

GROWING IN Grace

BUT GROW IN THE GRACE AND
KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND
SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.

– 2 PETER 3:18

MATERIAL BY
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LESSON 1

Growing in Grace

THE GRACE OF GOD

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

It is sad to see jaded responses by Christians to the persistent call to grow in knowledge of the scriptures. Such responses are countered by continued warnings concerning the danger of ignorance. The scripture is replete with examples of neglecting spiritual growth, and the damaging effects of such negligence. While the fact that people will be destroyed for their ignorance (cf. Hosea 4:6) is cause for sorrow, it is just as sad to know what true joy and fulfillment they opt out of by their indifference.

Peter’s final plea to the brethren in his second epistle was not simply to grow in knowledge, but in **grace** (2 Peter 3:18). It is this writer’s opinion that the misunderstanding of God’s grace has led some in the church to believe growth in knowledge is not an urgent matter. Some might say, “We need to focus less on ourselves, what we are doing or not doing, and more on Jesus.” These thoughts take away from the very thing Jesus is seeking to accomplish via His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and revelation of His will. He is calling all to follow Him; to imitate Him. And He has done what was necessary to free us from the bondage of sin for us to be able to follow Him (cf. 1 John 3:7-9; Hebrews 9:14). So, to take our focus away from self – in the sense of not being concerned with what we are doing, and how we are doing – and claim to be focused fully on Christ is to deceive self.

One cannot truly look to the cross without considering himself. One cannot fully appreciate what Jesus has done until he realizes the dramatic change it has wrought within himself. Yet, according to the gospel, this change can only come through introspection, and patterning oneself according to Christ and His will. The true grace (cf. 1 Peter 5:12) of the gospel message is not something we passively observe, but actively receive and participate in. For this reason, Peter instructs the brethren to grow in the grace of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Peter 3:18).

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But what does it mean to “grow in the grace...of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” (2 Peter 3:18) “Grace” is a translation of the Greek word *charis*. Thayer defines the word as, “good-will, loving-kindness, favor.” However, the word is used in several different contexts and in several different ways. A consideration of the term will allow us to appreciate that God’s grace is not something we merely passively benefit from, but actively receive and participate in – something we can grow in.

The “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature” (BDAG) gives several definitions of *charis* according to the various contexts in which it is used in the New Testament. These clarify the many facets of grace, and how it relates to us.

GRACE IS GOD’S DISPOSITION OF FAVOR TOWARD US

“(2) a beneficent disposition toward someone, favor, grace, gracious care/help, goodwill” (BDAG)

Several times in Acts, Luke records those on missionary journeys as being “*commended to the grace of God*” (Acts 14:26; 15:40). BDAG notes, “Esp. of the beneficent intention of God.” I.e. as they go about preaching, the brethren who sent them on their way have committed them to God’s divine favor and care which He means to direct toward them. It is not that anything specific was in mind concerning the need for God’s beneficence, but that God has a disposition of goodwill toward His people, and they knew He intended to bestow upon them anything they needed on their journey.

The gifts of God’s grace which we can identify and experience are products of His expressed attitude of beneficence. The Word incarnate is noted to be “*full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). This is expressed in the fact that “*the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). God is “*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9). He “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). These are descriptions of His “beneficent disposition.”

There is a “beneficent intention of God” concerning all His children. This is especially manifested in the gift of His Son but is furthermore expressed in His efforts to bring us into participation with the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) by the transformative power of the gospel. It is important to understand that He accomplishes this, not merely by this abstract attitude toward us, but through practical means enumerated in His gospel.

GRACE IS GOD’S GIFT OF FAVOR FOR US

“(3) practical application of goodwill, (a sign of) favor, gracious deed/gift, benefaction” (BDAG)

GOD IS A BEING OF ACTION. IF HE INTENDS THE WELFARE OF HIS CREATURES, THEN HE ACTS.

That God can look down on His rebellious creation fully intending their well-being is sufficiently impressive. However, God is a being of action. If He intends the welfare of His creatures, then He acts. Peter noted that He is the “*God of all grace*” (1 Peter 5:10). I.e. He is the storehouse of all favor. Any benefit or favor ultimately originates with Him. James noted, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights*” (James 1:17). While it is important to note the practical application of His goodwill in that “*He did good, gave*

us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17), the greatest demonstrations of His grace are seen in the spiritual provisions.

