



EFFECTIVE, FRUITFUL CHRISTIANS

WEEK 13
08.27.17

FOCUS VERSE

II Peter 1:8

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

LESSON TEXT

II Peter 1:1-8

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.



FOCUS THOUGHT

We become mature Christians as we develop the qualities of virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Thriving in Christ

What is it that empowers a Christian to become an effective and fruitful believer? The answer is not too complex. It is simply a matter of abiding in Jesus Christ. When we abide in Him, we will discover the abundant life that Christ indicated God desires to give us. Only then are we thriving in Christ, abounding in Him.

In his book titled *Thrive: Digging Deep, Reaching Out*, Mark Hall stated, “Abound is the verb form of abundantly, the word Jesus uses in John 10:10 to describe the thriving life He intends for us. To abound in thanksgiving is to purposely direct the overflow of our root

system into other people’s lives. The only fruitful Christian is the one who abides (hangs in there) with Jesus. We can’t abound (thrive) unless we abide in Christ. When we do, He produces the fruit.”

To abound is to thrive, and to thrive is “to grow vigorously : flourish or succeed” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). To thrive does not suggest weak, anemic, or barely surviving. Rather, it points toward strength and victory. Thriving in the Christian life results from simply remaining connected to the life-giving vine—Jesus Christ. If we abide in Christ and abound, He will produce the fruit through our lives.

OUTLINE

I. EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

- A. Salvation Is a Gift of God
- B. We Are Partakers of His Divine Nature

II. GROWING IN GRACE

- A. Virtue
- B. Knowledge
- C. Temperance
- D. Patience
- E. Godliness
- F. Brotherly Kindness
- G. Charity

III. BECOMING MATURE CHRISTIANS

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

In a sense, this quarter has been a study of basic mathematics—subtraction, addition, multiplication, and division. We have studied disciplines, which involve the subtraction of carnal behaviors and the addition of practices that help form us spiritually. Ultimately,

the practice of the many disciplines we have considered will produce within individuals the multiplication of spiritual fruit and will greatly limit, if not eliminate division within the body of Christ. What is the end result? For one thing, it will ensure we are becoming the effective, fruitful Christians God designed for us to become.

Before individuals can produce spiritual fruit, they must experience spiritual birth and spiritual growth. Infants are incapable of reproduction; immature trees cannot bear fruit. The process of reproduction and fruit bearing is reserved for the mature. So it is with individuals; they can bear spiritual fruit only after experiencing new birth in Christ and pursuing the processes of growth in Christ and His body, the church. This is not necessarily a lengthy endeavor for Christians, but it is an active one.

While on one hand bearing fruit is reserved for the mature, on the other hand all healthy, growing believers should bear fruit. Fruit is the evidence of growth and maturity. Bearing fruit is a normal and expected process as Jesus illustrated by means of a parable.

“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” (Luke 13:6–9).

As Christians we have the opportunity and responsibility to experience a vibrant and growing relationship with Jesus Christ daily. This is the kind of life that will result in the production of spiritual fruit and a life of effectiveness for the cause of the kingdom of God.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

Peter began his second letter by referencing the great salvation experience shared by all believers (II Peter 1:1–4). He made several subtle but definite comments that pointed to our salvation experience:

1. Like precious faith received through God’s righteousness
2. The multiplication of grace and peace through knowing God
3. Encounter with the divine power of God
4. God’s supplying our lives with all things having to do with life and godliness
5. God’s calling us to glory and virtue
6. The reception of great and precious promises
7. Opportunity to partake of the divine nature
8. An escape from the corruption of this world

These all refer to the opportunities we have been given through the redemptive experience we have in Christ Jesus. Before we can grow in the grace of God and produce fruit, we have to experience the new birth, which is a great and precious gift from God that allows us to partake of the divine nature.

A. Salvation Is a Gift of God

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Numerous verses of Scripture throughout the New Testament reveal that salvation is a gift from God. It comes through divine favor that one cannot possibly purchase, earn, or deserve; it is a gift.

God was determined in Creation to have people who would, by their own free will, choose to love and serve Him. Still, in His foreknowledge God knew individuals would fall to temptation and sin, so He already had a plan in place: the Lamb of God who would atone for the sins of mankind.

“Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (I Peter 1:18–20).

