

Make Every Effort

2 Peter 1:2-8

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 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, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 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. 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.

Thirty one years ago God brought a young man out of a self righteous life into a life of surrender and dependence on Christ. He had grown up thinking obedience earned God's favor. And God's love, while available, was conditional. All of a sudden, grace took center stage. God's love did not ebb and flow. And he knew without a doubt that there was no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

But, this young man had a dilemma. All of his past "good works" were based on a religious lie. He now knew being good couldn't save him and that he could never be good enough. Christ alone saves. Yet as he read more and more of the Bible, he couldn't escape statements such as "keep yourself in the love of God", "work out your own salvation with fear trembling", "to obey is better than sacrifice", "love you neighbor as yourself" and "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". Without the framework of works righteousness these words, these truths from God's word simply gathered dust on the bookshelf of his mind.

However, God is a good, good Father and he would not leave this young man alone. Various authors, both old and new, preachers both local and distant but most importantly God's own word pressed on his heart and soul until he realized this: salvation has an implication. He heard Paul command the Ephesians to "walk in a manner worthy of your calling". He heard James say "faith is completed by its works". He resonated with John the Baptist's call to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." And he trembled at Jesus's words "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Yet, questions remained “what does this look like?” “How do I ‘do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with my God?” “What does it mean to seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness?” “In all of this how do I avoid falling back into works righteousness?” All of that led him to 2 Pt 1:2-8.

Today I would like to look at that very same text. But before I do, there is a term I would like to define. It is sanctification. It is easy for some to use a term like this as shorthand and maybe forget its deeper meaning. And it is equally easy for others, especially those newer in the faith to hear a term like this, come to recognize it, maybe even use it but not know what it means. So, what is sanctification?

The Oxford Dictionary offers the following definitions “The action of making or declaring something holy” or “the action / process of being freed from or purified from sin”. The Easton Bible Dictionary describes it this way “sanctification is the carrying on to completion the work begun in regeneration, and it extends to the whole person”. Vine’s Complete Expository Bible Dictionary would add “sainthood, or sanctification, is not an attainment, it is the state into which God, in grace, calls sinful people, and in which they begin their course as Christians”

In these definitions, I hear these words: grace, process, call. This is exactly what Peter is describing in our text this morning. For our purposes, it will be helpful to consider it in three parts.

- 1) Grace vv 2-3
- 2) Process & promise vv 4-7
- 3) Call vv 3, 8

Read with me again verses 2 & 3 **“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 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,”**

As we consider the journey of sanctification, we cannot begin without grace. Think about it. As Dan has gone through Romans it has been made clear we would not seek God without grace. We would not be able to stand before him without grace. We could not cling to Christ in faith without grace. We would not know the reality of our adoption nor the fact that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus without grace.

Here, Peter is extending that truth to our growth in sanctification. We see here that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. My friends listen carefully to this

verse. He has given us exactly what we need so that we can obey him and follow him. Now I realize we are all at different stages of our walk with Christ. Some just starting. Some at it for decades. Some seeing progress. Some seeing regress. Some feel the Spirit walking right beside them. Some cannot feel him at all. And there are some who think they are alone and without hope.

To each, let Jesus speak directly to you. Your loving savior and king has given you exactly what you need to grow in godliness. We need to abandon a scarcity mindset when it comes to God. As the feeding of 5,000 demonstrates, God always gives more than enough. And there is no gift that even slightly diminishes who God is and what he is able to do. And as we pursue him, he willingly, graciously, freely gives us everything need.

I have to pause here to say I have not always lived as if this were true. Yes I would have affirmed the truth of this verse, but I lived as if I had to produce godliness, as if I had to manufacture holiness. Or, I felt like I had to convince God I was worthy of his mercy and grace. This dishonors God. Who am I to work for what he has freely given? And what does it say about God if I have to beg for what he has promised to provide?

The first and foundational aspect of pursuing Christ and growing in our sanctification is the grace of God and the second is built directly upon it. God has promised this to us and has given us a process to follow. Read vv 4 with me **“he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”**

I realize this is a tightly pack verse with lots of content. Let’s look at in layers:

- We all face sinful desires
- Left unchecked, those sinful desires lead to corruption
- Elsewhere in the Bible, including Romans, it is clear this corruption goes to the core of our being
- But because of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, we have escaped this corruption
- We now have God’s great and precious promises that we may enjoy union with him

All of that to say this: salvation is not an end in itself. It is a transformative event that begins a journey of sanctification, of growing in holiness and partaking more and more in our union with Christ.

