



Growing in Grace

Series: A Divine Antidote to Heresy – Sermons in 2 Peter

2 Peter 1:5-9

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

Introduction -- Last week, Peter had much to say to us about the indispensable and thoroughly sufficient character of Christ. Now Peter is going to talk to us this morning about the way that faith in Christ must affect our lives. Peter is going to show us this morning that our faith, if it is genuine, will set up a chain of deep, internal, and experiential changes in us that demonstrate the reality of our salvation in Christ. But first, Peter wants to:

1) Make certain that we have the right perspective on spiritual growth (v. 5a) For what reason are we to make every effort and with what are we to supplement our faith? Here is where understanding the foundation of what Peter has written is so important. Remember that Peter is writing this to those who have already received all that is needful for life and for godliness in Jesus Christ. They have been born again. They are new creatures in Christ. The Holy Spirit dwells in them. Their minds are being renewed by the Word of God. They have the gifts of the Spirit purchased by His blood; they have an advocate and intercessor in Christ. They have been freed from the power and the penalty and dominion of sin; they have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. But most of all, they have received free and full forgiveness through faith in Christ's atoning death – through His substitutionary and sacrificial death in which He bore the wrath that our sinfulness deserves from God.

(1Pe 1:18-19) We have been ransomed, we have been purchased, we have been redeemed and set free from the just wrath of God upon us by the blood purchase of His own dear Son. By the death of the precious Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, our condemnation and just punishment and death have been forever taken away. There is nothing that we can add to that work of salvation. This is key.

The gospel does not demand that you earn your salvation by religious works. It tells you bluntly that you cannot, that your situation is hopeless apart from God's intervention. You are guilty, comprehensively guilty of all manner of sins against a holy God who cannot and who will not clear the guilty; you cannot make yourself acceptable to God. It is beyond your

power, beyond your ability. But, what you cannot do, God has himself done, sending his Son in the flesh to live for you the life you should have lived and did not, and to suffer and die for you the death you deserved to die for your sin. The command of the gospel is that we would repent of our sins and believe in Christ, receiving Him as Savior and Lord. **Then, and only then**, the call is to live out of love for God who loved you, to live as one who is filled with love and gratitude and thanksgiving that Christ, to live filled with the Spirit of God, to live as one set free by the sovereign work of God in Christ, grateful for God's grace and mercy, and desiring to live in a way that pleases the one who saved him from sin and death at such great cost to himself.

So what is the reason for Peter's calling us to spiritual growth? He is calling us to spiritual growth in light of the sovereign work of God to redeem us and make us His people. Peter is saying to us this morning **that gratitude for grace received is expressed by the pursuit of growth in that grace**. It is in light of this truth that Peter commands us to **make every effort to supplement our faith**. Now what does he mean by that? Does he mean that we need to add to our faith in order to be saved? We know that is not the case, so what does this mean? Well first, Peter is calling us to be diligent – to make every effort – to be earnest and zealous to pursue spiritual growth. In other words, the new birth, the new life that we have in Christ is not a static, dead life. It is a life of vibrancy and vitality and power. Here is where we need to hold the sovereignty of God in salvation and the responsibility of man in spiritual growth in a right tension. Man cannot contribute to his salvation. Though the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. All we must do is receive it, and even this occurs by divine grace. But once we have come to faith in Christ, we are to diligently strive after godly character—for Christ has granted to us by His divine power all that pertains to **“life and godliness.”** We strive in our Christian walk because Christ has given us the means. The sovereignty of God should never be an excuse for passivity or inactivity; rather, His sovereignty is the basis for disciplined and faithful living. That is what Peter means for us to see and so he calls us to make every effort to **supplement our faith**.

