

Knowing and Growing (2 Peter 1:1–11)

If anybody in the early church knew the importance of being alert, it was the Apostle Peter. In his early years, He felt overconfident when danger was near and tended to overlook his Master's warnings: he rushed ahead when he should have waited; he slept when he should have prayed; he talked when he should have listened. He was a courageous, but careless, Christian.

However, he learned his lesson, and he wrote to help other believers learn it too. In his first epistle, Peter emphasized the *grace* of God (1 Peter 5:12), but in this second letter, his emphasis is on the *knowledge* of God.

The word *know* (or *knowledge*) is used at least thirteen times in this short epistle. The word does not mean a mere intellectual understanding of some truth, though that is included. It means a living participation in the truth: "*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent*" (John 17:3).

Peter began his letter with a description of the Christian life. After describing true believers, he described the counterfeits. The best way to detect what is false is to know the truth. Peter made three important affirmations about the true Christian life.

1. **The Christian Life Begins with Faith (2 Peter 1:1–4)** *1 Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received the same kind of faith as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*

Peter introduced himself using both his Hebrew and Greek names which probably indicates that his letter was or a mixed audience of Hebrew and Greek believers. He assures them that the faith God gives to every believer is of equal honor or privilege with the faith God gave to the apostles. This faith every provides every believer "*everything pertaining to life and godliness*" through His "*precious and magnificent promises.*" This means that our standing with the Lord today is the same as that of the Apostles centuries ago. They had no special advantage simply because they were privileged to walk with Christ, see Him with their own eyes, and share in His miracles.

It is not necessary to see the Lord with one's own human eyes to love Him, trust Him, and share His glory (1 Peter 1:8).

1) **This faith is in a person (vv. 1–2).** That Person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. The faith is given to us through the righteousness (*dikaiosynē*, “justice,” or “uprightness”) of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. From the very outset of his letter, Peter affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ. “God” and “our Savior” are not two different Persons; they describe one Person, Jesus Christ. Paul used a similar expression in Titus 2:10 and 3:4.

Peter reminded his readers that Jesus Christ is the Savior by repeating this exalted title in 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18. A *savior* is “one who brings salvation,” and the word *salvation* was familiar to the people of that day. In their vocabulary, it meant “deliverance from trouble,” particularly “deliverance from the enemy.” It also carried the idea of “health and safety.”

It requires little insight to see how the title “Savior” applies to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is, indeed, the Great Physician who heals the heart from the sickness of sin. He is the victorious Conqueror who has defeated our enemies—sin, death, Satan, and hell—and is leading us in triumph (2 Cor. 2:14ff). He is “God and our Savior” (2 Peter 1:1), “our Lord and Savior” (2 Peter 1:11), and “the Lord and Savior” (2 Peter 2:20). To be our Savior, He had to give His life on the cross and die for the sins of the world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has four “spiritual commodities” that can be secured from nobody else: knowledge, righteousness, grace, and peace. When you trust Him as your Savior, you receive the knowledge of an intimate, personal, eternal relationship. Within that relationship, the believer can take advantage of the “full knowledge,” whereby His righteousness becomes your righteousness. As a result, the believer is given an eternal right standing with God (2 Cor. 5:21). You could never *earn* this righteousness; it is the gift of God to those who believe. “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us*” (Titus 3:5).

Grace is God's favor to the undeserving. God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve; God in His grace gives us what we don't deserve. Our God is “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10), and He channels that grace to us through Jesus Christ (John 1:16).

The result of this experience is *peace*, peace *with* God (Rom. 5:1) and the peace *of* God (Phil. 4:6–7). In fact, God's grace and peace are “multiplied” toward us as we walk with Him and trust His promises.

2) ***This faith involves God's power (v. 3).*** The Christian life begins with saving faith, faith in the person of Jesus Christ. But when you know Jesus Christ personally, you also experience God's power, and this power provides everything believers need for life and godliness! The unsaved sinner is dead (Eph. 2:1–3) and only Christ can raise him from the dead (John 5:24). When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, "*Loose him, and let him go*" (John 11:44). Get rid of the grave clothes!