Paul spoke of God’s grace that is the practical application of goodwill in the gift of Jesus – *“being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith” (Romans 3:24-25a).* Justification comes by God’s grace – i.e. His unmerited favor expressed with benefaction. Specifically, the practical application of His goodwill was in providing Jesus as *“a propitiation by His blood.”* Such is where our justification comes from – by God’s grace, the gift of His Son. Later, Paul spoke of it as *“the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:15).* But this application of God’s beneficent intention is conditional – *“through faith.”* The blessedness of God’s gift of Jesus and its results are received by means of faith – *“through whom [our Lord Jesus Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:2).* The gift of Christ’s death is the practical application of God’s favor toward man, which allows man to stand in God’s favor of justification, by faith.

Similarly, in the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul demonstrated that the *“law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).* The gospel frees from sin and death, but it is *“in Christ Jesus”* that this is accomplished. The *“message of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18)* administers the benefits of the cross by God’s grace. This message, then, is no less a practical application of God’s grace. In fact, the grace of God is said to teach us to live a transformed life (cf. Titus 2:11-14).

So, God’s character is such that He is inclined to ensure the goodwill of His creation, that He has acted in supplying what is needed by grace and continues to do so in order that His creation is dramatically changed by His grace.

GOD’S GRACE IS THE EFFECT PRODUCED BY HIS FAVOR

“(4) exceptional effect produced by generosity, favor.” (BDAG)

The grace of God is intended to change its recipient. Those who are beneficiaries of God’s grace are dramatically different than they were before it came to them. A case in point can be observed when the gospel reached even the Hellenists in Antioch. When the church in Jerusalem heard of this, they sent the great encourager, Barnabas, to aid them in their new walk of faith. Luke records, *“When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23).* How had he *“seen the grace of God?”* It is because God’s grace is not merely an abstract concept in our lives that is unidentifiable, but it leads those who are directed by it to an extremely specific way of life. They were now part of *“the Way” (Acts 9:2).* They were *“called Christians” (Acts 11:26).*

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There are immediate effects of the reception of God's grace – release from sin and death (Romans 8:1-2), justification (Romans 5:1, 9), reconciliation (Romans 5:10-11), adoption as God's child

(Romans 8:15-17). However, it is clear from the words of Barnabas to those new converts in Antioch – “[he] encouraged them all that...they should continue with the Lord” – that God's grace is meant to continually produce exceptional qualities and characteristics in those who yield to its power.

This is especially what Peter meant when he prayed that grace would be multiplied to the brethren in the knowledge of the Lord (2 Peter 1:2), and that they should grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Peter 3:18). *Charis* is further detailed in BDAG:

“[There are] a number of passages in which *charis* [grace] is evidently to be understood in a very concrete sense. It is hardly to be differentiated from *dynamis* (power) or from *gnosis* (knowledge) or *doxa* (glory).”

When Paul's thorn in the flesh brought him to his knees, the Lord responded, “My grace [*charis*] is sufficient for you, for My strength [*dynamis*] is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul's response was to accept the grace of God in his weakness “that the power [*dynamis*] of Christ may rest upon me” (ibid.). When Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow through with their benevolent work they began a year prior, his ground of appeal for them to complete the work was their abounding in everything, “in faith, in speech, in knowledge (*gnosis*), in all diligence, and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace (*charis*) also” (2 Corinthians 8:7). Knowledge (*gnosis*) is described as a grace (*charis*). In defense of his ministry of the gospel against Judaizing teachers, Paul spoke of how the gospel was changing him even more dramatically than the glory which shone on Moses' face – “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory [*doxa*] to glory [*doxa*], just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18). As he noted earlier in his ministry, this was accomplished by God's grace – “But by the grace (*charis*) of God I am what I am, and His grace (*charis*) toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace (*charis*) of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

God's grace is not to be approached passively. It is to be actively participated in. We are to grow in the grace of God (2 Peter 3:18). We are to allow His power to make us what we ought to be, grow in the knowledge of His will, and be transformed into the glorious image of His Son. All of this is by grace, and to neglect such growth is to receive God's grace in vain (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1).

