

## Spiritual Growth and Eternal Security

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2 Peter 1:8-11

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It's undoubted that the Great Depression of the 1930's brought some of the most difficult days in the history of our nation. Every sector of the economy was rocked and the ripple effects reached far and wide. During those days a simple stroll down the street in most major cities would have revealed the concrete foundations of multiple unfinished buildings. These massive structures stood stark and gaunt, often overgrown with weeds, having been abandoned by men who began a good work, but because of the depression ceased to finish it. Though the foundations of these buildings were substantial and adequate, for years they stood entirely useless because nothing was added to make them habitable. This picture is a lot like the picture that Peter has been painting for us in the opening chapter of his second letter.

In verses 3-4 Peter, reminds us of what God has done for us (granted to us) in Christ. He reminds us that our salvation is purely a work of sovereign grace – God's unmerited favor. We didn't earn it, didn't work for it, weren't seeking it, and don't deserve it. Peter writes, "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, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises..." Verses 3-4 have to do with our justification.

In verses 5-7 Peter shows the connection between divine sovereignty and human responsibility – how we are to work out what God has worked in (Philippians 2:12). Peter calls us as believers, in light of God's saving grace in our lives, to begin a building process (progressive sanctification). In these three verses Peter enumerates 7 character qualities that every believer should be growing in. He says, "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love." Faith is the foundation grace. But a foundation, just like those left in the wake of the Depression, is of little use if no building follows. We are to exercise our faith, building on its foundation, by diligently seeking to grow in godliness.

In verses 8-11, our text for this morning, Peter shows us the practical benefits or results of our growth in godliness. If you make every effort (diligent) to grow in godliness (v.5): (1) You will experience the delight of an effective and fruitful life for Christ; (2) You will avoid spiritual nearsightedness and amnesia; (3) You will enjoy assurance of God's election and calling in your life; (4) You will have the

hope of a rich welcome awaiting you when God calls you home. Let's turn our attention to our text for this morning. Peter, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens these words:

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

### **1. GROWING IN GODLINESS WILL RESULT IN AN EFFECTIVE AND FRUITFUL LIFE. (v. 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.*

"These qualities" refers back to the list of character traits that Peter explained in verses 5-7. Peter is saying that if those qualities (virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love) are present and increasing in your life then you will be spiritually effective and fruitful in service to Christ. Likewise, if you do not pursue these qualities, you will be ineffective and unfruitful in service to Christ or others. If these qualities are not present, at least in their bud form, we must ask ourselves whether we possess a true knowledge of Christ and are partakers of the divine nature (vs. 3-4).

There is something wrong with a professing Christian who is not actively growing in these areas - Peter will explain that in verse 9. What Peter is arguing here is that a true knowledge of Christ, a saving knowledge, will inevitably produce fruit. Paul shows the connection between a growing knowledge of Christ and practical fruitfulness in Colossians 1:10. He says, "Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

The Christian's orthodoxy (what we believe) must show itself to be genuine by a robust orthopraxy (how we act). Just as the muscles in our body will atrophy if they are left unused and unexercised, so will our spiritual effectiveness and fruitfulness wane if we do not diligently seek to grow our faith. In a sense, Peter, only after clearly articulating that we are justified by faith alone (vs. 3-4), encourages us to hit the spiritual gym and supplement or furnish our faith with growth. Spiritual growth is evidence of spiritual life.

The word ineffective here literally means to be idle or useless. Peter uses this word in direct contrast to his exhortation in verse 5 to, "Make every effort" or "apply all diligence" to grow your faith. Peter was warning the church both then and now against standing still. We need to be active and

exercising our faith. We need to be building on the foundation of our faith a life that pleases Christ and is useful and fruitful. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:21, "If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work." Spiritual fruitfulness is the natural outflow of genuine repentance (Matthew 3:8). Jesus says that very thing in different language in Matthew 7:17-18, "Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit." For those of you that garden you know that fruitfulness requires diligence and hard work. Like a garden, our spiritual lives must be cultivated (intentionally attended to) in order to be fruitful. If we truly possess Christ by faith, we cannot remain idle. We must be growing and bearing fruit. Is your spiritual garden healthy?

