

Make Every Effort – Part 1

2 Peter 1:5-11

Series: *Growing in the Knowledge of God – 2 Peter*

Introduction: Take your Bibles and join me in 2 Peter 1.

The great missionary, David Livingstone was making his way through the Kalahari Desert of Africa. Along the way he was warmly welcomed by a tribal chief named Sekomi. On one occasion when they were together, Sekomi, said to Livingstone, “I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always.” Livingstone lifted up his New Testament and was about to tell him of the only way in which the heart can be changed, but he interrupted him by saying, “Nay, I wish to have it changed by medicine, to drink and have it changed at once, for it is always very proud and very uneasy, and continually angry with someone.” Realizing that Livingstone didn’t have a physical medicine for his spiritual heart issue, he rose up and went away.¹

This tribal chief represents how many Christians tend to think about their own heart change. They know that their overarching spiritual issue has been dealt with in Christ and his finished work. But they desire for the leftover corruption of their heart to be dealt with instantly through some swipe of God’s divine power. In fact, we just learned last week that the divine power of Christ brings the Christian this indescribably good sufficiency and surety. We have all that we need for life and godliness, and we have the very great and precious promises of God that we will be partakers of the divine nature and that we will escape the corruption that is in the world. So, does that all just mean that we sit back and wait for God’s glorious power to rid our own hearts of the corruption of our sinful desires? Is this a let go and let God situation? Do we need some kind of supernatural spiritual pill to cure us of our ills? Well, Peter powerfully addresses that in verses 5-11 of chapter 1. And there is so much here in the text that we are going to split it up into 2 sermons to try and digest it all. Let’s start reading at verse 3, and we will read down through verse 11.

These are glorious words from our Lord! For many of you they are some of your most favored words in all of the Scriptures – and for good reason. And there is this great logical progression in the text – which is exactly what we should expect from God’s Word. But this is another proof of the inspiration of Scripture because here is this uneducated fisherman – Peter – who has been called by our Lord to be one of his 12 apostles – writing to us a logical presentation of what it means to be a Christian, and what it looks like to live out that glorious faith in Christ. So, in

¹ Ron Prosis, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, pg. 192.

verses 3-4 we learned of this divine power that grants us all that we need for life and godliness and which is at work to secure the great and precious promises of God's Word. And now in verse 5-7 we are going to be called to the pursuit of the core qualities of this new life and godliness that we have in Christ. And then in verses 8-9 we are told why these core qualities are so important in the present, and in verses 10-11 we are told why they are important for the future. The overall purpose of this introductory section of Peter's letter is to explain to us the remarkable nature of the Christian life.

And as Peter does that he really counters several errors that are prone to abound in the Church. So, a right understanding of the truths of these verses helps us counter the heresy of salvation by works – that somehow we can have a little faith, and then add to that faith our own virtue and then to that virtue a little knowledge and so on down the list – and that through this we then earn eternal life and a right standing with God. Well, the text is quite clear that life and faith are given to us in Christ – and because those things are granted to us, we then have the privilege and responsibility to pursue maturity in these qualities. And on the flip side, the opposite heresy is also addressed – the one that says that God has done everything and we don't need to do anything. Because God has given us this great grace and peace, then we are off the hook – our spiritual maturity now should come naturally by God's power at work in us. That is a form of antinomianism, or anti-law, which basically takes the grace of God for granted and takes away the responsibility of the Christian to pursue maturity in this faith we have been given. Well, this text specifically says – make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and your virtue with knowledge, and so on.

