

A Balanced Growth

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn now for a few moments together to 2nd Peter, as we continue with our studies in 2nd Peter, and it's at chapter 1, verse 5.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Especially verses 5 to 7.

As we've been seeing earlier in the chapter, Peter is dealing with some of the characteristics of what these people are as Christians, before he comes to give them these directions.

We've seen that he begins with what God's work is, as that has already taken place in their lives, and how, as last time we saw, his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

[1 : 15] And that, of course, is where you always go to define what a Christian is. What is a believer? What is a Christian? What is a person who, you could say, is a man or a woman or a child of God?

You don't begin, it's a person who does this and a person who does that. You begin with what is most basic and most foundational. It's a person in whom God has begun a work of grace.

And then things follow on from that with regard to what they do and what they are required to do by God. And that's the same here. That's what he started with. And now he's saying in verse 5, For this very reason, then, make every effort to supplement your faith.

In other words, for this very reason follows on from what he's just said. Because of what God has done. Because of what God has given you by his divine power. Because of what his divine power has already achieved in your life.

Seeing that as the case. Now, add or supplement to your faith. And then he gives us a list of these characteristics or components of Christian character.

[2 : 24] It's, I suppose, a bit like, you could illustrate it, a bit like, supposing you yourself had never driven a car. You didn't have a car.

You didn't know what it was like to drive yourself. And then one of these days, somebody, very kind benefactor, came along and said to you, Here's a car.

It's brand new. It's never been driven. It's yours. It's paid. Absolutely yours. Everything in it's been tested.

There it is. It belongs to you. I'm giving it to you. That's what God has said. He has given by his divine power. He's granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

What do you then do if somebody comes along to you? If you're in that position, having never driven, having never owned a car, and all of a sudden, here's somebody saying, This is my gift to you. First thing you have to do, of course, apart from accepting it, is that you learn to drive.

[3 : 25] And you get to know how you drive. You get to know the various parts of the car and how they function. And then you're concerned to look after the car. You have to put petrol in it.

You have to keep filling it up. You have to check that it's okay every so often for oil and for water. If you're going down the A9 and you press the washer on your windscreen washer button and just a little dribble comes out and you realize it's empty.

It's not the car's fault. It's not the person who's given it to you. You just haven't looked after it. You haven't added to the matter of it being given to you. You haven't built upon the basic gift that you got in the first place.

And of course you add to that various other things that you need to do. You need to service it to keep it in good condition. And you even need to wash it every so often. Please don't look at mine when you go out.

These are the things that you need to do having been given in those circumstances in the illustration. And that's what it is spiritually as well. God is saying I have given you by my divine power all things necessary that pertain to life and godliness.

[4 : 36] Now then for this very reason supplement your faith with virtue. Your faith has brought this into your possession. I have brought this by my power to pass.

Now that's your responsibility to add to that. To go on with your life. To build on what God has begun. Can't do it of course without God.

But what Peter is doing here is giving us what we can call the need for a balanced growth in Christian character. That's the first point. The need for a balanced growth in Christian character. Because as God has done this for us it means our life has been changed. He's granted us by his divine power all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him. By which he's granted us these great and precious promises. And now that we've been set on our way as Christians. What is it to be a Christian?

[5 : 39] What is a Christian character comprised of? What are the things that make up a Christian character? What are the main components of it? And how do we need to use them?

Well the one thing that we will need to notice as we go through these various components or this list that he's given. Is that what he's doing is giving us a balanced view of things.

He's actually providing us a view of balanced growth in Christian character. And that is so, so important. We mustn't think that these seven components that he gives us.

That the first one just leads on to the next one. And when you have the next one it leads on to the next one. In a kind of unbroken chain that way where each of these links leads on to the next one. And you've left the previous ones behind. It's not like that at all. The seven actually exist together at the same time. And are to be pursued at the same time.

[6 : 37] Yes they have a relationship with each other. In fact we'll see that the interaction between them is very important. For example the knowledge as we'll see in a minute as to what it means.

But knowledge is obviously something that interacts with or affects or comes into contact with self-control. With godliness.

