

## LESSON 4

*Add to Your Faith*

## GROWTH IN GRACE PRESUPPOSES FAITH

Peter's call to *"add to your faith"* shows faith to be distinct from the virtues listed (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7). Its very presence is granted, and this leads Peter to challenge his readers to further grow in the grace of God. The grace of God extended in the promise of partaking of the divine nature is with the escape from *"corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Peter 1:4) as a past event. This escape was through the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, and faith expressed in baptism (cf. Colossians 2:11-12). This is not an end itself but marks the beginning of a life in Christ. The plan of God includes transformation into Christ's image (cf. Ephesians 4:13). His image was observed in *"his own glory and virtue"* (2 Peter 1:3, ASV), which calls one to share in it – something requiring tremendous change. To this end, Peter acknowledged a failure of growth in grace to be in part due to a forgetfulness of the cleansing of sins in the past (cf. 2 Peter 1:9). Faith that is not shortsighted will *"be neither barren nor unfruitful"* (2 Peter 1:8; cf. Matthew 13:23; John 15:1-8; etc.). It will grow in holiness (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:1).

For one to grow in grace they must have first accessed it. Paul noted that those who stand in the grace of God have gained access into it by faith (cf. Romans 5:2). Having been *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:24) there is peace with God, and newfound joy (cf. Romans 5:1-2). This new state of being in the grace of God marks the start of a greater process, but that start was with the initial access by faith and continues with it (cf.

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1 Peter 1:5). The rejoicing is in *"hope of the glory of God"* (Romans 5:2). Such hope has substance, which the Hebrew writer identifies as faith (cf. Hebrews 11:1). This great confidence not only leads to rejoicing in the object of hope – *"the revealing of the sons of God...the adoption, the redemption of our body"* (Romans 8:19, 23) – but even in the tribulations which lay ahead (cf. Romans 5:3).

Through the eyes of faith, a disciple of Christ sees tribulation as a tool for growth. Paul would later write in a context of suffering, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28). He had noted that the children of God are subjected to futility, but in hope (cf. Romans 8:20). This hope leads to the perseverance in such trial (cf. Romans 8:25). Similarly, the joy in tribulations in Romans 5 is due to faith that God can use such to produce perseverance (cf. Romans 5:3). The perseverance leads to *"proven character"* (Romans 5:4, NASB). The proven character leads to hope (cf. Romans

5:4). The hope does not disappoint because of the revelation of God's love to us via the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 5:5-11) – something which further strengthens our faith (cf. Romans 10:17).

Such is merely one example of faith being a presupposition to growth in God's grace. Without faith tribulation has adverse effects. Tribulation only leads to Christian growth when approached with faith in Christ. This is no less true for the advancement in the listed virtues of 2 Peter 1. These do not stand independent of God's word, and the faith it produces. They are built upon the foundation of faith.

## FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH THE VIRTUES ARE ADDED

It is important to understand that the context of growth in these virtues is what gives them spiritual significance. The context is growth in God's grace *"through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord"* (2 Peter 1:2, KJV). Each of the seven virtues has faith as its ultimate foundation – the object of that faith being Christ. This dramatically separates these virtues in the Christian from their presence in one belonging to the world. The Greek terms used by Peter had their own thrust of significance in society. However, Peter in no way is suggesting spiritual value in living according to societal standards. These virtues are matters we seek to add through imitation, but not of the world, rather, of Christ (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-4). The point is not to add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love in the sense that some Greek possessed them, but as Christ possessed them.

This may seem to go without saying, yet too often Christians think they are growing in the grace of God when, truly, their growth is in the sphere of man's wisdom. This is not to suggest there is never anything positive to glean from the musings of men. Paul acknowledged the valid conclusion of Grecian poets when he told the Athenians on Mars' Hill, *"for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'"* (Acts 17:28). They correctly identified the "unknown god" as the author of life, nevertheless they worshiped Him improperly, and Paul called them to repentance (cf. Acts 17:29-31).

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In a world which owes its existence to a holy God there are bound to be traces of holy influence. It is accurate that Christ changed the world, though the majority remains unconverted. Any hint of moral goodness in the world merely reflects the existence of a moral standard. The Christian acknowledges that standard as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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revelation which gives *“all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:3) is like one seeking to satiate his hunger with the crumbs fallen from the table at which he has been invited to feast. Prudence also requires our acknowledgement that these virtues have often been hijacked, twisted, and manipulated by those in the world. The standard of Christ reveals their true form. For example, one may claim to practice love, but not in a way which conforms to the commands of Christ (cf. John 14:15). This love is not the love which is the pinnacle of Peter’s inspired list. The only way to discern the truth is through faith which comes from hearing God’s word (cf. Romans 10:17).