And so, this text wonderfully directs us to the balanced Christian life that is truly a remarkable picture. The Christian is one that has been born again by the mighty grace of God to a new and living hope as he has received this glorious gift of the work of Jesus Christ on his or her behalf. And this new life that has been given them is not just a life that has remarkable qualities to look forward to in the life to come, but it is an abundant life that has already begun. We right now are seated in the heavenly places with every spiritual blessing in Christ. And so, we have this glorious privilege and sacred responsibility to fan this flame of faith as we grow in to greater maturity in our Lord. That is the charge we are given in verse 5 – “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith.” This is a high and holy calling to a strenuous pursuit. And as we will see, Peter paints the picture of a well-balanced Christian with these 7 qualities of maturity. This is what the divine nature that we are partakers of in Christ looks like in the context of everyday life. This is what it means to walk in the sufficiency of divine power that grants to us everything we need for life and godliness. It looks like faith that is growing in virtue, and this virtue growing in knowledge, and this knowledge growing in self-control, and this self-control growing in steadfastness, and this steadfastness growing in godliness, and this godliness growing in brotherly affection, and this brotherly affection growing in love. So, let's just hone in on verses 5-7 this morning and look at this pursuit that Peter is calling us to here.

I. The Cornerstone of Our Pursuit – vs. 5a

- a. Right away in verse 5 Peter points us back to the cornerstone of this pursuit with the first phrase. In the KJV this is translated as “and beside this,” but there is more going on than just moving to the next subject. The original points us back to the glorious gospel truths of verse 1-4 to give us the ground of our growth. Before God calls us to do anything in verse 5 we are pointed to what we have already received by grace through faith in Christ. We have obtained a faith of equal standing with the apostles, and this has been given to us by the gracious work of God. And this sovereign grace has put us in the remarkable position of being in Christ. And as we found out in verses 3-4 this means that we have sufficiency and surety in Christ. We have all that we need in Christ for the living of this life of faith and this life of godliness. We have all that we need.
- b. And we have also been given great and precious promises from the Word about how this life and godliness are going to turn out. We have been freed from the corruption of our sinful desires, and we will one day be fully and finally free from them. And we have been enabled to be partakers of the divine nature of God. God will conform us to the image of His Son as he shapes us into co-heirs with Christ. In other words, we can have confidence in Christ that we have what we need to be godly, and we can have confidence that all we have been promised will come true. That He will complete our salvation in us and for us. So, God gives us life in Christ and then calls us to live out that life in this world. God never calls us to put into practice things that we cannot put into practice. Rather, we are given everything we need, and now we must pursue putting it all into practice.
- c. Think of it in two different analogies that the Scriptures use. We are like a baby that has been born with vibrant life. That baby has everything that is needed for life and growth and health already built into its own DNA. It must be cared for and nourished and developed – but it is all there. In our sinfulness before salvation, we had no spiritual life. We are dead to God and unable to truly live out these attributes of spiritual life because we are a spiritual corpse – we have no ability to truly live. But when the Gospel enters in through the preaching of the Word of Christ and we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts and confess him with our mouths and are saved – are born again – then we now have true life. We can hear and heed this call to grow and mature and nourish and develop our spiritual life because we have true spiritual life.
- d. Another analogy which may help is to think of the farmer. Think of the farmer who has been given everything needed to farm – they have the ground and the equipment and the seed and the fertilizer, etc. – they just need to put in the work to grow a crop. Well – the instructions to that farmer is to go farm – go get busy about the work. You have all you need, so go do the work. That is the idea in our text here. You have been given everything you need in Christ to go about the work of spiritual growth – so go get busy. That is the cornerstone of this great

pursuit. If you are not in Christ by grace through faith – then you cannot hear or heed this call. You cannot grow a faith that you do not have. You cannot bring life to a dead spiritual corpse – you must be born again.

- e. But if you are born again, then you must be about this pursuit – for this very reason, make every effort – Peter says, and do it based upon this cornerstone of the great work of grace that has been wrought in your heart by God.