That word supplement is a word that comes from the Greek dramas and choirs of the day. It is the word “epichoregeo.” Whenever the drama and choir festivals in Athens and other famous Greek cities took place, there would be a rich individual, called a choregos, who furnish and pay for all the training and equipment that the choirs and actors would need and in that way he would co-operate with the singers and the actors in their productions. They actors and singers would do what only they could do and the choregos would do what only

he could do. That is the picture we are to understand here. We must engage with God and co-operate in the production of a life that honors Him. We co-labor with God to furnish fully our lives in Christ. This what Paul meant when he wrote to the Philippians saying: **(Php 2:12-13)** It is a great paradox of the Christian faith to understand that we are to rest in Christ's finished work on the cross for our salvation and our justification before God – our position before God, but we also must strive to lay hold practically of our position before God – to live out our salvation before God – what we call sanctification. Here, Peter gives us

2) Eight qualities of a grace-shaped life (vs. 5b-7) There are two questions that immediately come to mind when I read this text. What exactly do these eight qualities of a grace-shaped life consist of and why does Peter choose these? Don't understand these qualities like merit badges in boy scouts, or like levels in a game of some sort – you know master one, move on to the next. That is not the idea. The intent of the apostle is to say, in a definite manner, that we are to strive to possess and exhibit all these qualities. Instead of giving us a specific order in which to grow in grace, what Peter is saying instead is that we should understand this list that he gives as a composite picture of Christian character. We also will come to see in just a moment that Peter picks each these particular qualities for their sharpness in pinpointing and exposing the errors and the hypocrisy of the false teachers that were plaguing them. I'll show you that in a second, but before we do that we need to understand what these qualities consist of. Peter begins with

Faith -- The faith that Peter is talking about here is the saving faith that is the gift of God, the product of the effectual calling of Christ to salvation by which we are justified and declared not guilty of our sins and fully righteous in Christ. Peter again is careful to establish that the wellspring of these graces that are to be evident in the Christian's life is saving faith and we do not create or generate that saving faith. Saving faith is the gift of God (**1 Peter 1:3; Eph 2:8-9; 1Pe 1:5**) Saving, sustaining faith is a gift from God, not a quality to be pursued, so why Peter even include it on this list? Because faith is the fountain from which these other graces flow.

Virtue – This is a word that means energetic moral excellence. It is not simply the absence of bad habits, it is not holiness by negation whereby you don't do certain things you aren't supposed to do and therefore are practically holy. Neither is it an active pursuit of your own personal standard of righteousness. Instead, this word "virtue" is all about a positive, vigorous pursuit of what God declares to be right and morally helpful and holy. It is the

Greek word “arête.” In Greek culture, something was considered excellent as it properly fulfilled the purpose for which it was made. The excellence of a knife is to cut. The excellence of a horse is to run. The excellence of land was to produce. The excellence of a soldier is courage. What is the excellence of man and woman? The excellence of man and woman is to glorify God and to reflect His image in this world. (**Isa 43:5-7; 1Co 6:19-20**)

Knowledge – The knowledge that Peter is speaking of here is understanding, correct insight, the proper comprehension of truth and its application in our lives. It comes through the study of Christ’s life, through the study of the Word of God and the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the kind of knowledge that comes from reading, reflecting upon, and applying the Scripture. What Peter is encouraging here is not so much a knowledge of facts as much as it is a knowledge of what pleases Christ and honors God. The goal of this knowledge is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but knowledge that we might grow into God-centered, Christ-loving and grace magnifying and fruitful people. There is a vast difference between knowledge about Christ and knowledge of Him. Knowledge about Christ is simply a catalogue of facts; knowledge of Him is intimate and life-changing friendship. (**Eph 4:17-24**) The knowledge of God is not something static, not some dispassionate, boring responsibility that results in full heads and cold hearts. What we are talking about is the active, productive knowledge of God working in our hearts which comes by abiding in Christ and in His word. And this knowledge comes with great promise: (**Joh 14:21, 23**)

Self-Control – The self-control of which Peter is speaking is submission to the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Literally, this has the idea of getting a grip on yourself. It is the idea of the inner power to control the old desires and cravings that are inherited from Adam. It is the idea of not being mastered by your emotions. Self-control is that grace whereby a believer’s affections and passions are governed and kept within the lawful bounds of God’s Word. Now understand something. Christians are not meant to be pale, boring, passionless people – we should be people of great passion but people whose greatest passions are reserved for Christ. Self control is just another word for self-discipline and self-discipline is not always negative, it is not always a matter of saying no to what we should not do, it is also saying yes to what we should do. (**1Co 9:25-27**)