Peter is writing out of the immediacy of his times and the current circumstances surrounding the churches in Asia. It's important for us to have an understanding of the context that has prompted Peter's writing. If you have studied Peter's first letter, you will know that it was written for the encouragement and consolation of persecuted believers. Peter encouraged the believers to "suffer well". But Peter's second letter has a much different theme. Here, Peter encourages believers to "grow strong". Peter's tone in his second letter is not so much encouragement as it is a warning against false teachers and their destructive heresies (Cf. 2:1). Since the writing of his first letter, Peter had become increasingly aware and increasingly concerned about false teachers who had infiltrated the church with false doctrine and immoral lifestyles. When I read Peter's letters I can't help but to think back to Jesus' piercing in John 21:15-17 where three times He admonished Peter, "Tend and feed my sheep". A cursory reading of Peter's letters undoubtedly reveals that this was a burden that he bore with a great sense of sobriety and earnestness.

It's probable that the false doctrine that Peter was combatting in his letter to the churches in Asia was a form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is somewhat colorful and comes in various shapes and sizes but distilled to its basic tenants, it teaches that salvation is obtained through an ascent of esoteric knowledge (known only to some) rather than through faith in Christ. This emphasis on knowledge and the mind often led to a subsequent de-emphasis on the body resulting in rampant immorality (2:13-19) among Gnostic teachers and their followers. They believed and encouraged others to view Christian liberty as a license to sin. They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption (2:19).

Interestingly, Peter emphasizes and puts a premium on Knowledge. As a matter of fact, he uses a form of the word 16 times in these 3 short chapters. Growth in grace and knowledge are actually the bookends of Peter's second letter:

2 Peter 1:3-4	2 Peter 3:18
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, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises...	But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

But the knowledge that Peter points us to is wholly different than the worldly wisdom of the false teachers. In 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul says, "The world doesn't know God through [its] wisdom." The wisdom and knowledge of God are found in Christ. It's obvious that Peter sees the solution to false teachers and their destructive teaching to be a growing knowledge and application of true knowledge, which leads to a changed (sanctified / Christlike) life. Where do we obtain this knowledge? In the Word of God. Much time in God's Word results in much resemblance to God's Son. We are not to remain babes in Christ; we are to be growing up in our salvation (1 Peter 2:2). We must not neglect a growing knowledge of Christ through His Word. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Shallow knowledge leads to shallow Christians.

The first benefit of diligently growing godliness is an *effective* and *fruitful* life.

## **2. GROWING IN GODLINESS WILL KEEP YOU FROM BECOMING NEARSIGHTED AND FORGETFUL. (v. 9)**

*For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*

In verse 8, Peter expresses the positive result of spiritual growth in that it produces an effective (active) and fruitful life for Christ. In verse 9, by way of contrast, Peter tells us that blindness and nearsightedness are the tragic result of not diligently pursuing spiritual growth. He says, "For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." Blind and nearsighted are used somewhat synonymously here in verse 9. The text literally reads, "Whoever lacks these qualities is blind, being nearsighted."

Before we come to know Christ we are spiritually blind (Ephesians 2), unable to discern and live in light of God's truth. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." But after our eyes are opened, our visual acuity must increase. Commentators debate whether Peter has a believer or a non-believer in view here in verse 9. I am more persuaded that He is referring to a "sick" believer given the fact that he says, "having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." The Greek word for blind is (myopazo). It is the word from which we derive our English word myopia (nearsightedness). A believer with spiritual myopia is not magnifying the grace of Christ.

Peter defines blindness and nearsightedness in terms of having forgotten that you were cleansed from former sins. In other words, a lack of spiritual growth is a result of a deficient understanding and appropriation of the gospel to your life. The assurance of pardoned sin is the greatest motivation for a Godly life. Think about 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." Likewise, Romans 12:1-2, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." If you forget what Christ has done for you:

1. *You won't have any zeal or enthusiasm for growing spiritually.*

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 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. Titus 2:11-14*

2. You will lack gratitude and thankfulness for the spiritual blessing in your life.
3. You will become increasingly attracted to the things of this present world.