II. The Character of Our Pursuit – vs. 5b

- a. This cornerstone of the pursuit is coupled with the character of our pursuit in the next phrase – make every effort! This describes the attitude and action of this pursuit – its character. We are not to be ho-hum, maybe – kinda – sort of – somewhat committed to pursuing this maturing of our faith. No, we are to be making every effort. The word for make has the idea of bringing something into the equation on your part – to put something to use – to apply – or to do your all in some effort. And then this is combined with every effort – so we are to use or apply all effort in this pursuit. The word in the original for effort has the idea of enthusiasm and earnestness. It represents a zeal and a haste. This is an urgent and universal effort. So, we are to bring to this equation our very best and most enthusiastic effort as we pursue the life and godliness we have been given in Christ. That is going to look like adding the 7 qualities of this list to our faith. We are going to ardently pursue these things. And lest you be confused – look at 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.” This is not a wishful statement by Peter – like he hopes you have these things in your life. But rather, a conclusive statement – if you are in Christ then you already have these qualities in your possession.
- b. So, the character of the pursuit of these qualities is not one in which you need to bring them to the equation. But rather, one where you need to bring the effort to cultivate what is already there. So, like the farmer, you do not need to go out and buy seed for your winter wheat – you have that seed already in your bin. But the wheat won’t get in the field on its own, nor grow itself on its own. Rather, it needs planted and nourished and fertilized and then it will grow and produce wheat. In a similar way – Christian – you don’t need to go buy the spiritual seeds or the equipment or the field, nor do you need to make the rain, or the sunshine or the nutrients in the soil – you simply must make every effort. Remember that this pursuit is rooted in the cornerstone of God’s work for us in Christ. Remember that this effort is done because of what God has done. Remember grace – but by all means – make every effort!
- c. And this is the mysterious way of God. His work in us and our work brought together in the pursuit of a maturing faith in Christ. How do these two relate – God’s work and ours? Well, in his classic book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* author John Murray says – “God’s working in us is not suspended because we

work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work. . . The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.”²

- d. So, we work because God works. All the energy and resources are from Him and are given by His grace, but we work them with great zeal and energy. Later Murray says – “Sanctification involves the concentration of thought, of interest, of heart, mind, will, and purpose upon the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus and the engagement of our whole being with those means which God has instituted for the attainment of that destination.”³
- e. Does that describe your sanctification Christian? Are you aware of your glorious standing in Christ as having divine sufficiency and absolute surety of full and final victory? Are you invested in the work of nourishing your faith with that in mind? Are you employing every tool given you by the grace of God to help you grow in Christ? Are you always looking for new ways to increase your faith as you redeem the time and steward all that God has given? What is the Spirit of God speaking to your heart at this moment? He sees your life as it is, not as you want him to see it. He sees through the thin veneer of image that we present to everyone else. He knows you for who you really are. So, as you hear this text explained, don’t hinder his work in you beloved. Some of you need to wake up from your spiritual slumber. Some of you need to be done with lesser things. Some of you need to repent of your apathy and lack of effort to nourish and grow your faith. All of us must hear the call of this text and be genuinely inspired to give more zealous effort to supplement our faith. But some of you need to do some radical surgery today. You have given your zeal to lesser things, to easier things, to earthly and worldly pursuits. Maybe not inherently sinful in themselves, but sinful in how much effort you give over to them showing them to be an idol you worship rather than a gift you steward. Oh beloved – may this be the character of our pursuit – make every effort.

III. The Content of Our Pursuit – vs. 5c-7

- a. Lastly then, let us look at the content of this pursuit. And that is the list given in verses 5-7. Peter tells us to make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and so on down the list. This verb – supplement – is the main verb of these three verses, and is the command to be followed. We are to add these things to our faith. The verb is the one that was used to describe a great benefactor who would generously supply all that was needed for a town’s drama production. He

² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 148-149.

³ *Ibid*, pg. 150.

would buy the costumes and the instruments for the band so that the production could be held. The idea is not of bringing a little bit of this and a little bit of that – scrounging here and there to find just enough to get by – but rather, it paints the picture of a generous supply of everything. The rich benefactor spares no expense so that the every need is met in abundance so that the production can go on.