Steadfastness – Steadfastness is simply constancy, endurance, perseverance and the strength to bear up under a heavy load, unflinchingly and unwaveringly. It is the triumphant

facing of difficult circumstances, fully convinced that you can trust in the God's faithfulness and in His future grace. This word is the same word used of believers and of Jesus in **Hebrews 12:1-2**. Even more, steadfastness is the idea of continued perseverance in the faith in expectation of the ultimate reward of God's praise. A steadfast Christian does not give up or fall back. His life is not like the flash of a flashbulb, but the steady shining of a star. Steadfastness is the willingness to take the time and make the effort to build a life that is not spiritually shoddy but will stand the test of time and the test of Christ's return.

Godliness – We mentioned that last week. It is kind of a general word. Godliness is a word that speaks of reverence and of awe that is expressed in our living. It's a desire to be pleasing to God in all that we say and do and think. It speaks of an inner attitude of worship that expresses itself word and deed. Godliness pictures a man or a woman who is empowered by grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit to conduct themselves in the reverence and awe of God, not just in appearance but in reality, in a way that pleases God. Godliness is living your life consciously "Coram Deo" – before the face of God, a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life.

Brotherly Affection – The idea of brotherly affection is a warm affection toward those of the family of God. Our relationship in Christ radically changes our lives. We are not just a group of people, but we are family. We are intimately related to and dependant upon one another. We are called to love one another with a love of devotion, to be devoted to one another, to have the kind of love for one another that is reserved in most cases for non-dysfunctional families. Brothers (and sisters) before others.

Love – Unlike the last word, this is not the love that a Christian has for other Christians but the love that he has toward God and toward others as well. Agape love is the heart-felt affection of the Christian toward God and toward others in response to the love God has shown toward us, especially in the gift of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Love is an affection which prompts the Christian to act in a manner that edifies and blesses others. Love is first and foremost directed toward God who is the source of true love, and then toward others in this priority: God, family (especially our spouses), fellow-believers, our neighbors, and even our enemy. Love is displayed by deliberate, diligent, self-sacrificial service to others, which is intended for their good, at our expense. And the greatest good that we can do for another, and therefore the highest love that we can show, is that which

leads others to know Christ as Savior and Lord, and which leads them ever more deeply into the joy of making much of Jesus Christ now and forever. That is genuine love.

These are the qualities of a grace shaped life and it becomes immediately clear why Peter describes the grace-shaped life in this way. He does so because it stands in stark contrast to the lives of the false teachers. **Faith** as opposed to their destructive heresies and denial of Christ (2Pe 2:1). **Virtue** as opposed to their insatiable and ravenous desire for sin (2 Pet 2:14). **Knowledge** as opposed to their “ignorant blaspheming” (2 Pet 2:12) and “loud boasts of folly” (2 Pet 2:18), promising freedom but making slaves like themselves (2 Pet 2:19) **Self-control** as opposed to their sensuality (2 Pet 2:2) and eyes filled with adultery (2 Pet 2:14). **Steadfastness** over against their being like “mists driven by a storm” (2 Pet 2:17). **Godliness** in contrast to their ungodliness. Brotherly affection in light of the false teachers who were blots and blemishes on the feasts of the brethren (2 Pet 2:13) And **love** as opposed to the false teachers who sought to exploit (v.3), entice (v.14) and sought to lead the church into slavery.