## FAITH IS OBTAINED THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

The faith which presupposes growth in grace, and which serves as the foundation upon which these virtues are added is obtained through an exclusive source. Peter’s epistle begins with a recognition of the fellowship he and his apostolic companions had with the readers (and all Christians) – *“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:1). They possessed “faith of the same value” (NKJV footnote). Its value was equal because its source was equal.

The introductory verse contains a similar sentence structure to the following verse. As discussed in previous lessons, the KJV rendering, *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you **through** the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord”* (2 Peter 1:2) gives the proper sense. The Greek, *en*, connotes instrumentality in the text. The knowledge of Jesus is the means by which God multiplies grace and peace. Similarly, the KJV translates 2 Peter 1:1, *“to them that have obtained like precious faith with us **through** the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”* The *“righteousness of God”* is how the faith of equal value to the apostles’ faith is obtained. It is this faith upon which the virtues are to be added.

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*“The righteousness of God”* is used in the same sense as it is elsewhere in the New Testament. Romans 1:17 is especially helpful in aiding us with Peter’s thoughts – *“For in it [the gospel of Christ] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”* Paul is not speaking of God’s righteous character, but of His plan for man to be counted righteous through the gospel. In the gospel, God’s plan for man to be righteous is revealed from the standard of faith to the production of faith in the subject who takes it in (cf. Romans 10:17). When one partakes in the revelation of God’s plan of righteousness in the gospel, they reach the faith it is intended to produce. Paul explains in another place, *“knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”* (Galatians 2:16). The knowledge of God’s plan to justify man by faith in Jesus separate from the law of Moses moved Paul to faith in Christ. This is the same plan of

*“the righteousness of God”* to which the Jews refused to submit (cf. Romans 10:1-4). It is this plan to which Peter’s readers submitted and obtained a faith equal to that of his own.

This should be understood in stark contrast to the wisdom of men. The wisdom of men does not produce the *“like precious faith”* of Peter, the apostles, or his readers. The wisdom of men cannot lead a man to meet the conditions required by God for salvation. This is one of the many ways in which the gospel transcends human reasoning. One could argue the merit of a man’s philosophy in human society – though, as stated before, any good is ultimately traced back to Him who is called good (cf. Matthew 19:17). However, there is not any reasoning of man which leads to salvation. The faith upon which the virtues enumerated by Peter are to be added is produced by the gospel. Implicitly, any other *“faith”* upon which these virtues are added will not lead to salvation. Growth in grace is not intended as a mere path to becoming a better person. Some have erroneously concluded that all religion, from the content of the Bible or otherwise, comes down to being a better person. Such could not be further from the truth. Discipleship in Christ is about bringing glory to God and receiving everlasting life.

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Paul addressed a problem in the first Corinthian letter concerning the Corinthians’ subjective perception of the gospel message. The conflict was not about the content of any message they accepted and practiced. Paul explained through the figurative transfer of the dilemma to himself and Apollos that they were one in their work (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:8).

The message they were both proclaiming was united in content – it harmonized. However, despite the uniformity of doctrine between Paul and Apollos some were boasting of being a Paulite, or an Apollosite (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12). Apparently, the inappropriate behavior had its root in the culture of subscribing to a man’s wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17, 20). Though the message Paul and Apollos preached was from God, the Corinthians were accrediting it to them. This same thought was vehemently repudiated regarding the reaction of some to miracles performed by the apostles (cf. Acts 3:12-16; 14:8-18). The result of such a perception of the gospel message proves to be deleterious. As Paul stated, *“your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:5). It is the *“divine power [which] has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:3). Not man’s wisdom. We must hasten to the study of God’s word, not the works of men, lest we disqualify our efforts from the outset.

## CONCLUSION

The point cannot be stressed enough – the only way to grow in grace is through the faithful application of the gospel message. Adding these virtues to faith means practicing what you observe in the Christ revealing word. No number of self-help books of philosophy and psychology can mold you into the image of Christ. There is no degree which makes you a better Christian. There is not a person on the planet you can imitate entirely to draw nearer to God. Only faith in the saving message of the gospel will do.

LESSON 4 QUESTIONS

1. What significant event does Peter allude to that takes place prior to partaking in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4)? When does this event occur?
2. What must take place before one can grow in grace (cf. Romans 5:2)?
3. What example of faith as a presupposition to growth in grace can be observed in Romans 5:1-5? Explain the role of faith in this process.
4. What gives growth in the virtues listed by Peter spiritual, and saving significance?
5. Will one grow in the grace of God by adding any of the virtues Peter listed as a mere response to something observed in the world?
6. Explain how faith is obtained *“through the righteousness of God”* (2 Peter 1:1, KJV).
7. What profit is there, if any, when one grows in the virtues listed by Peter as a response to anything other than the gospel? Is there any danger in this as it pertains to the life of a Christian?
8. How had the Corinthians viewed the message preached by Paul and Apollos? What significance, if any, did this have?
9. What is the only way to grow in the grace of God? As opposed to what?