It is very possible that the blindness and nearsightedness that Peter refers to in verse 9 is a result of becoming fixated on the temporary things of this world. Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

If we aren't careful, we can become so focused on our present circumstances that we fail to remember the gospel. This "gospel amnesia" will quench your motivation to be diligent to grow in godliness. Spiritual growth is the result of fixing your eyes and mind on those things that have eternal value.

4. You will lack motivation to share Christ with others.

The second benefit of diligently growing in godliness is that you will avoid spiritual *nearsightedness* and *amnesia*.

### **3. GROWING IN GODLINESS PRODUCES ASSURANCE AND STABILITY. (v. 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.*

Notice that Peter uses the word diligence. He says, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent..." The word "diligent" here in verse 10 is the same word that is translated as "effort" in verse 5. Peter said, "Make every effort to supplement your faith with..." Diligence has the idea of a zealous pursuit, an earnest endeavor, and hard work. Peter's point is that you won't grow effortlessly! Paul reminds us of that in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 when he says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (Peter will talk about the imperishable prize in the very next verse). So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." The writer of Hebrews says, "Strive...for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" Hebrews 12:14. The grace of God and the vigorous pursuit of holiness are not antithetical. We are 100% dependent of the grace of God for spiritual growth while at the same time it requires our earnest pursuit. Growth takes work. Sanctification is not a "let go and let God" endeavor.

I think Peter wanted to encourage those who were being diligent, but also to rouse those who had become complacent. Some within the church had apparently bought into the lie of false teachers that since salvation isn't based on merit / works, that working hard and being aggressive in pursuit of spiritual growth is unnecessary. This complacency or idleness is what leads to the spiritual ineffectiveness that Peter talks about in verse 8. Rather Peter encourages us to be diligent. God has supplied all the means of grace to us, but spiritual growth doesn't happen without a deliberate, concentrated effort on our part.

Peter says, "Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure..." What is election? Election is God's sovereign choice of us in Christ before the foundation of the world. In Ephesians 1:4-5 Paul says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as Sons through Jesus Christ." We had nothing to do with this. Jesus tells us in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit – fruit that will last." Here again you see the inseparable connection between genuine conversion and a fruitful life. We need to be clear that election is no excuse for spiritual immaturity or for lack of effort in the Christian life.

What does it mean to be called? Calling refers to the actualization of God's predestined election at a particular time in our life – conversion. God elects before the foundation of the world and calls the one who is elect to faith and repentance at a particular point in their life resulting in new birth. There is a lot of theology wrapped up in those two words and we need to understand what they mean and how they apply to us!

So what does Peter mean when he says, “Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure?” Let’s first be clear about what he is not saying. Peter is in no way saying that we can secure our own salvation if we would just do the things listed in verses 5-7... He isn't advocating moralism. Rather, he’s saying that your diligence in the Christian life, your intentional pursuit of spiritual growth will be the litmus test of your calling and election. Remember James’ question, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. You see that faith was active along with his (Abraham) works, and faith was completed by his works” James 2:14, 17, 22.

In other words, It’s not your *profession* of faith that guarantees that you are saved; it is your *progression* in that faith that gives you assurance. The person who claims to be a child of God but whose character and conduct give no evidence of spiritual growth is deceiving himself.<sup>1</sup> If you truly belong to the Lord, your diligent pursuit of godliness will prove it. If you’re not working to develop the qualities listed in 1:5-7, it’s possible that you have never come to a saving knowledge of Christ (v. 3). Assurance of salvation is directly related to present spiritual service and obedience, not merely to a past salvation event such as a profession or prayer. Here is a question worth reflection: What does your present life say about your faith? Paul encouraged us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). We want to avoid the pitfall of both under and over self-examination (morbid introspection), but we do want to soberly evaluate our lives to ensure that at least the bud of these graces are evident and growing in our lives.

If these qualities are present and growing, then we can be assured of our calling and election. What a beautiful promise! As Christians we don't have to wonder if we have truly been regenerated – we can know! We can have that blessed assurance that we belong to Christ and that He will indeed bring to completion what He has started in us (Philippians 1:6). This is one of the themes of the book of 1 John. In 1 John 5:13 John says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” It’s important to note that Peter and John aren’t writing to an elite class of Christians – All Christians are meant to enjoy assurance of their salvation in Christ.