The reason that Peter is calling us to pursue these qualities of the grace-shaped life is because **true, saving faith is confirmed by the reality and growth of the graces that come with it.** Genuine faith is not a lifeless thing. The reality of faith is confirmed by the fruit it produces. And again, how do we grow in these graces? The means of grace – the Word of God, worship, prayer, fellowship, setting God before us every day. Psalm 16:8-11 is helpful here. Peter wants us to understand that, in contrast to the false teachers:

3) A faithful Christian is a fruitful one (v. 8) What Christian would ever want to be barren or unfruitful? These qualities shine forth as evidence that we really do know Christ and so Peter wants that those who he is writing would recognize them in themselves and pursue their increase in their lives. The qualities are to increase. There is to be growth in these areas of their lives. They are yours by virtue of your faith and they must be increasing. Now understand what Peter is saying here. He is not expecting sinless perfection and full and complete maturity in every quality, but the possession and the increase of these qualities is an expected thing by reason of the fact that a Christian has become a partaker of the divine nature. In the life of a faithful Christian there should be the continuing increase of likeness to Christ. Jesus said to his disciples: **By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. (Joh 15:8)**

Peter's desire for his readers is that they would be effective and fruitful in their knowledge of Christ and I want you to understand what that means. These qualities of Christian character are not to be added to our lives not so that we meet some level of spiritual productivity and performance, but rather so that our character may be come like Jesus Christ's. Peter is calling us to be effective and fruitful in growing in our likeness to Jesus, not to a series of spiritual pursuits and performances. It is easy for us to fall into that mindset, to measure out growth in terms of our "stats". I fast twice a week; tithe of mint, dill, and cumin; have x number of quiet times, witness to x number of people, have passed out x number of tracts... The other temptation is to compare ourselves to other people so that we look like paragons of the faith. In truth, those things can become a cover for a sinful and drifting heart if we are not careful. The point Peter is making is that the effective and fruitful knowledge of Christ is a life that is increasingly like Christ's.

Now having said that, realize that a life like this **will** have a profound impact on the lives of the people around it. Effective and fruitful knowledge of Christ first affects the Christian and then impacts the world. It must, because a life like Christ's will not and cannot go unnoticed. In the words of Paul, **For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. (2Co 2:15-16)** So what Peter is saying is that the possession and increase of these qualities of the grace shaped life will make you both useful and fruitful in your knowledge of Christ – you will become more and more like Christ, you will know the joy of fuller and fuller communion with Christ, others will be impacted by the power of your sanctified life and God Himself will be glorified in and through you. True, saving faith is confirmed by the reality and growth of the graces that come with it. For that reason, Peter closes this text we are looking at this morning by giving:

4) A solemn warning for the sluggish and superficial (v. 9) This is a solemn warning from Peter that we need to see. Whoever lacks these qualities, he says, is so nearsighted that he is blind. Peter is acknowledging the fact that a true believer, for a time, can neglect to cultivate these graces and qualities in their lives. Certainly there are Christians who from disobedience can suffer spiritual regression and decline, who can through disobedience, can weaken and wither for a season.

To fail to pursue holiness is to become increasingly blind. Spiritual blindness manifests itself as short-sightedness. Instead of “fixing our hope” on the spiritual and eternal certainties which God has promised and provided for us, our eyes are lower to the false promises and allurements of this sinful world. How does this happen? Spiritual amnesia, forgetting that we were cleansed from our former sins. To forget that this cleansing is to be a person who forgets the whole purpose of the incarnation and the humiliation of Christ, His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. In essence, he has forgotten the gospel. Sin has, for a time, clouded, hidden his vision of the character of God, the wretchedness of sin, the loving-kindness of God in providing a Savior, the finished work of Christ on the cross, the effectual call of God, the cleansing from sin promised in the gospel, the covering of righteousness, and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. This believer will have no confidence before the Lord, only fear and doubt. He will be joyless. He will be joyless because his life is an utter inconsistency. How is someone brought out of such a state? How do you rescue the sluggish Christian? You remind him of the gospel, you declare to him the gospel, you show to him the beauty of the gospel. A true Christian will respond to the counsel of the gospel and be restored to fruitfulness.

The great danger, however, is the one who makes a profession of faith, who gives the appearance of saving grace, who conforms to Christian appearances but who never sees these graces evident in his life and when confronted with the gospel is utterly unmoved. In his case, his spiritual fruitlessness is evidence that while he may have outwardly made a profession of faith in Christ, the reality of an inward salvation never took place and that is why it is vital for us to examine ourselves.

I would like to ask you two simple questions as we conclude this text.

- First, do you have life in Christ?
- Second, Christian, are you growing?

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