

"Working Out Your Salvation" - 2 Peter 1:5-7

In Ephesians, Paul talks about the importance of Church's teaching ministry. He says that God has gifted individuals within the Church to contribute to the spiritual growth of the body. The reason being is so that . . .

*... we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; **that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine**, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:13-16)*

For just a moment, I want to focus on a phrase right in the middle of that passage: **that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine**. There is no shortage of false teachers in the world. Sadly, there is no shortage of false teachers in the visible Church. They are agents of Satan who would deceive you by their trickery, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. As Christians, we need to be able to distinguish between truth and error. We need to recognize heresy when we encounter it. We need to cling steadfastly to the truth of the Bible, to the sure promises of God.

That is what the second Epistle of Peter is all about. Peter wrote this letter to protect Christians from attacks that come from within the Church. He wrote this to warn us about those who claim to represent Jesus, but actually spew the devil's lies.

I find it interesting and very instructive that Peter doesn't start out by directly confronting those lies. Instead, he begins his teaching by showing us how we are to grow in the truth. It makes perfect sense. If you know what the Bible really says and you know what the Bible really means, you will not be deceived by false teachers. Yet so many Christians neglect serious Bible study. "I confessed Jesus as my Lord and Savior," they say. "I believe that God raised Him from the dead. I have been saved! I don't need to become a theologian because I have a simple faith." Well, as R. C. Sproul has famously said, "Everyone is a theologian." Everyone has a theology, but is your theology correct? If you do not know what you believe and why, then you are vulnerable to the attacks of false teachers and really, that attack comes from the devil himself.

What I have found is that Satan really loves to attack a Christian's assurance of salvation. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, but once you have put your faith in Jesus, he can't accuse you to God anymore. That's been covered. So he tries to accuse you to yourself. "Do you really think God would save somebody like you? Look how you continue to sin. You're pathetic! He couldn't possibly love you." So many Christians struggle with this sort of doubt. So many Christians have been duped by Satan into doubting their salvation. So many Christians fail to know the peace and joy salvation assurance that Jesus wants for you.

After you have placed your faith in Jesus and have been saved by God's grace alone, there is real work for you to do. You are to . . .

... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Before Peter addresses the heresy that was creeping into the Church, he exhorts Christians to do exactly that. Let's look at our text right now. I'm actually going to read down through verse 11, although we won't get that far this morning. Lord willing, we'll pick it up again next week.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

Again, we'll get into this in greater detail next week, but this is an exhortation, a list of things we need to add to our faith, a list of things we need to do and the reason we need to do these things is down in verse 10. It is to make your call and election sure and it is to make sure you never stumble. Do you want to know for sure that you are saved? Do you want to make sure that an entrance has been supplied for you into the kingdom of heaven? Then this is how you can make sure.

Now, I need to be sure you understand that this is not a list of things you need to do to get saved. You are saved by God's grace alone, by faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. You don't earn salvation; salvation is a gift. Jesus earned your salvation for you by dying on the cross. By doing so, He paid the penalty for your sinful rebellion. He suffered the death penalty for your sin and because He rose again on the third day, you can be absolutely confident that His sacrifice was accepted. The penalty has been paid in full. All you have to do is accept that awesome fact by faith. Just believe that it is true. Just pray that God would give you the faith to believe it is true. Confess the fact that you are a sinner, turn from your sin and turn to the cross. If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

This list is not what you do to be saved, this list is what you do once you are saved. Peter tells us to add to our faith. He presumes that you already have saving faith. He is speaking to Christians here.

Now before we get into the list itself, I need to remind you of something we covered last week.

His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, (2 Peter 1:3)

Jesus has already given us everything we need. God does not need to be convinced of our call and election. He does not need to be assured of our salvation, because He is the source of our salvation. He has already given us everything we need, including the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. So as you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, remember that it is God who works in you to both will and do for His good pleasure.

As a Christian, you have received great and precious promises. You have become a partaker of the divine nature. You have become a participant in Christ's holiness. So you have already been empowered to live a sanctified life. Peter is saying, since all this has been granted to you, this is what you need to do with it. Jesus has given you this

wonderful salvation, now, take it and run with it. You can do it because Jesus has your back. Jesus says:

I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:20)

Now in verse 5, Peter says “*But also for this very reason*” You have been empowered to do this. It is your duty to do it. And you must give it all diligence, everything you’ve got. This is a full-time gig.

The first thing Peter tells us to add to our faith is virtue. Now, this is an interesting word in the Greek: *arete*’ (ἀρετή). It means moral excellence. In secular Greek, it refers to the God-given ability to perform heroic deeds. It is a strong term. Now, what human being best exemplifies moral excellence? Jesus Christ, of course. So Peter is saying that once we have saving faith, we need to strive for the same moral excellence we find in Jesus.