LESSON 1 QUESTIONS

1. How might a misunderstanding of God's grace lead to the neglect of growth in knowledge?
2. What is the proper response to the grace of God? Is it passive, or active? Explain.
3. Describe and explain the four uses of *charis* according to BDAG in this lesson.
4. What does it mean to be "*commended to the grace of God*" (Acts 14:26; 15:50)?
5. What follows God's beneficent intentions?
6. What are some examples of God's practical application of His goodwill toward us?
7. Are God's gifts of favor (grace) conditional, or unconditional? Explain.
8. Explain how Barnabas had "*seen the grace of God*" (Acts 11:23) among those who had obeyed the gospel in Antioch.
9. Is God's grace intended to continue to have an effect after the initial point of conversion?
10. Give some concrete examples of God's grace that can be seen in our lives. I.e., beyond the initial blessings connected directly with our baptism, what are some effects of God's grace in our lives as Christians?

LESSON 2

*Growing in Grace*GRACE MULTIPLIED THROUGH
THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

The call of Peter to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18) acts as a bookend with his introductory thought, “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Peter 1:2). The thrust of the entire epistle is the imperative growth as a preventative measure against apostasy (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-2; 3:17-18), and the preparatory means for the coming day of the Lord (cf. 2 Peter 3:14).

The link between his call for growth in grace and knowledge and his introductory greeting for the multiplying of grace and peace manifests the nature of his greeting, and even that of others (cf. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; etc.). Peter’s desire is for their benefit of grace and peace through their increase in them. However, as noted previously, this does not form a thought of passivity, but proactivity. In all the epistles, the introductory greeting marking a desire for the recipients to receive grace and peace (with mercy sometimes included – cf. 1 Timothy 1:2; etc.) is not merely formulaic language, but an earnest exhortation to growth in spiritual matters.

The fact that this greeting for the multiplication of grace and peace requires effort on the part of the recipient is emphasized by the medium and process of this increase – “*in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” The King James Version highlights the idea with the translation, “*Grace and*

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peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” For one to increase in grace and peace, they must increase in knowledge, for it is “*through*” knowledge that these are multiplied. This requires intensely focused effort, yet, still in total dependence on God.

THE SUPPLY OF GRACE

Again, the grace and peace are supplied, thus multiplied, “*through the knowledge*” (2 Peter 1:3, KJV). Peter continues this thought in the next verse noting the way the grace and peace proceed to be multiplied through such knowledge – “*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Peter 1:3) (“*as,*” *hōs* – “a comparative particle, marking the manner in which something proceeds,” BDAG).

The “*divine power*” of God is instrumental in dispensing to us “*all things that pertain to life and godliness.*” These enable us to lead the life characterized by, and abounding in, God’s grace. This

power which is inseparable from the knowledge of Christ was identified by Paul when he wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). One cannot grow in the knowledge of Jesus without the gospel. If one is to know about things pertaining to life and godliness, he cannot do so separate from the gospel. Ergo, one cannot grow in grace separate from the gospel message.

Through the saving power of the gospel message God reveals to us things which pertain to the new spiritual life in Christ (cf. Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) marked by godliness (cf. 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:6-8). Through the eyes of faith, we see Christ in the gospel. It is Him that we imitate to abound in this new spiritual life. Christ demonstrates what true godward piety is in His own life. If the “things” which pertain to life and godliness are added to our faith, and we abound in them, we will grow in grace.

But why would we? What would lead us to desire that growth in practical spiritual knowledge? Peter says, he “called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). This call is not some dry obligation communicated to us through the gospel. God does not simply command but gives incentive – “it is God who works in you both to **will** and to do” (Philippians 2:13). His calling is one which involves hope (cf. Ephesians 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). Peter highlights some of the divine incentives that attracted us to Christ – “glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3) – i.e. “His own glory and excellence” (NASB). These divine attributes displayed in the life of Christ through the gospel message have drawn us to Him (cf. John 6:44-45).

In the prologue of his gospel, John records that the divine Word came in the flesh, “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The “glory” possessed by Christ which attracted us to Him was not that of any material nature, but that “pertaining to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind)” (BDAG, “only begotten,” *monogenēs*) in relation to God the Father. “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3, NASB). This glory is especially reflected in His full possession and display of “grace and truth” in His life (cf. Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7).