You can't have these without the knowledge. And the knowledge as it relates to them. Just like the other parts relate to each other. It is a balanced growth.

It's important that it's a balanced growth. Because it's something. The words that Peter is using here are. You can illustrate it various ways.

You could illustrate it by what you would put into medicine or a perfume. You have different components. Different elements that go toward it.

[7 : 35] But if you put too much of one as against too little of the other. You're going to end up with a mess. You might even end up with something dangerous. Or you could say. Think about an orchestra trained to play one of the famous symphonies.

The symphony itself is amazing. Because it has all of these musical parts for all of these instruments. And the composer has worked out perfectly. As far as possible. On the music score. How loudly they're to be played. When each of them come in. Where they play together. Where individual instruments play on their own. And it all comes together. It all belongs together.

It's not that each of them plays just by itself. And accidentally it makes a decent sound. And of course it's the same when you come to the orchestra playing it.

They have to follow that score. They have to play the way it's intended. And if one all of a sudden takes it on himself. Just to completely outdo and abandon the script. And uses whatever.

[8 : 38] A trumpet or violin or cello. So loudly that it drowns out many of the other parts. Well obviously it's not balanced. It's the same in the Christian life. It's not all about knowledge.

It's not all about the other things there on their own. It's not all about steadfastness or perseverance. It's not all about brotherly affection. You put all of them together.

And as you keep them together. And as they grow together. And as you attend to each of them.

And all of them together. Then you come into this wonderful balance that Peter has given us.

In terms of Christian character. How we grow individually and collectively and together. As Christians. Now the word that he's using here.

reactions.

Everything that you set about doing. Do it energetically. Don't wait to be prodded into it. Don't wait for time to go by and then you realize, well, I've spent the whole day and haven't really done much for the Lord. I know we've all got days like that. What Peter is saying is, we shouldn't have days like that.

And whatever we do for the Lord, it's not just talking about sitting with your Bible, praying, all of the things that we have to do in that respect as well. This is really including all that we have to do every day as we do it for the Lord, whether we're at school, whether we're sitting in the study, whether we're visiting people, whether we're actually out in the community, whatever it is.

As a Christian, he's saying, add to your faith energy. An energetic commitment to living as a Christian.

[15:59] And then, to virtue, or to that energy, knowledge. Now, we've seen knowledge earlier on, but this is actually not as precise or as confined as the knowledge that you mentioned in verse 3.

Remember, we saw that as very specific and knowledge of God, a knowledge of Christ as Savior. But this knowledge, this word here, is much wider in its meaning.

Add to, supplement, contribute to, abundantly, to your faith, energy, and energy to that add knowledge.

The knowledge that you get by thinking through things, meditating, reading, listening, praying, discussion, fellowships with other Christians, knowledge.

So important, and so important we use all the means God has given us to actually extend that knowledge, to enlarge that knowledge, for that knowledge base to increase.

[17:09] Think of your mind as a database. Think of it as something that needs to be added to every day, regularly, so that that database increases. Something that you find stored on police computers, for example, or any computer like that, medical computers, where records are added to it all the time, where the base grows and increases, and where you can see the signs of it developing, and the contents of it improving all the time.

That's knowledge in the spiritual sense too. God is saying, let this be so if you give energy, so that along with your energy, you have this knowledge.

Grow in knowledge. Indeed, that's the way he finishes this wonderful little epistle, isn't it? But when he's saying, don't be like your opponents, don't be like those who are ungodly, grow in grace, and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Because you see, for one thing, here's one place, for example, where there's an interaction between these components, because the energy that we are to put into our Christian life, and our exercise of these other things, has to be an energy that's directed properly.

Controlled energy, if you like. And it's controlled by and large by knowledge. I think Peter probably was here thinking of himself.

[18:39] himself. He was energetic. You read about him in the Gospels, after the Lord called him to follow him and made him a disciple. He was so energetic.

He was so energetic even above his fellow disciples. So often pushing himself to the front and being determined that he would do this and he would do that and whoever else would do this, he would not do this.

