

## A Diligent Pursuit (2 Pet 1.5-11)

### I. REVIEW: REMINDED OF THE TRUTH

- A. The epistle of 2 Peter was written to strengthen the church in the face of deception and the threat of false teaching. The letter gives us a specific understanding of how the apostles sought to strengthen the church of God in light of demonic deception. This is important for us in our current moment as we seek to grow in maturity as the people of God and remain steadfast.
- B. We also find ourselves in a cultural moment experiencing the reality of false teaching that threatens to separate the church from the true and firm foundation of Christ Jesus. We are witnessing a great “falling away” in our contemporary moment as people in the church are “deconstructing” and abandoning their faith in Christ Jesus.
- C. It is important to remember that the *primary strategy* we find in the New Testament for combating false teaching is by the intentional and faithful *strengthening of the church*. Peter does not spend time speaking out against the outside culture they find themselves in. Rather, he orients his efforts toward reminding the church of who they are and shining a light on the areas where false teachings have crept in among them with devastating results.
- D. Peter begins his letter to the church by reminding them of who they are in Christ Jesus — and reminding them of the glorious promises given in the gospel. These realities are meant to stir them up to response and action as they engage them once again.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. <sup>13</sup>I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder (2 Pet 1.12-13)

<sup>1</sup>This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder (3.1)

- E. He outlines five specific truths that they must hold fast to as they remember who they are: (1) our *faith has been given to us*; (2) we have been *given everything we need* to walk in godliness; (3) *God has called us* with an effectual call; (4) we have been *granted precious and very great promises* in Christ; and (5) we have been made *partakers of the divine nature*.
- F. As we see throughout the rest of the New Testament, the starting place of any exhortation to holiness or warning against deception is *always rooted* in the reality of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We must regularly remember the origin of our life in God comes from his act, his power, and his gracious gift.

### II. EXHORTED TO HOLINESS (2 PET 1.5-7)

- A. The next reality of Peter’s strategy to strengthen the church against the waves of deceptive teaching that threaten them is to exhort them to live in accordance with who they are in Christ Jesus.
- B. One reality we see throughout the whole of the Scripture is that being reminded of the truth of who we are in Christ Jesus is always intended to *produce something* in our lives as we seek to respond to this truth in faith.
- C. In v. 5 Peter declares that it is *for this reason* that we are to take steps toward pursuing holiness. In other words, it is precisely because of the truths that have been declared to us in vv. 1-4 that we are to take up effort to walk in holy living before the Lord.
- D. The sum of the exhortation is that believers (precisely because of the gift of grace we have received in Christ) should *make every effort* to press on toward walking in holy living.

- E. Many believers struggle to make sense of the relationship between the free gift of grace in Christ and the reality of human effort in pursuing holiness. However, throughout the Scripture, these realities are *never* separated from one another.
- F. God’s active power at work in the life of Christians manifests itself through our response to his word in a spirit of obedience and humble faith. Dallas Willard famously stated: “*grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning.*” (e.g., farm and a farmer)
- G. Peter here calls believers to zealously, intentionally, consciously, and vigorously exert their effort toward something. He calls them to pursue a series of characteristics that embody a growing maturity in Christ-likeness.
- H. **Supplement:** the word Peter uses in this exhortation is important. He is not say that they should “add” each of these virtues to one another (or saying that one is achieved, and then we pursue the next one). Rather, he is saying that each of these concepts should be pursued and supplied to the others (like voices in a chorus or ingredients in a dish).
- I. **Faith:** Peter begins with the idea of our faith. We have been granted (given) faith as a gift by the Lord himself. It is not something we could earn, merit, or attain of our own works. Because of this, it is the starting place for any pursuit of holiness. We must seek to supply (supplement) our faith with the pursuit of conformity to Christ in the whole of our lives.
- J. **Virtue:** To our faith, Peter invites us to strive toward adding virtue. The word here could also be termed a general category of *moral excellence*.
1. Although there is debate as to the nature of what Peter means here (does he mean a traditional/classical sense of the virtues — justice, temperance, fortitude, prudence) or something more specific. Within the context, it likely speaks of striving to embody Christ-likeness in our lives, since earlier he has declared that we were called by Christ’s own glory and *excellence* (same word used here for virtue).
  2. In other words, what Peter is most likely stating here is that believers ought to make every effort to embody and practice a way of living in the world that imitates the nature of Christ — which has been given them through the gift of the Spirit and his empowering presence in them.
- K. **Knowledge:** One of the glorious realities of walking in relationship with God is that we are invited into communion with him. Throughout the Scripture, the knowledge of God is not merely intellectual, but is a **relational** and **experiential** knowledge that comes by the Spirit of revelation. Believers must orient their lives around growing in the knowledge of God through **relating to him through his Word**.
- L. **Self-control:** This speaks of the intentional and personal restraint over our emotions and our desires. Each of us (in our sinful nature) is preoccupied with ourselves and our own passions. To exercise self-control is to train (discipline) our **will** to choose more consistently to operate with constraint with regards to our passions.
1. The need for self-control is often (we will see in 2 Peter — and it is also the same in our day) one of the primary places that false teaching counteracts the teaching of the Scripture (cf. 2.7, 10, 13-14, 18).
  2. Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him in the way of self-denial — promising that the one who desires to find his life must actually lose it.
  3. One of the greatest affronts to Christian teaching in our day is the gospel of self-fulfillment and self-expression that fills both the world around us and has found its ways into the teaching of the Church. Many in our day believe that to be truly fulfilled requires that anything that stands in the way of my own personal expression, personal fulfillment, or personal “health” must be done away with.