Jesus Christ was not crucified prior to Creation, but He was already in God’s redemptive planning. Consequently, when Eve partook of the forbidden fruit in the Garden, God was prepared with His eternal plan for redemption. He gave the first hint of human salvation in Genesis 3:15 when He spoke of a bruised heel and a crushed head—the judgment He would bring against the serpent, that is, Satan.

B. We Are Partakers of His Divine Nature

This glorious gift of redemption is unquestionably an exceeding great, precious promise! The gift of salvation allows humans to partake of the divine nature of God.

Partaking of the divine nature does not eliminate the innate human nature of mankind; it only gives us the power to discipline

and control the human inclinations and tendencies. Jesus promised, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Spirit empowers believers both in the ability to make right choices and in the capacity to be witnesses for Christ.

As believers faithfully live by the Holy Spirit’s empowerment, they experience the divine nature and through it will subdue human temptations, control human frailties, and receive divine strength. The result in every believer’s life will be continual spiritual growth by the grace of God.

II. GROWING IN GRACE

In our march toward full Christian maturity, Peter mentioned seven specific elements believers should diligently add to their faith.

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (II Peter 1:5–7).

While we cannot be saved by our works, human diligence and effort is essential to genuine spiritual growth in Christ.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8–10).

Notice the progression of Paul’s words to the believers in Ephesus: (1) We are saved by God’s grace through faith; (2) it is not of our own abilities but is a gift from God; and (3) as God’s people redeemed by grace, we are ordained unto good works. These stated good works are not capable of effecting our redemption in Christ, but they are both vital

and necessary. While it is God’s work that redeems us, it is our work that establishes cooperation with the Holy Spirit in maintaining that redemptive relationship and in preparing us to experience divine spiritual growth—and ultimately, the production of spiritual fruit. The seven vital qualities Peter mentioned will not appear suddenly without cause; human effort is necessary in order to add them.

A. Virtue

Believers are to add virtue to their faith. What is virtue? Virtue has to do with moral goodness or excellence as exhibited by one’s modesty and purity.

In Peter’s lifetime, moral depravity was all too common in the wider cultures surrounding the holy lands. For example, Roman and Hellenistic cultures devolved into self-gratification, hedonism, and sexual immorality. This is evident both in a study of their histories as well as archeological discoveries. It is not surprising that these dominant cultures of the day were morally corrupted, for it is the path of unbridled human nature. Sadly, it appears every culture, given time, will erode eventually, diminish, and succumb to deterioration, especially with regard to its morals. History is replete with evidence of this continual human decline.

Only empowerment of the Holy Ghost can successfully protect individuals from this usual path of moral decline. However, God will not force His redeemed people to live morally. They still are individuals who have been given the gift of free will; they must choose whether they will follow the path of morality. Human will, initiative, and discipline are necessary. For believers, that involves adding virtue to their faith. Further, Peter recognized diligence would be essential in successfully achieving this moral addition, as well as the addition of the other six qualities he mentioned.

B. Knowledge

Peter went on to encourage the addition of knowledge. Moral excellence is good and necessary, but without knowledge it becomes only a human discipline void of eternal value. In other words, being a good and moral individual will not initiate salvation. Some moral people will be lost eternally because they

failed to receive God's gift of redemption, and individuals cannot experience salvation through or on the basis of their good works.



The word *knowledge* is translated from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “knowing (the act), i.e. (by implication) knowledge. . . . knowledge signifies in general intelligence, understanding; the general knowledge of Christian religion; the deeper more perfect and enlarged knowledge of this religion . . . esp. of things lawful and unlawful for Christians; moral wisdom, such as is seen in right living” (Strong’s Concordance).

Knowledge then adds wisdom to morality so that right living is not based on following legalistic codes but based on wise, intentional efforts to profoundly please God in one's choices and lifestyle.

C. Temperance

As one studies through this list of seven elements for healthy spiritual growth, the progressive pattern of the list soon becomes clear: each one builds upon the previous one. That is not to suggest they do not exist or function separately; rather, it reveals how they work cooperatively to progressively build strong, spiritual health within a person.

Peter stated that we should add temperance to our knowledge. Knowledge of God and His Word is essential, but only knowing the Word of God will not effect salvation or spiritual growth within an individual. The person must submit to the Word, embrace its truths, and obey its precepts.