When you are born into the family of God by faith in Christ, you are born complete. Nothing has to be added! "*And you are complete in Him*" (Col. 2:10). The false teachers claimed that they had a "*special doctrine*" that would add something to the lives of Peter's readers, but Peter knew that *nothing could be added*. Just as a normal baby is born with all the "equipment" he needs for life and only needs to grow, so the Christian has all that is needed and only needs to grow—nothing is lacking except growth!

Just as a baby has a definite genetic structure that determines how he will grow, so the believer is "genetically structured" to experience "glory and virtue." One day he will be like the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2). We have been "*called ... to His eternal glory*" (1 Peter 5:10), and we shall share that glory when Jesus Christ returns and takes His people to heaven.

But we are also "*called ... to virtue.*" We have been saved so that we might "*show forth the praises [virtues] of Him who hath called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (1 Peter 2:9). We must not wait until we get to heaven to become like Jesus Christ! In our character and conduct, we should increasingly reveal His beauty and grace.

3) ***This faith involves God's promises (v. 4).*** God has not only given us all that we need for life and godliness, but He has also given us His promises in His Word to enable us to develop godliness in this life. These promises are *great* because they come from a great God and they lead to a great life. They are *precious* because their value is beyond calculation.

Peter must have liked the word *precious*, for he wrote about the "*precious faith*" (2 Peter 1:1; cf. 1 Peter 1:7), the "*precious promises*" (2 Peter 1:4), the "*precious blood*" (1 Peter 1:19), the *precious stone* (1 Peter 2:4, 6), and the *precious Savior* (1 Peter 2:7).

In his first letter, Peter focused on God's promises related to the believer's inheritance and the return of Christ (1 Peter 1:9, 13). In this letter, Peter focuses on the promises of God related to the believer becoming partakers of God's very nature

through their new birth. When the sinner confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the Spirit of God imparts the life and nature of God to dwell within the believer.

In Christ, the old sinner is dead, but the born-again believer is truly alive because he shares the divine nature. The lost sinner is decaying because of his corrupt nature, but the new believer experiences a dynamic life of godliness because he has God's divine nature within. Without Christ, mankind is under the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21), but the born-again believer shares the freedom and growth that is a part of possessing the divine nature.

Nature determines appetite. The pig wants slop and the dog will even eat its own vomit (2 Peter 2:22), but the sheep desires green pastures. Nature also determines *behavior*. An eagle flies because it has an eagle's nature and a dolphin swims because that is the nature of the dolphin. Nature determines *environment*: squirrels climb trees, moles burrow underground, and trout swim in the water. Nature also determines *association*: lions travel in prides, sheep in flocks, and fish in schools.

Since we have God's nature within, then we ought to have an appetite for that which is pure and holy. Our behavior ought to be like that of the Father, and we ought to live in the kind of "*spiritual environment*" that is suited to our NEW nature. We ought to associate with that which is true to our nature (see 2 Cor. 6:14ff). The only normal, fruit-bearing life for the child of God is a *godly* life.

Because we possess this divine nature, we have "completely escaped" the defilement and decay in this present evil world. If we feed the new nature the nourishment of the Word, then we will have little interest in the garbage of the world. But if we "make provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14), our sinful nature will lust after the "old sins" (2 Peter 1:9) and we will disobey God. Godly living is the result of cultivating the new nature within.

2. **Faith Results in Spiritual Growth (2 Peter 1:5–7)** *5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*

Where there is life, there must be growth. The new birth is not the conclusion; it is the introduction. God gives His children all that they need to live godly lives, but His children must apply themselves and be diligent to use the "*means of grace*" He has provided.

Spiritual growth is not automatic. It requires cooperation with God and the application of spiritual diligence and discipline. “Work out your own salvation ... For it is God which worketh in you” (Phil. 2:12–13).

Peter listed seven characteristics of the godly life, but we must not think of them as seven beads on a string or even seven stages of development. The word translated “add” really means “to supply generously.”