Neither does a man have to be perfect in order to claim assurance of his salvation. We are not called to make our calling and election sure by way of sinless perfection. If this were the case no man would ever have assurance as we will never be perfect this side of eternity. Warren Weirsbe says, “[The Christian] will not always be on the mountaintop, but he will always be climbing.” We are called to make our calling and election sure by our diligent growth in grace. The more we grow in Christ, the more certain of our abiding in Him we become. And what does that abiding produce? It produces fruit. Remember John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit...”

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary Volume II: Ephesians – Revelation* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1989), 440.

Spiritual growth requires both divine grace (calling and election) and human responsibility (practice and effort). "Practice" refers to the pattern of daily conduct (ongoing)...When Peter says that the one who practices these things will never fall, he doesn't mean that a Christian will never fall into sin. We deny the doctrine of Christian perfectionism. Rather, Peter means that we will never suffer a "reverse". God will protect, establish and confirm His own. We show ourselves to belong to Him by our progressive conformity to His Son. This conformity produces marvelous confidence and assurance that our salvation is secure.

The third benefit of diligently growing godliness is the enjoyment of assurance and stability.

#### **4. GROWING IN GODLINESS WILL BE RICHLY REWARDED. (v. 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.*

Peter motivates us to diligently pursue godliness in two fundamental ways in our text: (1) By keeping the beginning in view - that God has saved us by extravagant grace and cleansed us of our former sins (v.9); (2) By keeping the end in view - that there is a glorious homecoming waiting for those who diligently *persevere* in godliness. It's interesting to note that the word "supplement" or "supply" in verse 5 is the same word that is translated "provided" or "supply" in verse 11. It's the word (epichoregeo) and it means to make lavish provision for. Peter is saying that if we make lavish (diligent) provision for spiritual growth, God will make lavish provision for us by welcoming us into His eternal Kingdom. "A rich entrance" was a phrase often used by the Greeks to describe the way Olympic winners were welcomed home.

It's important for us not to gloss over the word "provided". There is a glorious future that waits every Christian. But we must not forget that it is *provided* because it was *purchased*. Everything that we look forward to and long for in our eternal home was purchased for us at the expense of Christ's blood. He hung on Cavalry's cross, enduring the unmitigated wrath of God so that those who were elect, those who were predestined in love (Ephesians 1:4), might be with Him for eternity. Jesus prayed in the garden just hours before his death, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" John 17:24.

We look forward to the Day when we hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" Matthew 25:21. Paul anticipated that Day when he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

Peter gives us a twofold description of the divine kingdom that awaits those who persevere in godliness. First, it's eternal, and thus as different as can be from the transient powers and the hollow glamor of earth. Second, it's the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Entrance is gained only as a consequence of a living relationship with him. The one who makes his calling and election sure, evidenced by a life that is increasing in godliness, has the hope of life in the eternal kingdom of Christ. Do you remember what the sixth Beatitude is? Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart [those who are growing in godliness], for they shall see God." Jesus was never afraid to motivate us with reward. Peter wrote in his first letter, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" 1 Peter 5:4. Paul told Timothy, "Bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" 1 Timothy 4:8.

The Last benefit of diligently growing godliness is the hope of eternal *reward*.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Christian life begins with faith, but that foundation of faith must be built upon. If you are a growing Christian then you are confirming your calling and election. Your calling and election provide the unwavering hope and assurance of your final glorification. Paul confidently reminds us, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" Philippians 1:6. What a glorious promise! But the Christian life cannot be lived by default. You have a responsibility to intentionally and diligently pursue Christ-likeness. It is this very Christ-likeness that makes you light and salt in this dark and decaying world. The Christian life is not meant to be stagnant, but rather brimming with vitality. The key to a growing, vibrant, effective, and fruitful Christian life is that you remember the gospel. Don't ever become desensitized to your desperate need for extravagant grace. Remember the weight of sin that was paid for on Calvary's cross. Remember that while you were still yet a sinner, Christ died for you (Romans 5:8). This truth provides you with incredible hope and assurance that you will soon see Him face to face and be like Him (1 John 3:2). If you persevere, you will be richly welcomed into His Kingdom. Come, Lord Jesus, come!