

Add To Your Faith – Part 1

2 Peter 1:5-8

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)

As we read and study through these words of scripture, may we always keep in mind that they are closely intertwined with each other, their meanings and purposes intimately woven together one with another. As the words of Isaiah 28 remind us,

¹⁰ For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” (Isaiah 28:10 (ESV))

Each word, its meaning and its purpose flows into the next.

And we find that especially evident here in these verses, as we read that it is God's divine power that is working out His great and precious promises, giving us everything that we need for life and godliness, so that we can escape the corruption caused by the lusts of our flesh, lusts that have somehow found ways to linger within us even after we have been washed clean and set free in our salvation . . . remnants of our old dead "sin nature" that still cling to the outside edges of our souls, finding ways to rear their wretched heads to bring that corruption back into our behavior.

But thanks be to God, He has truly given us everything that we need for life and godliness so that we can escape that corruption, a powerful Spiritual unction that propels us on forward in our faith and in our loving relationship with Christ, here in verses 5 through 8, setting forth a step by step rise to new and more Godly heights of behavior and standards of conduct.

And each of these steps are wondrously precious, each of them gaining us better ways of godliness that we never knew before. These words and these instructions are what these scriptures and our church scholars call "sanctification", that process by which we who have come to faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord are now being "set apart" for the greater purposes of God, and are being trained up in ways of righteousness, growing in knowledge and wisdom of Him.

And here in these next words are seven blessed steps set out for us to follow. And may I strongly emphasize that we must follow them ever-so diligently, else we will surely become as verse 8 warns, ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of Christ and in our relationship with Him, saved but not sanctified in the way God wants His beloved "sons" and "daughters" to be sanctified. We would be like a "bride" who never gives herself fully to her bridegroom, married but never enjoying a real love relationship with her bridegroom, having provision, but no intimate love.

For that reason, the beginning words here in verse 5 strongly exhort us and urge us on to "make every effort", to "give all diligence", "working with all our hearts" as we add step upon step of sanctification to our faith. And here, the Lord begins first with the Godly attribute of "virtue".

May I pause here for a moment and give us a strong caution against our often assumption of the simplest understanding of the meaning of a word. Yes, God does keep matters simple for us, especially when we are newly reborn children of His. But remember that God does not desire that we remain "elementary" in our understanding all the days of our lives. We must want with all our hearts to move on forward in our knowledge and wisdom of Him.

With that in mind, we are here being addressed first as "true believers", men and women who have a very "basic" form of saving faith, faith that is even equal to the faith of the Apostle Peter Himself.

And that tells us that these words in this passage are not instructing us about how we are to get saved. These words assume that by faith we are already saved, but needing to grow. Our faith is still elemental faith, faith that needs more substance added to it for it to become mature and useful to Christ in our daily walk with Him.

And here, the Holy Spirit reveals the first attribute we are to add to our faith, that of "virtue". . . . But what is "virtue"? What does the word "virtue" mean? I confess to you that I don't often use the word "virtue". I probably should, but I don't. "Virtue" is a word that means "goodness", but "goodness" beyond our common understanding of the word "goodness". It is "goodness" in "being", and "character" and "behavior". And it has within it a special measure of "excellence", "excellence" in its highest and most Godly form and manner, "excellence" that is filled with purity and holiness, producing within us a "moral conscience" beyond any norm to which we are ordinarily accustomed in our usual behavior.

And "virtue" is dynamic, combining "being" with "doing". We are not only to "be" morally and Godly excellent, we are to "do" morally and Godly excellent things. We are to have virtuous behavior and conduct, conduct beyond question or reproach. A tall order yes, but that is the way of God. That is who He is, and that is the way we are to be.

And again, "virtuousness" is to become our ordinary manner of daily life. For you ladies, God has given you a precious and detailed description of what the conduct and behavior of a "virtuous woman" should look like. You can find that in the Book of Proverbs, chapter 31. For us men, the instructions are more spread out through these scriptures, found especially in the Books of Ephesians and in 1st and 2nd Peter, and also plainly given in other scriptures so that we are clearly instructed and without excuse.

"Virtue" then is "having and being and doing pure and holy and excellent behaviors, always exercising a moral conscience that is beyond reproach." "Virtue"!

And then, once we have added to our faith "virtue", we are to immediately begin to add "knowledge", but not just intellectual "knowledge", it is to be a very special kind of "Spirit-filled knowledge". And interestingly, we find that this form of knowledge is somewhat different from the "knowledge" we learned about recently in our study of verse 3. This kind of "knowledge" is the kind we gain from our diligent study of these scriptures, the repeated reading and meditating on the concepts and purposes and designs of God that are spoken about continually within these scriptures, writing these words of God indelibly upon our minds and hearts so that we can always know how we are expected to be and how we are to conduct the matters of our daily lives as Christians. A passage comes to mind from Romans 12. Listen!