And coming to the fore to sometimes just blurt out things, sometimes without even knowing what he was saying fully. What did he lack? And how was it different with the Peter you read in the book of Acts?

Well it's very largely to do with knowledge. The more he gained in his knowledge of the Lord and of himself and of the world about him and of the word of God, the more his energy was controlled and properly directed and the more his zeal was properly shaped into the needs that he had himself and the needs of the world and the church that he was a leader in.

It's great to have energy, it's absolutely indispensable he said, spiritual energy, vitality, see that you've got it he's saying, but don't have it without knowledge, don't abandon the knowledge part, don't leave that as if it's not important.

[20:03] And sadly that's all too often how Christians, and I'm concerned especially for the younger Christians here, that they'll be taking some of this with them and really applying it to themselves.

Of course it's for the older ones too, but when you're inexperienced, that when you listen to so much of what you have in the world today that passes for Christian books, a lot of it really discounts knowledge or puts it at a minimum.

You really don't have to go to the extent of reading books on theology and you don't have to go to the extent of attending meetings like this where we can go a bit deeper into the teaching of the Bible.

You don't really need to apply yourself that way to that extent to gain all of that knowledge. Well, Peter is saying, of course you do. If you want to be really armed properly against the enemy, if you want to be really equipped to go out in the name of Christ as you must to witness for him, if you want to be in a position to use what his divine power has given us, you need the knowledge.

You need the increase in knowledge. And that's why it's to preachers of the gospel, to ministers in congregations, to elders as well, it's so gratifying to see people like yourselves who are committed to grow in knowledge as in other things, who want to learn more about Christ and about yourself and about salvation and about how you go about various things as a Christian and what a Christian character is.

[21 : 37] Energy, knowledge, and then self-control. And self-control is regularly in the New Testament.

It's not absent from the old, but Paul's letters are full of it as well. Because it's one of the things that marks a Christian as distinct from the world.

Remember Peter's writing here to people who are Christians surrounded by those he calls the ungodly. And if there's one thing that marks people who are ungodly, it's a lack of self-control. A lack of self-discipline. Of course, when you put God aside and when you put the Bible aside, then you come to have your own mind as the God that you follow.

And that's what really matters. What matters to me is what matters. And however I choose to live, even if Christians say that's not a controlled way of life spiritually and morally, never mind that.

[22 : 41] It's my life. I'll control it the way I think best. The Bible calls that a lack of self-control. And how much you do find that, if it was true in the days of Peter, when he wrote this letter, it's certainly true of the society you and I live in.

Why do people make decisions in favor of three parent babies, of same-sex marriage, of all the other things that have distinguished us over the past few years as a nation, as a society, of people, as those in charge of our governments have actually brought forward again and again?

Why is that? Why is life as it is out there with so much packed into people's lives of promiscuity, of multi-partner relationships, of so many other things you can think of immorally in an immoral life?

Why is that? Because lives are ungodly. And because an ungodly life, life lacks self-discipline, self-control.

What Christ gives you when he comes into your life, when God gives you all things that pertain, you notice, to life and godliness, you will not have godliness without self-control.

[24 : 12] And it doesn't matter what passes for the name of Christian thinking, if it is contrary to what the Bible says must be a matter of self-control, self-discipline, in the area of sexual morality, in the area of personal relationships, it doesn't matter which area you look at morally and ethically, where the Bible says that is out for you as a Christian.

You've got to control yourself. If you come across teaching that says, but this is what Christians think nowadays, you have to say, I don't care what Christians think nowadays.

I know what the Lord thinks. I know what his word says. And I know what happened in my own life. When I was rescued from ungodliness, it wasn't so that I would carry that with me into a Christian life.

It's so that I'd put it behind me and put it beneath my feet and say, I'm done with being ungodly. God has given us by his power all things that pertain to life and ungodliness.

You see, that's involving very much at the heart of things, self-control. All our sinful appetites, or what the Bible calls in the old language, which is still very much a language and terms that we should use.