The essential idea of the word *temperance* in the context of II Peter 1:6 has to do with self-control. One of the definitions of the Greek word is “self-control (the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, esp. his sensual appetites)” (Strong’s Concordance). The progression is already becoming clear that believers are to exercise virtue (moral excellence) as guided and supported by knowledge (biblical understanding) and strengthened by temperance (self-control, especially of one’s passions).

If Peter's list of the three elements covered thus far seems to be weighty and challenging to a person, that individual may need the next one mentioned in verse 6—patience.

D. Patience

Patience is probably one of the most needed virtues of all. The Greek word for *patience* is *hypomone*, which Strong’s Concordance defines as “cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy:—enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting).” Patience, or the lack of patience, influences and affects every area and dimension of a person's life, even for Christians. After all, it is the one characteristic mentioned by which we are to “possess” our souls (Luke 21:19). In other words, patience has the power to stabilize and anchor our redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ, and the lack of it can threaten our very lives, both physically and spiritually.



“Two frogs fell into a tub of cream. One looked at the high sides of the tub which were too difficult to crawl over and said, ‘It is hopeless.’ So he resigned himself to death, relaxed, and sank to the bottom. The other frog determined to keep swimming as long as he could. ‘Something might happen,’ he said. He kept kicking and churning, and finally he found himself on a solid platform of butter and jumped to safety” (Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes, Robert Morgan).

E. Godliness

Peter continued to build onto his progressive chain of additives for the faith of a Christian: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, and godliness. As believers build upon their faith and develop a state of patience, they are poised to develop in the area of reverence and respect for the Almighty. The Greek word for *godliness* is *eusebeia*, which Strong’s Concordance defines as “reverence, respect; piety towards God, godliness.” As individuals

continue to grow in Christian character, their reverence and respect for God continues to increase. This involves one's entire attitude and frame of mind toward God.

As we draw nearer to God, He draws nearer to us (James 4:8). As the distance between God and us narrows, we reach a place of complete awe similar to that experienced by Isaiah: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). Godliness is an attitude of nearness to the holiness of God that evokes awe, godly fear, respect, and reverence for Him.

As individuals continue to grow in Christian character, their reverence and respect for God continues to increase.

F. Brotherly Kindness

The closer we draw to God, the more we sense and exhibit sincere love for others. This response should be no mystery, however, for God is love (I John 4:8), and there is evidently nothing dearer to Him than His children. He loves every person intensely; therefore, the more we become like Him, the more love we have for others. How can we love God and hate our "brother" (I John 4:20)? It is no wonder Jesus said our love for one another would give evidence to our being Jesus' disciple. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Believers are to add "brotherly kindness" to their godliness (I Peter 1:7). "Brotherly kindness" in the King James Version is translated from the Greek word *philadelphia*, a familiar Greek word for love. *Strong's Concordance*

defines the word as "brotherly love (kindness), love of the brethren."

G. Charity

With the addition of charity to brotherly love, we reach the pinnacle of Peter's admonition for a progression of spiritual growth. It is befitting that at the top of this tower of truth is charity, or love (Greek, *agape*). The Greek word *agape* describes the highest form of love one can experience. Further, it is so godlike it is evidently impossible to fully exhibit it apart from God's empowerment. *Agape* is sacrificial love, love that thinks not of itself but only of the recipient. Such love does not come naturally to humans, who are by nature self-centered, self-seeking, and self-focused. However, the love of God within the hearts of believers empowers them by the Spirit to love others as He loved us—sacrificially and supremely.

The Greek word *agapao* is the verb form of *agape*. The unabridged version of *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* points out several aspects of this word for love that reveal its nature as the highest form of love. In Greek, there were at least three words to convey the various aspects and kinds of love, unlike our English language in which there is only one word. In English, we may express our love for God, for a spouse, for a pet, or even for a meal. "I love your recipe for lasagna!" Obviously, those expressions of love are not equal. Surely our love of a meal is not equivalent to our love for God!

The Greeks, in their philosophical nature, developed different words for different kinds of love. Some of the words do not appear in Scripture, such as *eros*, sexual passion, from which we get the word *erotic*. However, we do see in Scripture the words *philos* (friendship, brotherly love, affection) and *agape* (supreme, sacrificial love as exhibited by Christ's sacrifice on behalf of mankind).

