

## *A Study of Second Peter*

### How to Live a Life with Spiritual Impact (2 Peter 1:3-11)

“Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride. Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair. Knowing Jesus Christ strikes the balance because He shows us both God and our own wretchedness.” ~ B. Pascal

#### I. Introduction

Peter wastes no time in addressing the heart of this epistle—the call for spiritual maturity. He will first note that our spiritual maturity is rooted in the provisions the Lord has lavished on His people (1:3-4). Based upon these resources, God’s people need to actively pursue spiritual maturity (1:5-9). In so doing, Christians await a glorious future (1:10-11).

#### II. Spiritual Maturity in the Life of the Believer (1:3-11)

##### A. The Basis for Spiritual Maturity (vv. 3-4)

v. 3 - In verse 2, Peter prayed that they may experience grace and peace as they grow in the knowledge of God. He now elaborates on the basis for his prayer. Observe the following:

- *The power of God is given to believers—a power that is sufficient and all-encompassing for Christian maturity.* This power is accomplished through a personal relationship with the Lord.

“called us by his own glory and goodness” - This phrase refers to Christ’s splendor and majesty. One scholar writes, “when Christ calls people to himself, they perceive the beauty and loveliness of his moral character. His character becomes exceedingly attractive to them, and they trust God for their salvation . . . believers will be morally transformed, but the foundation for their transformation is the grace of God” (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 293).

- *The Lord has granted and ensured glorious promises for His people.* “The promises Peter has in mind are not qualified . . . he is probably thinking of those many promises in the Old Testament about a new era of salvation and blessing that God would bring into being through his Messiah. Christians now experience the fulfillment of those promises and thus have the remarkable privilege of enjoying intimacy with the God of the universe” (Moo, *Jude & 2 Peter*, 43).

The purpose of these promises is that one becomes a “partaker of divine nature”. This phrase indicates a moral transformation; it does not allude to an individual becoming a god. The immediate context is clear—growing spiritually allows us to escape the corruption that is in this world.

“The Christian Gospel in the first instance does not ask us to do anything; it first of all proclaims and announces to us what God has done for us” (D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *2 Peter*, 23).

## B. The Appeal for Spiritual Maturity (vv. 5-9)

Rather than seeing these eight virtues in a series of ascending steps, Peter utilizes a popular literary device in his day to simply highlight various virtues that are essential for the Christian life. Such a construction does place emphasis on the concluding item, in this case, “love” (see Rom 5:3-5). Note that “Peter’s ethical list is set within the inclusion of knowing God and Christ (1:3-4, 8)” (Greene, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 191).

Observe Peter’s list of virtues that are vital for spiritual maturity:

- *Faith*. The term indicates faithfulness or reliability (Gal 5:22).
- *Virtue/Excellence*. The term means a person with “merit within a social context” (BAGD, 130).
- *Knowledge*. This is a relational knowledge that leads to obedience.
- *Self-control*. This word conveys the notion of personal restraint over emotions and desires (1 Cor 7:9).
- *Perseverance/Endurance*. Rather than enduring persecution, Peter is referring to moral endurance amid the pressures of temptation (Rom 2:7).
- *Godliness*. This virtue was highlighted in verse 3.
- *Brotherly love*. Peter is referencing the relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ.
- *Unselfish love*. This crowning jewel of Christian virtue serves as the means by which all the virtues are held together (see 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5-6; Col 1:4-5).

v. 8 - Peter highlights that these virtues are present, to some degree, in all believers. It is not an issue of whether we have them or not; it is an issue of whether or not we are growing in these areas.

If we are growing in these areas, then our intimacy with Christ increases. Failure to grow would imply that the virtues are ultimately not present. Moral neutrality does not exist (see the Parable of the Sower in Matt 13:22).

v. 9 - “blind . . . nearsighted” - The phrase seems to reserve the order: “nearsighted and blind;” however, the idea is that “shortsightedness” clarifies in what sense people become blind (see Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 152). Such Christians forget what the Lord has done for them. Their actions resemble unconverted people as they live lives that display ingratitude to God for the forgiveness of their sins.

## C. The Goal of Spiritual Maturity (vv. 10-11)

v. 10 - This verse raises the following two questions:

- *Question 1: Is Peter indicating that our salvation is dependent upon our actions?* The term “sure” is a legal term denoting that which is confirmed or ratified and indicates that

the guarantee stems not from the recipient, but from the one who gives the promise. While those whom God has chosen will always, because of the Holy Spirit, respond to God and confirm their election/calling, they are to live according to their calling. As James highlighted in his epistle, faith without works is dead (James 2:20). “God chooses us and ensures that we get to heaven. We need to choose God and live godly lives so that we can reach heaven” (Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 60).

- *Question #2: Is Peter stating that we can reach a state of sinlessness this side of eternity?* The immediate context argues otherwise. The call to “make every effort” in verse 5 indicates that the spiritual life is an ongoing process. Rather, Peter is speaking in soteriological terms in verse 10. In other words, the “stumbling into sin” refers to eternal ruin, as seen in the life of the false teachers (2:1, 14, 18).

v. 11 - Once again Peter returns to the topic of God's benefaction (vv. 3-4). This promise of an eternal dwelling place with the Lord will become an issue in the letter since the heretics deny the reality of a future judgment (3:3-7).

The future “welcome” indicates a blessing far more wonderful than anything we deserve!

### III. The Intersect

- A. We need to make sure that we are indeed followers of Jesus.
- B. Spiritual growth is not optional for followers of Jesus—it is a daily imperative!
- C. If we claim to be a believer, then we must use all means at our disposal to cultivate the Spirit's work in our lives (e.g., Bible study, prayer, Christian worship and fellowship, accountability). Select one of the eight virtues listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 that demands your attention. What specific steps can you take this week to grow in this area?

“There's a difference between knowing God and knowing about God. When you truly know God, you have energy to serve him, boldness to share him, and contentment in him.” ~ J. I. Packer

**For further thought . . .**

*Based upon our study this morning, I invite you to spend some additional time this week reflecting on the following:*

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24 and note what this passage teaches concerning knowing God.

Our knowledge of God needs to be ever growing. What have you learned about God recently?

For further study, you may want to read J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*. This Christian classic provides helpful insight into the topic of knowing our Lord.