1. In other words, we develop one quality as we exercise another quality. These graces relate to each other the way the branch relates to the trunk and the twigs to the branch. Like the “*fruit of the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:22–23), these qualities grow out of life and out of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is not enough for the Christian to “let go and let God,” as though spiritual growth was God’s work alone. Literally, Peter wrote, “*Make every effort to bring alongside.*” It takes every bit of diligence, effort, and commitment a Christian can muster, in submission to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, to *escape the corruption that is in the world by lust.*

The first quality of character Peter listed was virtue. We met this word in 2 Peter 1:3, and it basically means “excellence.” To the Greek philosophers, it meant “the fulfillment of a thing.”

When anything in nature fulfills its purpose, that is “virtue—moral excellence.” The land that produces crops is “excellent” because it is fulfilling its purpose. A Christian’s purpose is to glorify God because he has God’s nature within; so, when he does this, he shows “*excellence*” because he is fulfilling his purpose in life. True virtue in the Christian life is not “polishing” human qualities, no matter how fine they may be, but producing *divine* qualities that make the person more like Jesus Christ.

Faith enables us to develop virtue, and virtue helps us develop knowledge (2 Peter 1:5). The word translated “knowledge” in 2 Peter 1:2–3 means “full knowledge” or “knowledge that is growing.” It is the ability to handle life successfully. This kind of knowledge does not come automatically. It comes from obedience to the will of God (John 7:17). In the Christian life, we must not separate the heart and the mind, character and knowledge.

Temperance is the next quality on Peter’s list of spiritual virtues, and it means self-control. “*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city*” (Prov. 16:32). “He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls” (Prov. 25:28). In his letters, Paul often

compared the Christian to an athlete who must exercise and discipline himself if he ever hopes to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 3:12–16; 1 Tim. 4:7–8).

Patience is the ability to endure when circumstances are difficult. Self-control has to do with handling the *pleasures* of life and keeping one's passions under control, while patience relates primarily to the *pressures* and *problems* of life. Often, the person who "gives in" to pleasures is not disciplined enough to handle pressures either, so he "gives up."

Patience is not something that develops automatically; we must work at it. James 1:2–8 gives us the right approach. We must expect trials to come, because without trials we could never learn patience. We must, by faith, let our trials work *for* us and not against us, because we know that God is at work in our trials. If we need wisdom in making decisions, God will grant that wisdom if we ask Him. Nobody enjoys trials, but we do enjoy the confidence we can have in trials that God is at work, causing everything to work together for our good and His glory.

Godliness simply means "God-likeness." In the original Greek, this word meant "to worship well." It described the man who was right in his relationship with God and with his fellowman. Perhaps the words *reverence* and *piety* come closer to defining this term. It is that quality of character that makes a person distinctive. He lives above the petty things of life, the passions and pressures that control the lives of others. He seeks to do the will of God and, as he does, he seeks the welfare of others.

We must never get the idea that godliness is an impractical thing, because it is intensely practical. The godly person makes the kinds of decisions that are right and noble. He does not take an easy path simply to avoid either pain or trial. He does what is right because it is right and because it is the will of God.

Brotherly kindness (*philadelphia* in the Greek) is a virtue that Peter must have acquired the hard way, for the disciples of our Lord often debated and disagreed with one another. If we love Jesus Christ, we must also love the brethren. We should practice an "unfeigned [sincere] love of the brethren" (1 Peter 1:22) and not just pretend that we love them. "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10). The fact that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ is one evidence that we have been born of God (1 John 5:1–2).

But there is more to Christian growth than brotherly love; we must also have the *sacrificial* love that our Lord displayed when He went to the cross. The kind of love ("charity") spoken of in 2 Peter 1:7 is *agape* love, the kind of love that God shows

toward lost sinners. This is the love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13, the love that the Holy Spirit produces in our hearts as we walk in the Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22). When we have *brotherly* love, we love because of our likenesses to others; but with *agape* love, we love despite the differences we have.

It is impossible for fallen human nature to manufacture these seven qualities of Christian character. THEY MUST BE PRODUCED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD. To be sure, there are unsaved people who possess amazing self-control and endurance, but these virtues point to *themselves* and not to the Lord—in other words, the individual gets the glory. When God produces the beautiful nature of His Son in a Christian, it is God who receives the praise and glory.