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

Too often, we Christians spend much of our time wondering what God's Will is in one matter or another. But listen again to these words that we just read! Romans 12:2 . . .

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

We really can know what God's Will is in matters that confront us each day. This is the formula.

As we read and receive the precious truths of these scriptures into our minds and hearts, we truly become transformed. Our hearts, our minds, our thoughts, our beliefs are changed. And through the Holy Spirit who resides within these words, real and true knowledge and understanding of who God is and who we ought to be in Him, and what we ought to do, begin to come to the surface of our souls and we start to become very different people, thinking differently and behaving differently, better husbands and better wives, better daddies and mommas, better employers and employees, knowing what His Will is in all the matters that beset us. We begin to change into the image of Christ. And what a wonderful change that is! Praise be to God!

And then, as we are adding virtue and knowledge to our faith, we are to also be adding "self-control". Verses 5 and 6,

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control. (2 Peter 1:5-6)

May I caution us that this is one of those occasions where we must be very careful as we deal with these new character traits. Here is where our old dead "self" can easily slither its way back into our newly reborn personality. In many of the usual circumstances involving "self-control", our responses can quickly evolve into a subjective or "opinionated" response. And therein lies a "fine line" that we can easily step across. Sometimes we get backed into a corner with old habits and behaviors. And old answers come to mind, some that we have grown up believing and accepting. But we must be quick to remember that old answers from our old self will not really work well in doing God's Will. We need now to call upon His Holy Spirit within us to help us and to guide our thoughts and behaviors during those critical moments.

And yes, most all of these new character traits that God's Spirit desires to add to our personality will involve a careful interaction between our own "self" and God's indwelling "Self", His Holy Spirit and our spirit, but again, for myself, this is where I find that "self-control" is difficult to keep in the right perspective. That is because "self-control" does involve efforts from my "self". And our personal "self" is so often very dominant and very insistent. The thing that we have to keep bringing back to mind is, as a new creature in Christ our "new self" now has the presence of the "Self" of the Holy Spirit. And it is in our being able to delicately intertwine His "fruits of the Spirit" with our own mind and emotions, His "self-control" with our "self-control", that our own free will efforts will become able to do His good and perfect Will. And the only possible avenue of achieving that kind of "self-control" is through a continual heart attitude of "surrender", the giving up of our will to His Will. And again, all of that is ever so difficult, but it is the only way that it can work out rightly.

This is another example of the words of Philippians 2:12 & 13 being worked out rightly in the demanding activities of our daily lives. Those words . . .

¹² Therefore, my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

(Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV))

Note those words carefully! It is a delicate interaction of our free will and God's Holy Spirit Working in us that brings about God's Will.

So then, how does this "self-control" work itself out in the practical matters of our daily lives. It manifests itself in our awareness of the presence and the Will of God's Holy Spirit having control inside of us. And as we are careful to listen for and to sense the "still small voice" of the unction of the Spirit, we will to begin to "want" to do His Will. We will want to have His answers and responses to the difficult circumstances and problems that confront us. And as we do that, we will begin to say and to do things we never did before, better things, more Godly and effectual things.

And also, thankfully we will find ourselves not being so quick to respond with our own personal opinion about matters. I say that because our personal opinions seem often to be more detrimental than they are helpful.

Before we leave this attribute of "self-control", may I also give us part of a commentary that Matthew Henry provides. And note that his words add additional meaning to how "self-control" should work its way out in our daily conduct. Listen! He tells us that . . .

We must be sober (clear-minded) in our behavior, and be moderate in our love towards, and use of, the good things of this life. If we have a right understanding and knowledge of outward comforts, we shall see that their worth and their usefulness are vastly inferior to those of God's Spiritual mercies. Bodily privileges profit us little, and therefore are to be esteemed and used accordingly. We must be moderate in desiring and using the good things of natural life, such as meat, drink, clothes, sleep, recreations, and all other such things. An inordinate desire after those things is inconsistent with an earnest desire after God and Christ. And those who seek after, reach for, and take more of those things than is reasonable can render back neither to God nor to man what is due to them.

These words of counsel given by Matthew Henry were given over 400 years ago, but are timeless in their value.

So then, “self-control” is our own heart, soul, mind, spirit and strength intentionally and willfully joining with God’s Holy Spirit in our daily conduct and behavior, moment by moment working out that which is “well-pleasing” in the sight of God. And by doing that, we will live lives that are blessed beyond anything we could hope for or imagine.

The Lord willing, we will continue next week to learn about these precious attributes of God that we are to add to our character. May we close for now with our scripture passage . . .

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