[25 : 46] Lust. The world out there is marked by lust. Greed for money, for material things.

Lust in relationships. Lust in all sorts of ways that you see it. It's really in very much the essence of the tenth commandment, which in many ways infiltrates and goes right through all the rest.

What is the tenth commandment? You shall not covet. You shall not covet.

It doesn't matter if it's your neighbor's wife, or your neighbor's goods, or your neighbor's house, whatever it is, the commandment says, you shall not covet. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not covet. covetousness is really at the heart of the absence of self-control. If you find a person that's covetous, it's almost certain that that person at the same time will lack self-control. [26 : 57] And that's what Peter is saying. Self-control is part of the characteristics or one of the components that makes up Christian character.

So let's just leave it at that. We could say more on that. But we need to try and finish the other. They're all very much together in the package that Peter gives. Virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness.

Everybody's writing to people who are going through tough times. Times of real challenge and times of persecution. Times when it is really difficult to live as I believe and be true to your God. Also it is today if we are really true to our God, if we're speaking up for him, if we're noticed as people who believe the Bible, who want to carry the power of his truth into all areas of human life. It's not going to be easy. It's going to be tough times, maybe tougher times ahead. And we're tempted in many respects in that to not really hold out or not to go on as vigorously or as energetically as we've seen at the beginning of the study.

[28 : 05] What is it that lies, this word really is the same as perseverance in essence, steadfastness is really just in many ways perseverance onwards. Why do Christians persevere?

I know it's because God is working in us and because he's given us inwardly in our hearts this desire to go onwards even against temptation but what is it particularly as a consideration that makes Christians persevere throughout all the difficulties of life.

One thing apart from honoring God in this life but one thing in the future. What is it? it's the return of Christ.

You look through all these New Testament epistles and the teaching of these apostles and this one is no different because when it comes to chapter three the scoffing of the ungodly is saying where is the promise of his coming?

This is nonsense you're talking about this day of the Lord and Savior. It's been a long time since he was here in the world. It's surely mistaken to think that he's going to come back again after all of this time.

[29 : 16] What's the delay? What's it about? Here are the scoffers and the Christian is tempted by that to slacken, to almost give up but then you look at things and you say well this is the word of my Lord and the thing that I'm most looking forward to in all this world is to meet him, to see him as he is, to be there and to see him when he returns because when he returns he's going to put everything right into its rightful place.

And however chaotic this world may seem and however much it may seem that it's just following its own devices I suppose in a sense it is but when the Lord returns the Lord will say to every individual, to every evil influence, to everyone that is good and to everyone that is bad, this is your place, you go there, you occupy that space, that's your eternal dwelling, that's where you're going to be forever more and this will be your state whether it's lost or saved, comfort or torment, but the Lord will do it.

Nobody's going to escape. many people say in this life that people have committed atrocities and then not been brought to justice in this world people will say well they've got off with it, life's not fair. Well you can only say that if you really don't believe in God, if you don't believe in the return of Christ and because when he comes back as the third chapter shows abundantly that's what will happen, that's why he's saying there in the third chapter, this is what we're waiting for, this is why we're pushing on, this is what enables us to persevere through the difficulties because we know what's coming and we know who's coming and we know what he has for us and we know what he's going to do for us and do with us as his people.

We are expecting as he says quoting the Old Testament, a new heavens and a new earth. And boy is that worth persevering for because that will fix everything that we've ever had wrong in this life in this world.

[31 : 49] Steadfastness, the return of Jesus looks forward from steadfastness that's what we look forward to, that's why we persevere because we know that what we have now in this world and its conditions is not how things will be forever.

Then you've got godliness. Well, godliness, we came across it earlier, everything that pertains to life and godliness. Now he picks it up here again, a godly life, which includes our relationship with other people and even with the world, but he is emphasizing here that a godly life, a life of holiness, a life of Christ-likeness really begins with our relationship to god.

Godliness is life in relation to god. That's why the word god is in it. Godliness will not be godly unless we begin with god, unless we put god first and basic to all our relationships, to all our doings. So he's saying that's one of the very necessary components. It's not something that comes in after steadfastness. Remember, all of these are held together at the same time.