In relation to His divine glory, His “virtue” has also attracted us to Him. The word Peter uses to describe Jesus is *aretē*, something which he also prescribes the readers to add to their faith (cf. 2 Peter 1:5). It is “intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue” (VINE); “uncommon character worthy of praise” (BDAG). Thayer notes that this broad term concerns “any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity.” Jesus displayed moral excellence. He was without sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15).

JESUS REVEALED HIS
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IN HIS GLORY AND VIRTUE.

While His own “glory and virtue” was instrumental in calling us, it also reflects the objects in which we are invited to have a share. “Who called us **by** glory and virtue” (NKJV) is accurate, though, the idea expressed in, “called us **to** glory and virtue” (KJV), is implicit in the context. Peter wrote, “By which,” i.e. the “glory

and virtue” instrumental in our call, “have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4). The promises given by the call of “glory and virtue” are not difficult to uncover, for Peter explains, “that through these,” i.e. these promises given through “His own glory and excellence” (NASB), “you may be partakers of the divine nature.” Thus, He called us “**by**

His own glory and excellence" (NASB), "*to His own glory and excellence*" (ESV). Jesus revealed His glory and virtue that we might come to share in His glory and virtue ("*partakers,*" *koinōnos*, "a sharer, i.e. associate," STRONG; cf. John 17:22, 24). God does not promise that through the knowledge of Jesus we can become deity, but He does promise that we can share in His divine attributes. We can be in intimate fellowship with Him through the practical knowledge of Jesus.

THE ACCESS OF GRACE

Knowing the call to grow is not a mundane, intellectual exercise, but an invitation to bask in the grace of God by being transformed into the image of His Son should fill us with excitement and urgency to submit to that call. We should not be dragged to bible study, worship services, or any other spiritual activity. We should go of our own accord, knowing that such is "*working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

If we desire God's grace, it is imperative we understand that it must be accessed (cf. Romans 5:2). No amount of work we do will ever earn anything God gives us by grace. However, grace is conditional, and we must meet such conditions to receive it. The process whereby we access God's grace, then, should not be begrudgingly viewed, but joyfully.

Initially, the benefits of God's grace are seen in the justification received by the propitiation in Christ's blood (cf. Romans 3:23-26). As discussed before, this is the beginning of a new walk characterized by God's grace. "*Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,*" we increase in the grace of God, becoming "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4).

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This describes an increase in God's grace after the obedience of faith demonstrated in baptism. We must understand the forceful implication – grace does not abound as we persist in sin, but the abounding grace of God means we are further distanced from sin as we increase in holiness (cf. Romans 5:20-21; 6:1-4, 12-14, 18-19). Many in the world boast of benefiting from God's grace as they continue in the same depraved lifestyle. This is not the true grace of God (cf. 1 Peter 5:12). Barnabas observed the true grace of God in Antioch as new converts had made a complete turn from their sinful life and were eagerly serving the Lord (cf. Acts 11:23).

The grace of God is not experienced passively, nor is it experienced by continuing in sin. It is accessed through spiritual growth in knowledge – "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). It is multiplied to us "*through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*" (2 Peter 1:2, KJV). However, this is not merely intellectual or educational. In the verses cited before, Peter uses two distinct words for knowledge – *gnōsis* (2 Peter 3:18), and *epignōsis* (2 Peter 1:2, 3, 8). Thayer says of *gnōsis*, "knowledge signifies in general intelligence, understanding." However, the grace of God is not multiplied through mere *gnōsis*, but through *epignōsis* – "[epi] must be regarded as intensive, giving to the compound word a greater strength than the simple possessed" (R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*).

Epignōsis is “expressing a fuller or a full ‘knowledge,’ a greater participation by the ‘knower’ in the object ‘known,’ thus more powerfully influencing him” (VINE). It is the difference between knowing the facts and becoming the facts – or applying the facts to self. It is the difference between knowing about Christ, and Christ living in you (cf. Galatians 2:20). The saving knowledge of the gospel is one which has been allowed by its possessor to promote a dramatic change congruent with its content. As Jesus stated, “*If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them*” (John 13:17).

THERE ARE MANY MEN WHO HAVE GROWN IN KNOWLEDGE WHO HAVE NOT KNOWN GOD’S GRACE. BUT TO PARTICIPATE IN WHAT ONE HAS COME TO KNOW BY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS TO TRULY EXPERIENCE GOD’S GRACE.

