with this tagline: "You're more powerful than you think! You have the power to create, shape, and share your life." And then it shows you what all you can do with this dazzling device. Almost go to the moon! Well, it's a very limited, earthly, temporary power – no power to change hearts! But isn't this what God keeps telling us? Christian, you're more powerful than you think! In yourself, you're weaker than you think, but I have given you my divine power to totally transform your life.

That's exactly what Peter is telling us here at the beginning of this powerful little epistle. God has given you your precious faith to believe the gospel, He has given you His divine power that equips you with everything you need to live for him, and He has given you His precious and magnificent promises in His Word that have made you a sharer of His nature and have liberated you from your slavery to sin! Through the gospel of Christ, you are more powerful than you think! Ephesians 3:19-20 promises: Unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works within us! And Paul adds in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who infuses His power into my life!" You're more powerful than you think in Christ!

Let's read verses 1-8. Verse five is basically saying, in view of how God has set you up with all you need, now you are ready for practical and personal growth and change in your life. And here are seven godly qualities you want to be building into your life. These are qualities you want to encourage others to aim at in your discipling, in your giving counsel, with your children, in your teaching. And there is progress here. Each builds on the previous. Moral excellence comes before knowledge. If you have knowledge without virtue, you can be a clever devil, which is exactly what we have plenty of today – clever devils! When I am looking for a good mechanic, I want one with knowledge. But before that, I want him to tell me the truth!

And notice in verse 8, as you are building these qualities into your life, two things result – You won't be useless or fruitless. That means you'll be useful to your Master, and your life will bear fruit for God's glory! You won't waste your life.

APPLYING ALL DILIGENCE -- God expects you to be aggressive in building your Christian life.

Peter is not talking about justification here. We got justified in verse one. We're justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Not by faith plus growing or plus loving or plus anything. But, and this is really important, justification always leads to sanctification. We're talking about progressive sanctification now. God grows His children. Ephesians 4:15, "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, Christ." 1 Peter 2:2, "Like newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow up in your salvation." 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ."

And Peter is talking to every believer here, not just a select few elite spiritual warriors. He's talking to the ordinary Christian. This is for you! Everyone on the field. Get out of the bleachers. No spectators here. I

fear some of us ordinary Christians feel like we're so far behind the radical ones that we aren't even in the race. Martin Strel is known as the Big River Man. He has swum the major rivers of the world, including the Yangtze, Danube, Mississippi, and Amazon (3300 miles and it took him 68 days). Some of our Christian leaders are like spiritual Martin Strels. We'll never rise spiritually to their level.

But listen, most of us believers are ordinary. We live ordinary lives. We go to work to support our families, pay the bills, try to save some money. We faithfully attend church, we give, but we're not selling out and moving to Tibet, we're just ordinary. I appreciate *Radical* and what David Platt is calling us to, but I want to see a book entitled, *The Ordinary Christian*. Here's my point – Peter's not just talking to high risk takers, selling everything and going where no man has gone before. He's talking to us, Mr. and Mrs. Ordinary Christians, and God expects us to be aggressive in building our Christian life.

We want an environment of progressive sanctification, of growing and changing to become like Christ, no matter who you are, or how long you've been a Christian. Progressive sanctification is for you, mom! For you, grandpa. For you young guys. We need to understand how God changes our lives from the inside out through the Spirit and the Word, changing our way of thinking, calling us to put off old habits and put on new habits that please God.

Now, what is your part? Peter says to apply all diligence in building your Christian life. Applying means to bring into alongside of, like a tool chest if you're a mechanic or your fishing tackle box if you're a fisherman. If you work for a builder, you're bringing your hammers and saws and whatever else you need to work today. God has given you power, the tools to be diligent, so bring it on.

"Wait a minute; this sounds like we've got something to do with this. Isn't this legalism? You mean I've got to do something here?" Exactly. God alone justifies and regenerates and gives us faith to believe the gospel. We add nothing! But in sanctification, God works and you work. You aren't earning your way to heaven, but you are living to please God. Philippians 2:12-13 says, "Work out your own salvation because God is at work in you to will and do of His god pleasure."

So, get fired up to change and grow! What do you get fired up about? I love getting out there on Saturday mornings and working around our lawn. But I need to get fired up spiritually. Applying all zeal, all effort. There's no room for sluggards in the Christian life. God has given you all you need, so go for it! Be aggressive! One author wrote, "You can hear a kind of surging 'Forward! Forward! Forward!'" in Peter's words here. Diligence is the same word as 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman." Study means be diligent, make haste, get moving here!

How many believers are struggling with all kinds of issues? They're struggling with sin habits or just not popping along and you ask them if they are diligently getting in the Word and diligently praying and diligently getting out to small group or Sunday School and they answer, "No, I'm not." So I want to drill down here. Discipline yourself for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). Growing isn't automatic. Did you ever say to your dad when he asked you to do something, "In a minute," or "I'll do it tomorrow." Can you imagine when God tells you to do something you go, "Okay, God, I'll do it later." or, "In a few minutes, God." Diligence means make haste to obey!