It’s like Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

We need to be pressing toward the upward call. We know we won’t get all the way there in these bodies of flesh, but we need to strive to be like Jesus. Our goal in life is to be Christ-like. That is the virtue we are to add to our faith.

But then to virtue, we are to add knowledge. This is *gnosis* in the Greek. It refers to a right understanding of all things related to Christianity. It is spiritual discernment. We need to get to know Jesus; we need to get to know God. And where do we get this knowledge? Our primary source is the Bible. We need to be students of the Bible, because in this Book, God has revealed everything we need to know about Himself.

This Biblical knowledge, this spiritual discernment informs our virtue. You can’t pursue moral excellence until you know what God expects of you. So we need to be saturated by the truth God has written down for us.

As we go through this list, I think you will find that it is quite reflexive at every step. We are to add to our faith, virtue and to virtue knowledge. But when we add knowledge, it informs our virtue and thereby strengthens our faith. This thing goes both forward and backward!

Let’s look at the next attribute we are to pursue: self-control. We’re to add self-control to our knowledge. The Old King James translates this “temperance”. It refers to our ability to master our desires, passions and our sensual appetites. As Christians, we are to control our fleshly desires, and we are not to be controlled by them. Fleshly desires are not bad in themselves. When we get thirsty, we have the desire to drink, which is a good thing. We wouldn’t last very long without water. But we are to be informed by our thirst, not dominated by it. For example, it is okay to be hungry, but not to give in to gluttony. Sexual desire is good when it is appropriately contained in the marital relationship, but not when you let it drive your behavior in an uncontrolled manner. One who is in control of his passions will not give in to any kind of addiction, whatever form it might take.

Let’s review what we’ve seen so far. It all starts with faith in Jesus Christ. But faith must lead to a desire for moral excellence. Moral excellence demands spiritual discernment, and spiritual discernment is used to discipline us, to give us this self-control.

To self-control, we are to add perseverance. You see, it's not good enough to be self-controlled for a short time. You need to have spiritual staying power. You need to have endurance. This speaks to a patient endurance in doing what is right.

And then to this perseverance, we are to add godliness. In the Greek it is *eusebeia*. It means reverence and respect for God. Really, you could say that godliness is nothing more than a lifestyle of appropriate worship. It is often translated as piety toward God. One who is godly is God-conscious at all times.

You know God is omniscient, don't you? He knows everything you do, everything you think, but are you aware of that all the time? If you were, I don't think you would do some of the things you do. I don't think you would think some of the things you think.

And to our godliness, we need to add brotherly kindness. This is the Greek *philadelphia*, and we've seen it many times before. It is the affection you feel for your brothers and sisters in Christ. You see, if you love God, you will also love God's people. In fact, John goes so far as to say:

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 John 4:20)

You need to develop an affection for the people of God. *Philadelphia* is a reflexive sort of love. We love God's people for a reason – they love God like we love God.

But then finally, to our brotherly kindness we are to add love. *Agape*, the self-sacrificial love that provides what is needed even when it is not deserved. This is the love of choice, the love of the will. It is not the love of emotion; it is the love of volition. This is the kind of love that compelled Jesus to go to the cross.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

What an incredible love! What an incredible God! What an incredible Savior!

The foundation of our Christian walk is faith. That's where you have to start. If you don't have faith in Jesus Christ, you don't have anything. But once you have faith, you need to build on that faith. You add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and finally, *agape* love. This godly love is the culmination of the Christian experience and we are to pursue it with diligence. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. And yes, you can do it, because it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Can you understand just how much God loves you? God's love for us is hard for us to comprehend because we know what we're like. So lest we forget God's amazing love for us, Jesus has given us the ordinance of Communion. As the men come forward to serve the communion, would you please bow your heads and close your eyes?

Jesus, the Lord of creation, entered His universe as a human baby. He was tempted in all ways just like us, yet He was without sin. He lived a perfect, sinless human life and then He took that one perfect life to the cross to be tortured and killed.

Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

It was for your sins, and for mine, that He was nailed to that cross. So right now, with your eyes closed, would you just confess your sins to Him?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

He can forgive us because He has already paid the penalty. All you have to do is just say “Yes Jesus, I believe. I believe you died for my sins. I believe you were raised from the dead so that I can have a living relationship with you. I know my salvation is a gift, born of the grace of God. I also want to remember what it cost You.”

So as we partake of these elements together, remember that the bread represents His body, broken for you. The cup of juice represents His blood, poured out for you. This is a remembrance, a memorial. This ordinance reminds us of how much our God loves us. By His stripes, we are healed!