- b. That is what we are being called to here. We are being called to make every effort to increase our faith in these things. And as you look through the list of things we are to add to our faith, you notice that it is quite the list. These are things that we can add – in other words, they are tangible things that each Christian can work on to seek to grow in them. They are not feelings or emotions or experiences, but they are qualities of mature faith that by the power of the Spirit we can consciously work at increasing. Also notice that this list is surrounded by the idea of knowing God. So, in verses 2-3 Peter talked about us multiplying in grace and peace in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. And then in verse 3 he talks about this growth in the knowledge of God again, and then at the end in verse 8, he says that if these things are in us they keep us from being ineffective in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words – these qualities in the Christian life are the outcome of knowing God and becoming partakers of the divine nature. If we know God then we will progress in moral character in these things.
- c. And this is completely opposite to the false teachers that he is countering in this letter. In fact, this growth in the knowledge of God is our greatest defense against the chicanery of the false teachers. And Peter points out the falseness of the false teachers by describing their immoral and ungodly character in chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3. Instead of teaching progress in these moral qualities like Peter does here, the false teachers were calling them to, and living out before them, the exact opposite. So, they were walking in sensuality in 2:2, and in the lusts of defiling passions and despising authority in 2:10, and in revelry in 2:13, and were insatiable for sin and had hearts trained in greed in 2:14, and made loud boasts of folly as they walked in sensual passions of the flesh in 2:18, and were entangled in the defilements of the world in 2:20, as they turned back from the way of righteousness and the holy commandment of God in 2:21, and they were following their own sinful desires as they mocked the promises of God in 3:3-4. And they did this while claiming to be more spiritual and closer to God than the true believers.
- d. Peter says that what is needed is the exact opposite. If you truly know God and are a partaker of God's divine nature then you must progress in these qualities of morality. The list is founded upon faith and then culminates with love. Faith is the foundation. This is the living and active faith which takes God at His Word and walks each day in personal and constant belief. This is true faith that was given to us through the sovereign grace of God back in verse 1. This is the faith to

which we were called by the effectual and irresistible call of God in verse 3. And so Peter is calling us to mature that faith that we have as a result of the grace of God. And this will look like stepping up this ladder of moral qualities which culminates or climaxes in the greatest of Christian graces – love. All of these qualities build upon one another in a sense, and they all go together in another sense. So, you can't pick out the one that you like the most and make every effort to add that one to your faith. No, you need work on all of these, and in Christ you have the power and divine sufficiency to do so.

- e. So, as we nurture and mature this gift of faith we must make every effort to add to our faith virtue. This is the word for moral excellence. It is the same word used to describe the moral perfection of Christ in verse 3. So, we have been called to Christ's moral perfection and now we add that moral excellence to our faith in Christ. In other words, true faith will be an active faith seeking to be more and more like Christ. Sometimes I think we tend to view faith as a passive activity. That we are just going to sit back and hunker down and hold on – all in faith. God is going to make the world right someday by sending Jesus back for the Church – so just hold on in faith! No, Peter says that true faith is a living and powerful faith which works to grow in morality. In Peter's first letter we saw this in chapter 1 when he called us to be holy as God is holy. If you have believed the Gospel and are in Christ, then pursue living like Christ.
- f. Then, add to this virtue knowledge. This is the true knowledge of God in which we have multiplied grace and peace from God. The antidote to the false teacher's false knowledge is not less knowledge or ignorance, but rather it is true knowledge of God. And this true knowledge always purifies our character. So, our virtue – moral excellence – will increase as we grow in the knowledge of God. Knowing what is right does not equal doing what is right. But knowing God is transformative. Knowing God calls us from darkness to light and from sin to righteousness.
- g. Then to this knowledge we are to make every effort to add self-control. This is the moral quality of denying the fleshly desires that bring corruption into the world in verse 4. These are the fleshly desires that control the false teachers and their followers. This self-control is especially needed in the areas of the mouth and the appetite and the sexual desires. The unrestrained man knows that something is evil or harmful to himself or to others, but he does it anyways because he is controlled by his passions and lusts. But the self-controlled man crucifies the flesh with its desires as he grows in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He denies himself, and takes up his cross of discipleship, and follows the Lord.
- h. This self-control leads to a life-long battle with the flesh and the temptations of the world. And so this self-control needs to be coupled with steadfastness in verse 6. This steadfastness means to bear long under something. Not just the grin and bear it kind of endurance, but the willful opposition of faith. This is the word

