

LESSON 12

Why Should I Grow in Grace?

The importance of growth in the grace of God has been emphasized. Peter's entire second epistle begins and ends with exhortation to grow (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-11; 3:18). Two major reasons are presented in the epistle for the urgency of spiritual growth: (1) We need to be fortified against false doctrine (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-2; 3:17-18), and (2) we need to be prepared for the coming of the Lord (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-18). The text has also indicated that what attracted us to Christ also presented promises of inclusion and fellowship (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4). If we wish to be "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4) we must grow (vv. 5-7).

Following the list of virtues, Peter gives various reasons why we should give all diligence to add these to our faith (cf. 2 Peter 1:8-11).

TO BE USEFUL AND FRUITFUL

"For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 8)

Peter explains that not merely the current possession of "*these things*" (vv. 5-7), but their increase would ensure the readers' usefulness and fruitfulness. He would later explain his intent to remind them "*though you know and are established in the present truth*" (v. 12). It was not that the Christians were completely lacking in the virtues mentioned (vv. 5-7), but that they needed to prioritize them, and continue to grow in them.

One of the many marvelous things about the gospel of Christ is that the growth it provides for willing hearts has no ceiling. Paul admonished the Corinthians for their pride in thinking they had reached the pinnacle of spiritual success (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:8-13). Using irony and sarcasm, he stated how they reigned as kings without the apostles, and were wise, strong, and distinguished while the apostles were fools, weak, and dishonored. The truth was they were still babes because they had not prioritized growth (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4). In contrast, Paul told the Philippians that he had ample room for progress since he had not yet reached the prize (cf. Philippians 3:12-14). He told the Thessalonians, who already knew about the command to love one another, that they should "*increase more and more*" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Essentially, if we are on this side of heaven, we have unlimited room to grow.

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If we allow these virtues to abound, we will not be "*barren*" (v. 8). "*Barren*" is translated from the Greek, *argos*. BDAG defines the word as "pertaining to being unproductive, useless,

worthless.” It is used for speech that is useless or vain (“*idle word*,” Matthew 12:36), those who are doing nothing in contrast to having work to do (“*standing idle*,” Matthew 20:3, 6; widows who “*learn to be idle*,” 1 Timothy 5:13), and for the negative reputation of Cretans for being “*lazy gluttons*” (Titus 1:12). Often, Christians worry that they are not active enough. Peter’s answer to that concern is to always be growing in these virtues. You will always be useful and active!

Growing in these virtues will also prevent us from being “*unfruitful*” (v. 8). Since bearing fruit is an active matter, then being inactive will make bearing fruit impossible. Christ said we must bear fruit lest we be cut off and thrown into the fire (cf. John 15:1-8). A branch that is unfruitful is of no use. He also said we cannot bear any fruit without abiding in Him (cf. John 15:5). This fruitfulness by abounding in the virtues is “*in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 8). Such is the fuller knowledge discussed in previous lessons (*epignōsis* – “a greater participation by the ‘knower’ in the object ‘known,’ thus more powerfully influencing him,” VINE). When we apply Christ’s teaching through the Spirit, we are bearing fruit (cf. Galatians 5:22-23).

TO AVOID SHORTSIGHTEDNESS

“For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” (v. 9)

Some Christians may resent the idea that their lack of diligence in growth is indicative of their disinterest in, and corresponding lack of focus on Jesus, heaven, and the power of God’s grace, but it is precisely what such negligence shows. In fact, when Peter says such a one “*has forgotten*,” he uses a combination of two Greek words which mean more accurately “‘having received forgetfulness’; this man let somebody give him amnesia” (Lenski). W.E. Vine explains, “to receive as merely a self-prompted action.” Negligence in spiritual growth is not simply indicative of spiritual stagnation, but of a reversion toward looking at, and living for the things that will be dissolved (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13). What will such profit (cf. Mark 8:36)? When we are not looking above in pursuit of our King’s decree, and in anticipation of His glorious reward (cf. Colossians 3:1-4), then we are shortsighted, “*even to blindness*” (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

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Peter further characterizes the shortsightedness explaining the fundamental cause – “*having forgotten his purification from his former sins*” (v. 9, NASB). This forgetfulness is not literal amnesia, but a spiritual condition of the heart. It is not the inability to recollect the fact of one’s baptism in the past, but the abandonment of its very purpose and implications. The cleansing of old sins is

synonymous with “*having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*” (v. 4). This escape enables one to be a partaker of the divine nature (v. 4). Baptism is not an end, but a means to an end. In baptism, one’s sins are washed away, but he is born again to walk in newness of life (cf. Romans 6:4). Recognition of the implications of the cleansing of sins leads one to present themselves to righteous living (cf. Romans 6). Jesus’ blood has cleansed our conscience from dead

works in baptism so that we can live to serve God (cf. Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 3:21). Our purification by Christ was meant to make us *“His own special people, zealous for good works”* (Titus 2:14). We were not washed to turn back to our filth, but to continue progressing in Christ. However, there were some who had turned back, and were seeking to take others with them (cf. 2 Peter 2:18-22).