Agape is the highest form of sacrificial love. This level and quality of love is possible to fully express only through the abiding Spirit of God within a person. Further, this is the very kind of love to which Paul referred in Romans 5:5: "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love [*agape*] of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given

unto us.” We can effectively experience and express such love only by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

III. BECOMING MATURE CHRISTIANS

The list Peter gave was in no way intended to be exclusive and exhaustive with regard to a Christian’s spiritual growth. We as believers should develop other qualities in our growing relationship with Jesus Christ. However, the seven qualities Peter gave offer a clear picture of a progressive pattern of spiritual growth through diligent discipline and application as a believer seeks to grow spiritually in these seven dimensions. And logically, the seven qualities do build progressively upon each other. Peter has given us a clear and concise exhortation to commit ourselves individually to seek continual spiritual growth.

In his letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul addressed the topic of spiritual growth and maturity in Christ Jesus.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Continual, progressive spiritual growth is a normal process for every spiritually healthy Christian believer. This process of growing

spiritually gradually brings a believer to full spiritual maturity in Christ. God has given to His church the gift of the ministry in all its aspects and dimensions in order to perfect this process of spiritual growth for believers. The various named ministries are for “the perfecting of the saints” and “for the edifying of the body of Christ” until we all come into a state of perfect unity and maturity in the likeness of Jesus Christ, the head of the body, the church.

Continual, progressive spiritual growth is a normal process for every spiritually healthy Christian believer.

The Scriptures admonish us to “grow up into him,” that is, into Jesus Christ. Growing up is the essence of maturity. Further, it involves learning to accept and grow within our individual places in Christ’s body and co-operating with all the workings of the other members of His body. Each member supplies its particular functions to the body in the same way every part of our human body supplies its operation to the functioning of the whole body. Learning to fill our place faithfully and efficiently and humbly accepting the working roles of the other body members is maturity and the basis upon which the individual members are able to effectively produce spiritual fruit.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

No believer wants to be cut off from the body of Christ for failing to produce spiritual fruit as the fig tree in Jesus’ parable was to be cut down if it failed to produce fruit within a reasonable time. But the secret to the production of spiritual fruit is not contained within the realm of focusing on fruit production and

fretting over when spiritual fruit will appear. The fig tree does not fret over its fruit; it just grows until fruit begins to appear. The secret to producing spiritual fruit just involves spiritual growth. If we grow consistently and faithfully as believers, we will produce fruit.

We should continue to grow spiritually as long as we live.

Perhaps the key concept to understanding how we become effective, fruitful Christian believers is that of perfection. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Many believers fret and worry over this concept. They fear they are imperfect, and they too often sense hopeless abandon that they will never achieve perfection. However, they fail to understand the concept of biblical perfection.

The word *perfection* in the English New Testament is translated from the Greek word *teleios*, which *Strong’s Concordance* defines as “complete (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.). . . . completeness:—of full age, man, perfect. . . . mature.” When God admonished us toward perfection, He was urging us to pursue completion.

As with every principle of the Scriptures, we witness the absolute love and grace of God in the concept of biblical perfection. It does not mean we are without flaw or error. It does not mean we make no mistakes. Should we somehow fail God and commit sin, it does not mean there is no hope for us. The idea of completeness in Jesus Christ is a moving target; we are complete as we continue to pursue God, pursue spiritual growth, and pursue our full state of maturity in Him. We should continue to grow spiritually as long as we live. As long as we continue to grow, we are pursuing and possessing biblical perfection, or completeness in Christ Jesus.

The spiritual fruit will take care of itself.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss how possessing a growing relationship with Jesus Christ daily is both an opportunity and a responsibility.
- What are several indications in II Peter 1:1–4 that Peter had in mind the salvation experience shared by all believers? Discuss several of these and how salvation is a great gift from God.
- Does becoming a partaker of the divine nature eliminate a person’s human nature? What does partaking of the divine nature mean for a believer’s life?
- Discuss the seven elements Christians are to add to their faith and how these seven characteristics Peter mentioned appear to follow a logical and natural progression.
- What is biblical perfection? Is it possible for a believer truly to be perfect? Discuss the concept of biblical perfection in a believer’s life.