And not only that, but as we look at these qualities, God says He wants us to "supply" each one. That word originally spoke of someone who would provide everything needed for the choir in a Greek play. It has our word "chorus" in it. It means don't be stingy here. Richly supply. Be all about it. Okay, let's diligently get to these first two qualities.

RICHLY SUPPLY MORAL EXCELLENCE TO YOUR FAITH

“In your faith, supply moral excellence.” You’ve already got your faith. God gave it to you. But now God says you need to richly, abundantly, and daily keep building this virtue, this excellence, this moral excellence into your life. You are a believer, you represent God in this world, and God wants you to shine in your virtue or integrity or moral excellence. Like Daniel in Daniel 6. Three times he is referred to as having an excellent spirit.

Christian, are you known as a person who exhibits moral excellence? Let’s use Daniel as an example here. In all the darkness of Babylon, he shone for the true and living God. That’s you at work, at school. In the midst of the assaults of temptation and opposition, you need a resolute determination to do what is right in the sight of God. That’s virtue. There’s an element of strength in the word. For guys, it’s the idea of “Man up!” 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” Quit making excuses for doing what is right. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

We live in a moral battlefield. Immorality is the new normal, isn’t it? And before you know it, a cool down at home, an inviting smile, smell of perfume, slight brushing of arms, and before you know it, unless you are firmly committed to moral excellence, down you can go! And it can happen so easily between unmarried couples. Pastor Goode used to warn, “When the physical gets involved, the passions are aroused, and reason flies out the window!”

I’ve told you about a fine man in our first church. One day he stopped by to share that he’d been seeing a lady from work. He was actually a leader in our church. How my heart was grieved. He had even so justified himself that he felt God was providentially putting her in his path. He’d come to a red light, look over, and there she was. Ah! How sad it all was. Did his wife have an easy time with this? Not even close. But he applied all diligence to repair his marriage and worked hard on rebuilding moral excellence.

What do you do when you blow it? Do you shake it off as nothing? Do you run and hide and cover and blame, like Adam did in Genesis 3? No, we are walking in the light. We are 1 John 1 people now. Thank God there’s recovery in sanctification. We are grieved by our sin, our hearts are broken by our sin and pride and offensive comments and little lies and cheatings and displays of anger or over indulging. We are humbled and we seek God’s forgiveness and restoration and learn from it and go back growing even more aggressively. That’s moral excellence.

Look at your life right now. What are you struggling with? How are you not pleasing God in a practical way? How are you doing as a Christian husband, wife, parent? Are you trustworthy? Are you like Daniel – they couldn’t find any crack in his moral excellence, so they had to go after his prayer life. That’s exactly what they’re doing to us today.

RICHLY SUPPLY KNOWLEDGE TO YOUR MORAL EXCELLENCE

The order here is really important. Tommy Nelson tells about a pastor in London who got on a trolley. When he bought the ticket the driver gave him back way too much change. As the pastor sat down, he thought, “Wow, God has blessed me today!” But then God troubled him and he made his way up to the driver, “You gave me too much change back there. Here it is.” The driver’s response, “I did it on purpose. I was in your church last Sunday and you talked about honesty and I just wanted to see if you were for real.” Before you want to listen to a pastor’s knowledge, you want to be assured he’s not a compromiser or a liar.

Integrity precedes knowledge. But God says you need to aggressively go after knowledge. You cannot live a successful, God-honoring Christian life in ignorance. We aren't talking about theology here, but God is talking about knowing God's truth and building it into your life. You need to feed your faith with good, rich, healthy spiritual food. This isn't optional. The only way to be able to discern right from wrong and good from evil is to know God's Word. Every believer, not just a select few, needs discernment. The enemy is flooding our land, our systems, our politics, and our churches with lies. We are drowning in an ocean of lies! The only way to fight lies is with truth. What does the Bible say? Who is God? How did we get here? What is man? What is God's purpose for man? How does God save us through the gospel? What are God's standards for sexual morality and gender identity? This is where the heat of the battle is right now in today's world!

And we are not just to know truth, but we are to love it! Psalm 119:97, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day!" It's one thing to know truth; it's another to love truth with all your heart, ardently, fervently. That kind of love will keep us from compromising what we know. It will cause us to bring truth to bear on every area of life, not just feeling good about God. Setting aside God's truth is what got us into this mess today with confusion on every side! The Christian life isn't just swaying with the music or feeling pumped at a Christian concert. It isn't James Brown theology, "I feel good!" No, it's Jeremiah theology – "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your word became to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart!" Why? "For I am called by Your name!" (Jeremiah 15:16).

The Bible warns, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." God's will for you is to be in His Word, to read it, to diligently learn its truths. We certainly want our church to be strong in faith, in moral excellence, and in godly knowledge! As we plunge deeper into a world of lies and chaos, the people who know their God will be strong and take action! That's Daniel 11:32. Let's repeat that: The people who know their God will be strong and take action!

God has given you all you need to aggressively and progressively build these qualities into your life. You're more powerful than you think! Where are you struggling right now? Take a close look at yourself. Do you hear these verses speaking to you? Is your spiritual life exhibiting diligence, zeal, and strong determination to apply these truths into your life? Is your life shining with moral excellence? And are you taking advantage of all the opportunities God is giving you to build more and more knowledge and understanding into your life? Are you reading the Word every day?