Ultimately, the failure in growth manifests a shortsightedness because the whole goal of our initial cleansing was to begin the process of transformation into the image of Christ. Christ has *“called us to his own glory and excellence”* (v. 3, ESV). This is what it means to be a partaker in the divine nature (v. 4). It is a participation with Christ in who He is (cf. Galatians 2:20). We were predestined in Christ to be conformed to His image (cf. Romans 8:29-30). This ultimately will occur in the resurrection, the redemption of our bodies (cf. Romans 8:23-25). However, it is a transformation process that begins now (cf. Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8; 1 John 3:1-3). If we wish to *“appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3:4), then we will seek to be with Him now by faith (cf. John 14:19-24).

TO MAKE MY CALL AND ELECTION SURE

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.” (v. 10)

It is the individual’s responsibility to *“be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless”* (2 Peter 3:14). The one who is barren, unfruitful, shortsighted, and has forgotten his cleansing will be found at Jesus’ coming at enmity with God (cf. James 4:4) and tainted with sin (cf. 2 Peter 2:20-22). Growth in grace is vital because it represents our responsibility for salvation. It is God who has called us to salvation by the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14) and elected us for salvation when we submitted to His terms of grace (cf. 1 Peter 1:2, 22-23). However, Peter says we must make that *“call and election sure.”*

“Sure” is the translation of *bebaios* which means “firm, steadfast, secure” (VINE). The opposite can be observed in the false teachers which Peter addresses. They speak of liberty but are slaves of corruption (cf. 2 Peter 2:18-19). If we are not diligent, we will be like those who have received God’s grace in vain (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1), or who thought they did much for the Lord but were iniquitous (cf. Matthew 7:21-23). We make our calling sure by walking worthy of it (cf. Ephesians 4:1). We make our election sure by living as those who belong to God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10).

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Peter describes the stability of the calling and election by saying *“if you do these things you will never stumble”* (v. 10). *“Stumble”* is the Greek, *ptaiō*, “to trip, i.e. (figuratively) to err, sin, fail (of salvation)” (STRONG). Many take this verse to mean if we are continuing to work on our faith and grow, we will not fall so as to lose our salvation in the end – apostatize. This is true, but Peter’s words provide a narrower meaning. *Ptaiō* is used four other times in the New Testament, all in

reference to sin in general, but never in reference to the final loss of salvation (cf. Romans 11:11; James 2:10; 3:2 [2x]). Peter is saying we will avoid sinning if we are abounding in these virtues. The Christian who is abiding in God's word will not sin (cf. 1 John 3:9; Psalm 119:11). Sin comes in when we lag in the increase of these virtues. As we grow in Christ, sin is fewer and further in between. Aiming toward maturity, and purification as He is pure (cf. 1 John 3:3) is how we will be found by Him *"without spot and blameless"* (2 Peter 3:14).

TO ENTER THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM

"For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (v. 11)

Lastly, the reason we need to grow in grace is because that is the condition of God opening wide the gates of heaven for us to enter. *"For so"* (NKJV) is translated *"for in this way"* in the New American Standard Bible; that is, by *"giving all diligence"* (v. 5) and adding to our faith. *"Supplied"* (v. 11) is from the same Greek word translated into *"giving"* (v. 5). If we supply diligence, God will supply entrance.

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The Holy Spirit makes sure to instill confidence. The verse does not merely say entrance will be supplied, but it will be supplied *"abundantly."* We will not *"barely make it."* We have every reason to be confident that we will reach heaven based on God's great grace, and our reception of it. Paul said, *"we are more than conquerors"*

(Romans 8:37). The Hebrew writer said, *"[Jesus] is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him"* (Hebrews 7:25). Thank God for His provision of grace in which we can grow to secure an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom!

LESSON 12 QUESTIONS

1. What are two major reasons the Christian must grow according to Peter's second epistle?
2. What can be said of the Christian who abounds in these virtues? (cf. 2 Peter 1:8)
3. Can a Christian ever reach a point where they have no more room to grow? Give scriptural support.
4. What does it mean to be "*barren*" and "*unfruitful*?" (v. 8)
5. What does negligence in spiritual growth indicate about a Christian's sight? (v. 9)
6. What does Peter say a nearsighted person has forgotten? (v. 9) What does this mean?
7. What will be made "*sure*" by our growth? (v. 10)
8. The Christian who makes his call and election sure is given confidence to avoid what? (v. 10)
9. What will God supply us if we grow in grace? (v. 11)