

Add to Your Faith

2 Peter 1:5-11

By faith alone. That was the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Sola Fide. Justification is by faith alone. Clearly that is a true and proper biblical doctrine.

Eph. 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Not of works, that’s what Christianity is all about. Salvation by grace. Not by works. And not by a combination of faith and works, either. But by faith, alone. But wait a minute. Peter says in our text this morning, “Add to your faith.” Add to your faith certain things. And in doing so, you are responsible to give all diligence! You are called upon to work hard at it.

So which is it? Faith alone, or add to your faith? I love to ask those questions, because the very question defines the pitfalls we must avoid in our understanding of both the doctrine of our salvation and the nature of the Christian life. Of course, the answer is both. Faith alone, and add to your faith, but not in any contradicting or conflicting sense. The right understanding of those two things is clearly expressed by the words of our Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 11, “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.”

Faith is the alone instrument by which you are justified. It is the alone means by which God declares you to be not guilty of your sins, by which he accepts you as righteous in his sight.

Faith alone. But not by a faith that is alone. In other words, faith works. Faith produces works. Faith is alive. Faith is “ever accompanied with all other saving graces.”

Thus James declares,

James 2:14 “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

“I will show you my faith by my works.” That is the context in which Peter writes,

v.5

Please don’t miss how that begins. “For this very reason.” For the very reason we studied last week, having received “exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

You have escaped! It has already happened. You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Freed from the power and dominion of the slavery of sin. You have been united with him in his death. You have died with him and have been raised with him!

“For this very reason,” Peter declares, you have responsibilities. Because you have escaped the corruption in the world cause by evil desires through the very great and precious

promises of God, because of that, you have certain responsibilities.

Paul puts it this way,

Phil. 2:12 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, 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.”

Work out your salvation. That’s your responsibility. And we shouldn’t be afraid to talk about,

I. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

You shouldn’t think that the idea of responsibility contradicts the doctrine of grace, either.

Rom. 6:1 “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

So work out your salvation, because you are under grace, not under law. And you know that “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

God works in you. That’s grace. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. That’s your responsibility as the recipient of grace. And Peter emphasizes, “giving all diligence.”

The Greek is very emphatic. These words are very strong. They refer to very strenuous effort and focused activity, stressing the urgency of that effort. Diligence means to exercise extreme care, to strive earnestly, to give all the attention and exertion you possibly can to the task at hand. And Peter adds another word, a

noun to emphasize that diligence and to apply that effort, the idea of bringing alongside all the determination you could possibly muster. It is clearly a warning against sluggishness and self-indulgence in the Christian life.

For the believer, the recipient of exceedingly great and precious promises, it is,

A. The requirement of due diligence.

In other words, again, you are saved by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone. You should work diligently to grow in faith. Make every effort to work out your salvation, knowing that it is God who works in you. That’s your responsibility.

Let me illustrate that for you. With three simple and easy to understand illustrations. None of them are original to me. They are revealed for us by the Apostle Paul. Turn to 2 Timothy 2. There, Paul uses these three illustrations to define the hard work which we must be devoted to, the hard work of spiritual growth. They are the illustration of a soldier. The illustration of an athlete. And the illustration of a farmer.

Three examples of hard working people. First, the soldier.

2Tim. 2:3 “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

Yet how easily we forget the primary objective of a good soldier--loyalty in his desire to please his commanding officer.

2 Tim.2:5 “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”

He must not cheat, but rather train himself in the discipline of his sport. The familiar words so often come to my mind,

1Cor. 9:24 “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”

And then, the farmer.

2 Tim.2: 6 “The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.”

And Paul’s conclusion,

2 Tim.2:7 “Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.”

That’s due diligence. With the objective of growth.

B. The requirement of advancement.

v.5 “Add to your faith...”

That’s the goal. Peter says in verse five that there are certain things that we must add to our faith. We are to supply these things in addition to bare faith. Actually, the Greek word has the idea of providing much more than what was expected or could be demanded, to give lavishly with generosity.

Peter identifies seven things which we are to add to our faith. That is, seven steps of identifying spiritual growth. And notice that they are all issues of the heart. He doesn’t mention outward,

external things. But matters of our soul.

II. THE VIRTUES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Let me read the list, then briefly explain each one.

v.5-7

There is the definition of spiritual growth, and let’s look at each one to see how you measure up. First,

A. Virtue.

Moral virtue. Goodness.

This ought to be the first and primary characteristic of those who profess salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the same word which Peter uses to describe God at the end of verse 3.

Moral virtue should be the hallmark of those who claim the name of Christ. It must be the definitive characteristic of our lives. We should stand out in a crowd because of our moral excellence. Your daily conduct must be governed by the glory and the goodness of God himself.

Today we talk more about “values.” Things that are important to me. But that is something far different than virtue. You see, virtue emphasizes this idea of moral goodness. It is a judgement that transcends me. It’s not about me and what I like. Rather a virtue is a demonstration of God-like goodness. Moral excellence.

Beloved, make every effort to add to your faith virtue. Moral virtue. That which is right. That which is good. That which is godly. Add those things in increasing abundance to your faith. Your faith will never grow and never mature in the absence of them. Then,

B. Knowledge.

To be necessarily redundant, true knowledge.

v.5

Not trivia. Not memorized factoids or even the external standards of learning our schools focus upon. But real knowledge. This is a reference to wisdom, and to what we might call common sense. The ability to understand discern God's will. Or simply the ability to know God.

Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge. And to knowledge,

C. Self-control.

It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, holding yourself in. Governing and managing everything about yourself. And it is Paul's explanation of the meaning of holiness.

1 Thes. 4:4 "...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God."

Do you want examples. Anger and a quick temper. Sexuality. Gluttony--what you eat and drink. Alcohol. Personal discipline and laziness. Sleeping. Words and speech. Television. Games. Thoughts in your mind. Use of your time. Faithfulness in finishing your tasks and chores.

All of those things are issues of self-control. Add to your faith, self-control.

Then,

D. Perseverance.

Patient endurance. The idea of enduring difficulties.

Have you stopped and considered how much the strength of your faith can be measured by the ability to endure difficulties? It is.

And that patient endurance will actually perfect your Christian character and moral excellence!

James 1:2 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

Or,

1Pet. 1:6 "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter then mentions,

E. Godliness.

This is a general word for religion, a word referring to reverence toward God and devotion in action, a practical awareness of God in every aspect of life, with much emphasis upon the practical rather than devotional aspect of the faith. An older word used is piety, or pious conduct. It is, perhaps, the most comprehensive description of the Christian life available in human language.

Then add to your godliness,

F. Brotherly kindness.

The love of brothers.

1John 4:21 “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” Then, very appropriately, Peter ends with the highest of all virtues, the greatest of these virtues,

G. Selfless love.

The Greek word agape. The love of self-renouncing surrender. The love of laying down your life for the benefit of others.

My friends, these things won't just happen automatically. There must be hard work on your part to bring them about.

And so, I'm right back where I started. God has given us very great and precious promises. He has transformed our lives. And on the basis of those promises, he calls you to make every effort to bring about this advancement in your spiritual growth. With the promise of blessing attached.

III. THE BLESSINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

v.8

But let's start with,

v.9

It's written in the negative, as a warning. If you lack these things being added to your faith, you are shortsighted. Nearsighted. I know what that means. Without my glasses, I can't see clearly at all. Oh, I can see you. At least, the group of you. But it is really, really fuzzy.

Sadly, some people have far more difficulty seeing than I do, even to blindness. And that's the illustration of the Christian life. A lot of people seeing things very fuzzy. But I want to study that

warning in the positive form.

What is the blessing of not lacking these things? And as my children are learning in math, that double negative makes a positive. If you are not lacking these things as being added to your faith, then you will have,

A. Clear-sighted gratitude for your salvation.

Peter explains what he means by blindness or even being shortsighted. It means that you have forgotten about your salvation. It means that you have forgotten about the forgiveness of your sins. You have forgotten about the work of God to cleanse you from your sins.

Let me give you a very graphic illustration of this sort of forgetfulness. Actually, Peter uses it, the illustration of two animals.

2 Peter 2:22 “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

Do you get the idea? That's freedom, right? According to the world in which we live, freedom means I have the right to do whatever I want to do. No restraints. No responsibilities. No duties or obligations. No standards of behavior I am expected to maintain.

OK, freedom. “A dog returns to his own vomit.” That's what the freedom is like. A pig, having washed, returning to wallow in the mud. That's freedom. I can do whatever I want.

Peter is warning us against just that sort of shortsightedness. And if you earnestly strive to add to your faith the virtues of the

Christian life, then you won't forget what is true about you, if you are a Christian. By faith in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. By faith in Jesus Christ, you are washed.

And what a blessing it is never to forget that!

1 Cor. 6:9 "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

So work out your salvation with fear and trembling, never forgetting for a moment that in Jesus Christ, you have been washed. By faith alone you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. Let that gratitude stir you on to love and good deeds. That's the blessing.

And, then, the kind and gracious words of,
v.8

If you add these things to your faith, something good will happen. Something very, very good. You will not be barren nor unfruitful. You will not be idle nor ineffective. Which is to say, you will not be without the good fruit of a lively faith. But look at exactly what that fruit is all about. Look what you will enjoy as the great blessing of adding to your faith the virtues of the Christian life.

v.8 "...you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That's the blessing. You will know Jesus. Personally, even subjectively. This isn't the higher knowledge of a special few who are really advanced. This isn't the academic knowledge of those who are particularly intellectual. This is the knowledge of a friend, the fellowship of one closely and intimately connected to you.

So the blessing is of communion with Christ.

B. Active fellowship with Jesus Christ.

So as a husband belongs to his wife and a wife to her husband, so are we joined to Christ. This is the blessing of Jesus himself dwelling in your hearts. This means you have put on Christ, are rooted in him, that you have put on Christ and that you live and abide in him.

This is what Paul prays for in,

Eph. 3:14 "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

That's knowledge, beloved. The best kind of knowledge, "to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge."

And to live in that knowledge of Christ's love! To abide in him.

John 15:4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you,

unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing...9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

Beloved, that's fellowship with Jesus. And it ought to be of great encouragement to know that this is what Jesus has prayed for all his disciples,

John 17:21 "...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

To be one with the Father and the Son together. Fellowship. Communion with God. That's the gospel. That's fellowship with Jesus. As John writes,

1 John 1:3 "...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Living with Jesus, united with him in the bonds of perfect fellowship. That's what it means to be always fruitful "in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

With that goal in mind, people of God, add to your faith virtue,

knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Add to your faith, so that you might know Jesus all the more.