4. We learn to practice self-control as our wills are trained and empowered by the Holy Spirit to restrain the various impulses of self-expression and self-love. This is done in the battlefield of the *mind* (thinking patterns and belief systems), the *emotions* (what we feel and our indulgences), and the *body* (physical appetites, sexuality, etc.).

M. **Steadfastness:** There is a great need for believers to experience the gift of endurance as we seek to walk in obedience to the Lord. There is a difficulty and hardship (*narrow gate and difficult way*) that requires a faithful and steadfast endurance over the long haul. This must be given to us by the grace of the Holy Spirit as we set our hearts to remain steadfast before him.

<sup>7</sup>My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! (Ps 57.7)

<sup>5</sup>May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thes 3.5)

N. **Godliness:** The word here speaks generally of what the ancient world understood as *piety*. This simply means a life that is ordered around proper reverence to God's authority over our lives that results in fulfilling the necessary duties required.

1. This concept of piety could closely be related to the Biblical concept of the fear of the Lord.
2. In the Scripture, the fear of the Lord is the understanding that God is in authority over all things; that his eyes see and know all; that he evaluates our lives according to his glorious goodness; and that we will one day stand before him and give an account for our lives in accordance with his evaluation.
3. The fear of the Lord throughout the Scripture produces in us a sober-minded desire to be *pleasing* to the Lord, in order that we might live in accordance with what he desires, and not be ashamed on the day when we stand before him.

<sup>9</sup>So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord... (2 Cor 5.9-11)

O. **Brotherly affection:** To these qualities Christians are called to supply a type of familial affection within the family of God. We have been called into a new family through Christ Jesus — and we are now brothers and sisters joined together in Christ. Because of this, there is a type of affection that should mark God's spiritual family. This is a type of solidarity and commitment to one another that is deeper than friendship or camaraderie.

P. **Love:** The final quality outlined by Peter is the *summit* of Christian virtue. It is important that this list begins with faith (supplied only by God through Christ) and ends in love.

1. To walk in love is the ultimate mark of the Christian community. We are called to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and demonstrate our fidelity to him through expressing his love in this world.

<sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13.34-35)

2. The portrait of love here is not speaking of sentimentalism, nor is it speaking of how others "feel" when they encounter us. Love is defined by God's own nature and is concrete in how it is described and defined throughout the Scripture.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup>Love never ends... <sup>13</sup>So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13.4-8, 13)

- Q. After giving this list of qualities, Peter again exhorts the church to **diligently** (v. 10) pursue these realities. Again, there is not a version of Christianity that does not vigorously engage the whole of our person in pursuit of relationship with God and conformity to his character/nature. He has already provided all of the power necessary to walk in his ways (salvation, justification, the gift of the Spirit, etc.) — but he now calls us to exert all of our energy toward growing and maturing in conformity with his ways.

### III. THE OUTCOME OF OUR PURSUIT (2 PET 1.8-11)

- A. Now Peter demonstrates the outcome of such a wholehearted pursuit of responding to God's grace. He does this by giving four reasons (outcomes) of why we ought to strive toward these things.
- B. **Fruitfulness:** Peter first declares that to pursue supplementing each of these things to our lives will cause us to live in a manner of fruitfulness before the Lord. He demonstrates this both *positively* and *negatively* in these verses.
1. First, he declares that if we **have these qualities** (positively) we will not be ineffective or unfruitful in our lives. Each of us desires that our lives matter (longing for significance) and successful (longing for impact). Peter is unashamed to declare that if we grow in these qualities in our lives by God's grace, we will not be ashamed when we stand before the Lord!
  2. Secondly, he declares that if we **lack these qualities** (negatively) we are like those who are so nearsighted that we are actually blind. The image here is likely speaking of a type of diseased eye that has an inability to see far away. The image invites us to see that those who do not pursue growing in holiness and godliness in their lives live in a short-sighted manner (i.e., given over to their temporal desires and passions) and cannot see the eternal reality of their lives (believing there are no consequences).
- C. **Confirming your calling:** The second outcome of pursuing these realities in our lives is that we diligently, and through active participation in God's grace, **demonstrate** our calling. The calling of God is effective in its nature — but it *always* expresses itself in a growing desire for godliness and holiness. Peter declares that to walk in a pursuit of obedience is objective proof of the fact that we have obtained faith from God and are called by him.
- D. **Endurance:** Peter then promises that if we seek to walk before the Lord in a pursuit of wholeheartedness of his ways that we can be sure that we will **never fall** (v. 10). This does not mean that we will not sin along the way, but rather that we will continue and persevere until the end. This is specifically important in the context of the letter to assure the believers that one of the primary ways they can ensure themselves of not succumbing to false teaching is through a wholehearted pursuit of obedience to the Lord.
- E. **Entrance into the eternal kingdom:** The final outcome given is a promise that those who diligently pursue these realities will experience the rich provision of entrance into Christ's eternal kingdom. Again, this is not stating that our works grant us access (that is opened only through the sacrifice of Christ alone). Rather, this means that a lifelong pursuit of obedience to Christ demonstrates the reality of his activity in our lives.

### IV. A SOBER REALITY: STRIVING TOWARD GODLINESS

- A. To pursue this exhortation, we must hold in tension the Biblical witness of receiving the grace of God as a free gift, and the possibility of receiving the grace of God in vain.

<sup>1</sup>Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6.1)

- B. To *make every effort* to pursue these things means that we seek to live in a **wholehearted manner** in these areas (i.e., no area of unrepented, complicit sin) in a **spirit of obedience** (not perfection, but a posture of repentance, receiving the grace of God, setting our hearts to obey, making costly choices toward obedience) over the long haul.