Because we have the divine nature, we can grow spiritually and develop this kind of Christian character. It is through the power of God and the precious promises of God that this growth takes place. The divine “genetic structure” is already there: God wants us to be “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). The divine life within reproduces the image of the Son if we cooperate with the Lord and use the means He has lavishly given us. The amazing thing is this: as the image of Christ is reproduced in us, the process does not destroy our own personalities. We still remain uniquely ourselves!

2. **Spiritual Growth Brings Practical Results (2 Peter 1:8–11)** *8 For if these things are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For in whom these things are not present, that one is blind, being nearsighted, having forgotten the purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and choosing sure; for in doing these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

How can we be certain that we are growing spiritually? Peter gave three evidences of true spiritual growth:

1) *Fruitfulness (v. 8)*. Christian character is not merely an end in itself, but it is also the means to the end. The more we become like Jesus Christ, the more the Spirit can use us in witness and service. The believer who is not growing is idle (“barren”) and unfruitful. His knowledge of Jesus Christ is producing nothing practical in his life. The word translated “idle” also means “ineffective.” The people who fail to grow usually fail in everything else!

Some of the most effective Christians are people without dramatic talents and special abilities, or even exciting personalities; yet God uses them in marvelous ways. Why? Because they are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. They have the kind of character and conduct that God can trust with blessing. They are fruitful because they are faithful; they are effective because they are growing in their Christian character and experience.

Such beautiful qualities of character exist “within us” because we, too, possess the divine nature. We must cultivate them so that they increase and produce fruit in and through our lives.

2) *Vision (v. 9)*. Nutritionists tell us that diet can certainly affect vision and this is especially true in the spiritual realm. The unsaved person is in the dark because Satan has blinded his mind (2 Cor. 4:3–4). A person must be born again before his eyes are opened so that he can see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). But after our eyes are opened, it is important that we increase our vision by focusing upon God’s vista. The phrase *cannot see afar off* is the translation of a word that means “shortsighted.” It is the picture of somebody closing or squinting his eyes, unable to see at a distance.

There are some Christians who see only their own church, or their own denomination, and who fail to see the greatness of God’s family around the world. Some believers see the need at home but have no vision for a lost world. Jesus admonished His disciples, “*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest*” (John 4:35).

If we forget what God has done for us, we will not be excited to share Christ with others. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have been purged and forgiven! God has opened our eyes! We must not forget what He has done! Rather, we must cultivate gratitude in our hearts and sharpen our spiritual vision. Life is too brief and the needs of the world too great for God’s people to be walking around with their eyes closed!

3. *Security (vv. 10–11)*. If we walk around with our eyes closed, we will stumble! But the growing Christian walks with confidence because he knows he is secure in Christ. It is not our profession of faith that guarantees that we are saved; it is our progression in the *faith* that gives us that assurance. The person who claims to be a child of God, but whose character and conduct give no evidence of spiritual growth is deceiving himself and heading for judgment.

Peter pointed out that “*calling*” and “*election*” go together. The same God who *elects* His people also ordains the means to *call* them. The two go together, as Paul

wrote to the Thessalonians: *“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation ... Whereunto He called you by our Gospel”* (2 Thes. 2:13–14).

There is never an excuse for spiritual immaturity or for lack of effort in the Christian life. Some believers say, “What is going to be is going to be. There is nothing we can do.” But Peter admonishes us to “be diligent.” This means “make every effort.” (He used this same verb in 2 Peter 1:5.) While it is true that God must work in us before we can do His will (Phil. 2:12–13), it is also true that we must *be willing* for God to work, and we must cooperate with Him.

The Christian may “stumble” in his walk but will always repent and recommit if he is truly a child of God. He will not always be on the mountaintop, but he will always desire to climb higher. If we do *“these things”* (the things listed in 2 Peter 1:5–7, cf. v. 8), if we display Christian growth and character in our daily lives, then our works confirm our salvation, and our destiny is heaven. It’s important to remember the blessings that *growing* Christian enjoy—fruitfulness; vision; and security.

Every believer will arrive in heaven, although some will have a more glorious welcome than others. However, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be a wonderful *“welcome home.”*¹

¹ Adapted from Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#). Victor Books.