If you're like me, you may be saying "that's all fine but it also seems super spiritual. What do I do with something like this?" I sense Peter was anticipating the same question. Look at verses 5-7 **"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."**

I need to pause here to tell you a story. When I was asked to preach this weekend I prayed that the Spirit would lead me to a passage that God wanted his people to hear. I thought about Isaiah. I considered Matthew. And of course Ephesians is always on the short list. But nothing resonated. Then as is often the case, the Spirit had me listening to a sermon in which one point was: following Christ takes effort. That led me to verse 5, which led to this sermon. But, what I didn't know was how convicting that opening phrase was going to be to me. As we can see, God's call for us to make every effort in our pursuit of righteousness. But a quick look in the mirror showed something different. And with equal conviction Hebrews 12:4 came to mind "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

So back to the question: "how do we become partakers of the divine nature?" We lean 110% on the grace of God and the promises he fulfilled in Christ. And we make every effort to grow in godliness, to become established in righteousness and to put to death the sin that lives within us.

As we consider for a few moments what it looks like to hunger and thirst for righteousness, as Jesus himself commanded, I want to be abundantly clear: I am not saying "you have been saved by grace now go be perfected by your works". Nor am I saying "work hard enough for long enough and you will reach perfection" Both of these concepts are heresies and are in direct contradiction to the clear teaching of scripture. The entire book of Galatians was written to confront the idea that we can accomplish our sanctification on our own. We are always 100% reliant on the grace of God and power of the Spirit. And every book of the Bible, perhaps every chapter reminds us that we will never achieve perfection here. Progress? Yes! Perfection? Never. If you doubt this, Romans 7:15-25 is the place where God presents this truth most clearly.

So how do we fight sin? How do we resist temptation? How do we love our neighbor to as our selves? The Spirit inspired Peter record a process here in verses 5-7. It is a growing in grace. It is a building upon what God has already done in your life. It is a journey of progress. But just like training for a sporting event or a career or anything, it takes effort. Grace driven effort.

Add to your faith, virtue. Take a faith that may be static, perhaps simply looking back at something that happened twenty years ago and ask “what if I trusted God today?” “What if I obeyed him rather than myself?” “What if I presume good intentions of my co-workers or neighbors or those I disagree with on-line?” “What if I choose to honor God in all the little things in my life along with the big things?”

Add to your virtue, knowledge. This is not simple head knowledge, as if all of us going to seminary would make us holier. Rather, the Spirit is challenging us to see things through the eyes of experience. My favorite example of this is the Grand Canyon. You can see it in pictures and read about it in books and even kinda sorta experience it through YouTube. But one walk out to the rim changes everything. It is wider, deeper and longer than anyone can grasp until they’ve been there. So it is in walking with Christ. We can read about it. We can hear others testify to it. But what about me? What about you? Are we ready, really ready to trust Jesus with all of our lives? Are we willing, really willing to experience the grace of Christ and power of the Spirit in our lives?

Add to you knowledge, self-control. You may not know this about me, but I wrestle with self-control. If there is a question asked, I want to blurt out the answer. If there is a detail misstated, I want to correct it. If there is a episode of something I’m following, I need to consume it. But goes further. If there is a sinful desire, I struggle to resist it. If there is an offense, I’m quick to react. If there are ideas expressed I disagree with, I am quick with a rebuttal. Yet one of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control and as we grow in our experiential knowledge of Christ we will see more clearly he was the epitome of self-control. How often do we pray for self-control, that God would put a throttle on our minds and on our mouths. O Spirit, would you guide our thoughts and intentions even in this moment?

Add to you self-control, steadfastness. How many of us have gone on a diet or an exercise program or a Bible reading plan? How many of us have made that diet or exercise program or Bible reading plan stick a month? For a year? For a decade? What about our pursuit of Christ? How do we stick with it. Peter calls us to steadfastness. To endurance. To faithfulness. This requires something of us that our 21st century culture does not gasp nor does it promote or even value. That is commitment despite the cost. We have examples throughout the Bible of men and women who were tempted to abandon their commitments. Some do, to their demise. Others stand firm to the glory of God. My favorite example is Ruth, in part because she could have left Naomi with a clear conscience. But she had a steadfast love for God which displayed itself in a steadfast love for Naomi.