The exhortation by Peter to grow in *charis* (grace) and *gnōsis* (knowledge) (cf. 2 Peter 3:18) acts as an inspired commentary on the term *epignōsis*. There are many men who have grown in knowledge who

have not known God’s grace. But to participate in what one has come to know by the gospel of Jesus Christ is to truly experience God’s grace. To this end, Peter exhorts his readers to grow in grace by partaking of the divine nature through the addition to their faith of seven ascending virtues. “*For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge [epignōsis] of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:8).

THE DISPOSITION OF GROWING IN GRACE

Considering what growing in grace means, it should be viewed as a privilege. Christians should never feel reluctant to grow in Christ. They should be joyous. Following our previous lesson, BDAG’s final definition of *charis* is “(5) response to generosity or beneficence, thanks, gratitude.” This is our response to God’s grace. We are to “*do all things without complaining and disputing*” (Philippians 2:14). Rather, we should follow God with continual expressions of gratitude (cf. Colossians 3:17). Paul was thankful to God that He was entrusted with the stewardship of the gospel (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12). In his second letter to Corinth, Paul expressed thanks for the grace of participating in benevolence for needy saints which promoted unity between Jew and Gentile (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, 7; 9:15). So also, “*let us show gratitude [charis], by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe*” (Hebrews 12:28, NASB).

LESSON 2 QUESTIONS

1. What conclusions can be reached by the wording of the bookends of Peter's epistle (cf. 2 Peter 1:2; 3:18)?
2. How does Peter say that grace will be multiplied to us (cf. 2 Peter 1:2)? Does this involve effort on our part?
3. How is grace multiplied through the knowledge of Jesus (cf. 2 Peter 1:3)?
4. How did Christ call us (cf. 2 Peter 1:3)?
5. Explain the glory and virtue of Christ.
6. What else was given to us through this call by glory and virtue (cf. 2 Peter 1:4)? What do these promises include?
7. What does it mean to be "*partakers of the divine nature?*"
8. Is God's grace conditional? How should we view the process whereby we access God's grace?
9. What is an initial benefit of God's grace which Peter notes precedes our coming to be "*partakers of the divine nature*" (cf. 2 Peter 1:4)?

10. What are some implications of God's grace if our increase in it takes place "*having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust?*" Do we increase in grace if we continue in sin (cf. Romans 5:20-21; 6:1-4, 12-14, 18-19)? How does this scriptural idea of increasing in grace contrast with how the world views God's grace?

11. Explain the difference between the words for "knowledge" used by Peter in the bookends of his epistle. (cf. 2 Peter 1:2 – *epignōsis*; 3:18 – *gnōsis*)

12. Explain the relationship between grace and knowledge (*gnōsis*) in the final words of Peter's epistle. (cf. 2 Peter 3:18)

13. Having understood Peter's teaching concerning grace and growth, what should be our disposition in answering the call to grow?

LESSON 3

Giving All Diligence

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith.” (2 Peter 1:5)

God wants nothing but good for His children. He looks down on us with gracious intent. We do not have to wonder about this. He has provided for us countless reasons to trust in His lovingkindness. He expressed through the pen of the Hebrew writer that His decision to not only make Abraham a promise, but to confirm it with an oath – which *“for [men] [is] an end of all dispute”* (Hebrews 6:16) – was out of determination *“to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel”* (Hebrews 6:17). By this He has given us *“strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”* (Hebrews 6:18).

God has done, and is doing, His part to bring us to salvation (cf. Philippians 2:12-13). Through His divine power He has given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness through the knowledge of Jesus (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). Through that knowledge we can come to partake in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). God has made preparation for our benefit by His grace, has offered us grace, and wants grace to be multiplied to us.

“But also for this very reason...”

This statement is preceded by actions on God’s part. He is the sole source of these blessings which culminate in our salvation. He is the only power capable of bringing those under the corruption that is in the world through lust out of that depraved state and into fellowship with Him. He alone can transform one into the image of His Son. Yet, this statement is followed by an instruction which concerns the readers – us.