used in Hebrews 12:1 to say, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. That is the race of faith that has been illustrated for us in Hebrews 11. So, a maturing faith needs a full supply of steadfastness. As I discuss the Christian journey with our older saints – and particular our men – one of the questions I routinely ask them is if this battle against the sinful desires of the heart ever lessens over the years. In other words, what I want to know is, does it ever get easier, and at what age can I expect some reprieve. And to a man, they have all said that the battle does not decrease, but actually heightens over the years. The more you resist sin the more sin you see that you need to resist. And this exercise of self-control in the power of the Spirit of God now requires steadfastness – endurance.

- i. And to this endurance, we must add godliness. This is the product of self-control and steadfastness. It is the same word used in verse 3. We have the divine sufficiency of Christ for all that we need for this godliness. This is the life of piety – of the one who is especially devoted to God and who weighs every thought and word and deed in light of the fear of God. This is formed in the Christian over years of making every effort, not over days.
- j. And to this godliness we must make every effort to add brotherly affection. This is philadelphia – brother love. It is the love for others who are in the same family. It is the love which has as its foundation our shared relationship with our Heavenly Father. The New Testament is the only place in the Greek literature where this word is used outside of the context of a biological family. So this is the love that is natural and right and common in the family between siblings. We tell our kids this all the time – brothers are made for love. Sisters are made for love. God blessed you with your siblings for you to love and for them to return that love to you. That is natural and right and good. But this loving affection is now expanded to a new family – the family of God. We are joined together by this faith in Christ that we have been given by God. Notice that true faith turns us in affection toward others who also have this faith. To be reconciled to God in Christ means to be reconciled to God's people as well. Just like it is unnatural for a sibling to abandon the family and go off on their own and not care about their siblings, so too it is unspiritual and ungodly for a true Christian to claim to be reconciled to God, but to show little care or concern or brotherly affection for their spiritual siblings in the church. But we also must work at this – we must fan this affection into flame. Some of you don't feel much affection for the body of Christ – your brotherly love quotient in your faith is pretty weak right now. Peter says – you need to make every effort to increase that! You are the problem here – not God and not God's church. You have everything you need available to you to grow in godliness in this way. So add to your godliness this brotherly affection.
- k. And this all culminates in love – agape love. Don't stop at just loving the brethren in the church. Rather, add to this brotherly affection a self-sacrificing love. The

difference between philadelphia and agape is subtle, and often undetectable in the Scriptures. But in this text, the difference is important. The brotherly affection is a love that is founded upon a common bond in the family of God. But this agape is founded not in the person being loved, but in the character of the person doing the loving. In other words, it is not dependent upon the lovability of the person being loved, but rather is an expression of the moral character of the one doing the loving. This is the type of love that husbands are called to of their wife in Ephesians 5. They are to love her with the love they know in Christ regardless of her lovability quotient in the moment. They are to sacrifice for her and cherish and nourish her – not based upon her deserving it, but based upon the very character of their heart. This is the culmination of this mature Christian. They are one who is growing up all the more into this chief expression of what it means to be a Christian in that they are loving others with this agape love. This is the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 – love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Conclusion: These are the greater things that you must make every effort to pursue. These things will be the outcome of a vibrant and living and active faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. This is what it looks like in the context of everyday life to know God – it looks like living out the characteristics of the divine nature. It looks like adding to your faith virtue, and to your virtue knowledge, and to your knowledge self-control, and to your self-control steadfastness, and to your steadfastness godliness, and to your godliness brotherly affection, and to your brotherly affection love! May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord in the addition of these things this week. Let's pray!