This wonderful combined, orchestrated, symphonic, harmonic, balanced Christian character. [33 : 22] brotherly affection. You've probably got in your fridge, something that I quite like myself, on my oat cakes, biscuits, Philadelphia.

If you like it, maybe some of you don't, but Philadelphia is a great word. It's not just cheese. It's there in the New Testament. It actually means brotherly love or brotherly affection. Delphos is the Greek for brother, philos the Greek for love or brotherly love. There it is together. There it is built together into one wonderful word, brotherly love, brotherly affection.

And you know the amazing thing is, scholars tell us that this word is not used anywhere else outside of a family context. Let me put it this way.

It was a word generally that was used of families or within family relationships within a family. It stands to reason it's brotherly love, it's family love, love for other members of the family.

[34 : 29] And the word written has never been found on any documents anywhere outside of it being applied strictly to a family except in the Bible.

Because the Bible takes it out of its ordinary family context and it applies it to the church, to the people of God. In other words, the people reading this first would have been quite surprised, maybe even shocked at having this word which they had always associated with family life, with home life, with relationships in a loving family.

And here it is, and Peter is saying, this is something that belongs to you as Christians. Christians. Because you are a family, you're God's family. And as God's family, one of the components of Christian character is brotherly affection, brotherly love, Christian love for one another.

And it shows, really, what it shows in using the word in this context is something like this, that the relationship that Christians have with each other is actually above any other relationships in this world.

I'm not talking about relationships with Christ just now, I'm just talking about human relationships. The relationship that Christians have with each other in Christ is above every other type of relationship in human terms that you find anywhere else.

[36 : 03] Because they're God's family. They have been given by God, by his divine power, something that is so immensely precious and exquisite that it surpasses anything else on the human level you find anywhere in relationships, anywhere in the world, any time in history.

Christian brotherly love. I was sad then that at so many times in the history of the church, we failed in it.

But it is for Peter so important. It is for you and for me if we're going to be a uniform in our Christian character.

Brotherly affection and finally there is love. A word that means love in the widest possible sense. love for God, love for fellow Christians, although that's Philadelphia particularly, but love even as far as your enemies as Jesus taught.

Love wherever you can exercise love as a Christian. That's what he's saying is part of your Christian growth and character. love for Christian love in the widest sense.

[37 : 33] Isn't it interesting that the list begins with faith and ends in love? And that's significant. what he says is for this very reason then make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.

And then he ends by saying and love. Why is it significant? Because as faith is the joining grace that joins you to Christ, love is the crowning grace that covers all the others, that keeps them together intact.

And within this wonderful parcel, within this wonderful confines of faith and of love, Peter has packed in these other components of Christian growth.

It begins with faith, it ends with love, and in between you have these vital components as if he's saying, well, you have to begin with faith and you have to end with love as the supreme covering

grace.

But you have to include all these in between and along with them for your Christian character to develop. What is a Christian? Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian?

[39 : 04] Why should we think a Christian is special? Not because anything in ourselves. Christian is a person into whose life God has come with power.

A person God has changed. A person in whom God has begun to work. A person to whom God has given all things that pertain to life and godliness. a person now charged with building on that these components that develop his Christian character.

A person that's concerned and required to do that in relationship with other Christians and to grow together as the body of Christ.

May God bless his word to us. Let's pray. Our gracious God we give thanks for the way in which your word is so full and complete in the teaching that it gives us in that relationship that your people have with you and that they have to one another.

We pray Lord your forgiveness for the way in which our familiarity with many of these terms means that we so infrequently look into them with detail and with study and with meditation.

[40 : 24] We thank you for the opportunities that you give us to look into these great components that pertain to the life of your people. We ask Lord that you would grant us that daily grace that would enable us to use all that you have given us for life and godliness so that we may indeed supplement and provide abundantly these components energetically and steadfastly and perseveringly and in faith and in love and in self-control.

We pray these things Lord for your glory's sake in Jesus our Lord. Amen.