That He *“called us by His own glory and excellence”* (2 Peter 1:2, NASB) includes the idea of one being drawn to Him (cf. John 6:44-45) implies what scripture explicitly states

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elsewhere – there is a necessary willingness and corresponding action on our part for these blessings to be imparted. I.e. God has ensured us that He will provide everything we cannot, but it will not amount to anything for the one who is not willing to take advantage of it. Because God has made such a grandiose promise for us to become *“partakers of the divine nature,”* we must beware lest we reduce such to vanity through inaction. When God made a promise to Abraham,

it was after “*he had patiently endured, [that] he obtained the promise*” (Hebrews 6:15). If a passive approach to the grace of God was appropriate, we would have seen it in Abraham.

We inescapably conclude that a Christian will never reach their spiritual potential through a passive view of God’s grace. Nowhere in scripture do we read of Christian growth into the image of Christ as an unexplainable transcendent mystical experience. Rather, Paul described it in this way, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20). The proper response to God’s unmerited favor is to surrender our will entirely to His. A positive response of obedient faith to the provisions of God in no way minimizes the unmerited nature of His grace. However, the passive response cloaked in the claim of humble unworthiness and inability manifests a lack of faith, and therefore refuses the life-changing power of God’s grace.

“...giving all diligence”

Peter connects the promises and provisions of God (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-4) with something we provide ourselves (cf. 2 Peter 1:5). He has given, and now we give “*all diligence.*” “*Giving*” translates the Greek *pareispherō*. Vine gives the definition, “‘to bring in besides’ (*para*, ‘besides,’ *eis*, ‘in,’ *phero*, ‘to bring’).” Thayer adds, “to contribute besides to something.” The idea expressed in the word suggests there is something already present. However, a different party brings something alongside it. Vine references the Revised Version’s translation, “*adding on your part,*” and notes, “the words ‘on your part’ represent the intensive force of the verb; the KJV, ‘giving’ does not provide an adequate meaning.” I.e. as much as we depend upon God to supply the necessities for us to partake in the divine nature, and thus increase in His grace, His design includes a required contribution on our part. To neglect this is to neglect His grace.

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR FAILING TO PROVIDE WHAT GOD HAS DEMANDED. HE REQUIRES US TO GIVE ALL DILIGENCE.

However, what we are giving is basic. It is described by Alexander Maclaren as a “homely virtue,” also “a very lowly virtue.” In no way does this minimize its importance. If anything, it maximizes the guilt of the negligent. There is no excuse for failing to provide what God has demanded. He requires us to give “*all diligence.*”

“*Diligence*” is the Greek, *spoudē* – “earnest commitment in discharge of an obligation or experience of a relationship, eagerness, earnestness, diligence, willingness, zeal” (BDAG). The word is simple to understand, but general enough to bear various implications given the context of its use. The noun is translated, “*haste*” (Luke 1:39), and “*earnest care*” (2 Corinthians 8:16). The verb form, *spoudazō*, is translated, “*was eager*” (Galatians 2:10), “*endeavoring*” (Ephesians 4:3), “*Do your utmost*” (2 Timothy 4:21), and “*I will be careful*” (2 Peter 1:5). These translations give the powerful sense of the word. The part we play in the multiplication of God’s grace to us is growing in the knowledge of Jesus with haste, and earnest care. We should be eager, always endeavoring, doing our utmost, and being careful to increase in the listed virtues God has provided (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7). Diligence does not manifest itself in one way. It is something which should permeate our entire existence and be present in every facet of our calling.

DILIGENCE REFLECTED IN ATTITUDE

Too often, the perilous times in which we live (cf. 2 Timothy 3:1-5) affect our values, which in turn, have a negative effect on our attitude about the spiritual. We are eager and passionate about entertainment, social activities, politics, exercise, physical health, etc., yet we struggle to produce even a small measure of the same enthusiasm for God's word. No wonder we find it a struggle to make time and prioritize resources and energy to the work of spiritual growth.

The first Psalm describes the blessed man as one who meditates on God's law day and night (cf. Psalm 1:2b). Most would find this as a form of extremism difficult for any to reproduce. Perhaps it is extreme for the spiritual climate in which we now live. However, it is something we can achieve, but it starts with developing a taste for God's word. The Psalmist's meditation was preceded by "*delight...in the law of the Lord*" (Psalm 1:2a). If he had no delight in it, he would not have spent time thinking about it.