Add to your steadfastness, godliness. There is the double edged sword to steadfast self-control. One edge is that it takes work and discipline. Dare I say it, most of us don't like either. But the other leads to a real sense that we can do it. We can accomplish it. In fact, there is a whole philosophy called Asceticism that prides itself in human self-control. But we must grow through our self-control into righteousness. This is the why behind what we do or don't do. Is our rigor of a Bible reading plan simply to check a box or is it to get to know God better. Is our discipline of prayer because a pastor or book told us to or is it to worship and commune with our Father and lean in humble dependence on our Brother? And what about our sin? Last week Dan rightly reminded us to be putting off our old self, our sinful self. But why? Simple obedience to a command? That may be a great place to start, but can we grow into a fuller reason? Let us do what is right and good because Jesus has made us right and good.

Add to your godliness, brotherly affection. Up to this point, Peter has kept the categories pretty broad. But now he tightens the boundaries so we can focus on how we interact with one another. The challenge is this: as hard as it may be to be godly in our words and deeds and disciplined in our knowledge of God, it all stands or falls in how we live and interact with one another. Name one sin in entirety of the Bible that was not both an offense to our holy God and an offense against a brother or a sister created in the image of God? Even the first sin involved two people conspiring together to become like God. In the end they sinned against God, against each other and against every person who would ever live on the earth.

Add to your brotherly affection, love. It is unfortunate that the ESV translated brotherly affection as they did. That phrase represents the Greek word *philadelphia* which could also be translated brotherly love. And the word love here is the *agape* in the original which could be translated unconditional love. So verse 7 could read "add to your godliness, brotherly love and to your brother love, unconditional love". As we work to grow in our Christlikeness, we need to love one another as brother and sisters, especially those in the household of faith. But Christ asks even more of us. Are we prepared to love the unlovely? To see the lost and the least, not as projects but as people. What would Jesus' *agape* love look like if it flowed through your life and into the life and another person created in the image of Christ?

Wow, that is quite the list. This is quite the task. It will be quite the journey. And, just like a journey through the Grand Canyon, looking across to the other side may cause us to simply get back on the shuttle bus and head back to the cabin. But brothers, sisters hear me. That is not what God in Christ is calling us to. He is calling us to grace driven effort.

So far we have seen that our growth in godliness is grounded in the grace of God. We have seen that God has promised to provide every thing we need for this growth and he has laid out a process by which we can, in the words of Paul, take off the old self and put on Christ. But there is one more aspect to consider: we are called into this journey of growth.

Let's look back at verse 3 **"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,"**

Here's the crux of the matter: Growth in Christ is not an optional extra for the elite of the elect. We are all called to it. As I've heard other pastors say "we are not fans watching Christ's kingdom unfold in front of us. We are players working together with Christ in the power of the Spirit to bring his kingdom into reality." Or as another has said, "In the battlefield of the Christian life, there are no rusty swords".

I realize that's a challenge to each of us. But consider the encouraging aspects of 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."**

First and foremost, this is a process. We are each somewhere between our moment of salvation and our moment of stepping into God's presence. Have any of us arrived? Not even close. But likewise none of us should be where we were the day we were saved. These qualities must be growing in our lives. And as they do we will be fruitful and effective for the kingdom of Christ.

John Newton captured this reality well "I am not what I was and I am not yet what I will be, but by God's grace I am what I am. Our work is great; our time is short; the consequences of our labors are infinite."

So what about our friend from the beginning of this sermon? What did he do with his passage? I would like to say he dove right in, that he started adding virtue to his faith and to that knowledge and self-control leading to steadfastness and godliness with produced both brotherly love and ultimately agape love in his life.

Unfortunately like many of us, he allowed the drift of this world to take him away from the call of Christ in sanctification. He let busyness override prayer time. He gave distractions and diversions more attention than the word of God. He let virtue languish. He allowed self-control to take a holiday. His steadfastness wavered. His godliness dried

up. Brotherly love became increasingly difficult to even remember and agape love was nowhere to be seen.

All too familiar right? Isaiah 53:6 is not just for those separated from God, it applies to all of us “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;” Or, as the hymn writer has said “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”

But here’s what our friend realized: God is the the God of super abundant grace. Jesus is always calling us to return and to follow; to repent and believe. I want to end where Peter started: the grace of God. Wherever you are in your journey with Christ: 2 days, 2 years or 2 decades, there is more than enough grace for you to take that next step with Christ. And whether you think you are increasing in these qualities or whether you know you’ve fallen into the swamp of despair, Jesus is more than ready to rescue and redeem and restore. So take heart my friends and 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.