Likewise, David expressed an attitude about God's word which would inevitably translate into diligent study. He said of the law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear, and judgments of the Lord, "*More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb*" (Psalm 19:10). His estimation of the word far exceeded anything else.

If our attitude does not reflect delight, eagerness, and care about spiritual things, then we by no means will grow in God's grace. The very mechanism used by God to shower

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grace upon us was the attraction to His Son (cf. John 3:18-21; 6:44-45; 2 Peter 1:3). Jesus invited, saying, "*Come to Me...For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11:28, 30). John assures us, "*His commandments are not burdensome*" (1 John 5:3). Our attitude about growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ should be nothing but positive. If we have the right attitude, diligence will follow.

DILIGENCE REFLECTED IN USE OF TIME

BDAG also defines *spoudē*, translated "*diligence*," as "*swiftness of movement or action, haste, speed*." Diligence has much to do with our use of time. The opposite of diligence is sluggishness, delay, and procrastination. The diligent make haste. Diligence does not take time for granted but acts on what is presently available.

Paul instructed, "*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:15-16). The "*time*" Paul encourages us to redeem is the Greek, *kairos*. This is distinct from *chronos*. Simply put, *chronos* is the span of time, while *kairos* represents the periods within *chronos*. The time spoken of by Paul is a reference to opportunities (cf. Galatians 6:10, "*opportunity*," *kairos*). Within a day there are 24 hours, but within that span may be several opportunities. Diligence makes hast to redeem them.

To redeem the opportunities, we must be aware of them. Paul says, “*walk circumspectly.*” The NASB translates the text, “*Therefore be careful how you walk.*” If we are being careful, we will recognize an opportunity, and if we are being diligent, we will redeem it.

DILIGENCE REFLECTED IN USE OF ENERGY

IT IS NOT SIMPLY THE QUANTITATIVE USE OF TIME WHICH SHOWS DILIGENCE, BUT THE QUALITATIVE. DILIGENCE IS NOT ABOUT CHECKING THINGS OFF A LIST. THE ESSENCE OF TRUE DILIGENCE IS THE EXERTION OF ENERGY.

In a context concerning the universality of death, the writer of Ecclesiastes exhorted, “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going*”

(Ecclesiastes 9:10). It is not simply the quantitative use of time which shows diligence, but the qualitative. Diligence is not about checking things off a list. The essence of true diligence is the exertion of energy.

One great inhibitor of diligence in spiritual growth is divided energy. We simply have too many irons in the fire. We should remember the powerful words of Moses to the children of Israel, “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). In a land full of idols, the Israelites were to remember that God is one. He would not be content to share the Israelites. He is a jealous God (cf. Deuteronomy 6:14-15). The practical response to the singularity of God is the dedication of one’s entirety, leaving nothing for anyone, or anything else – love Him with **all** your heart, soul, and strength. If God is one, and Christ has the preeminence in our life (cf. Colossians 1:18), they will have our undivided energy. If we do not give our all it will be impossible to please Him (cf. Matthew 6:24). Divided energy given to God is merely diluted energy. Nothing should ever come at the expense of discipleship.

The Israelites had to fend off idolatry as the weapon of the adversary. We must remember that we too are confronted with idolatry (cf. Colossians 3:5). Not that of graven and molded images, but worldliness in general. All our energy is due God – not our jobs, hobbies, or even our families. But whatever we do, we do as disciples who are serving the Lord (cf. Colossians 3:18-4:1). Everything falls subject to the service of God. Our diligence should be applied accordingly, and in turn will drastically affect everything else for the better.

LESSON 3 QUESTIONS

1. What does God calling us by Christ's glory and virtue imply concerning our part in the multiplying of grace to us?
2. What is the proper reaction to understanding the great provisions of God for our spiritual growth?
3. Define the Greek, *pareispherō*, translated "giving" (2 Peter 1:5). Who is giving something, and what does this word indicate in the context concerning spiritual growth?
4. What are we to contribute beside God's provisions and promises to grow in grace?
5. What is diligence?
6. How does our attitude about spiritual growth affect our diligence?
7. How might we develop the proper attitude about spiritual growth?
8. What are some antonyms for diligence?
9. How do we show diligence in our use of time?
10. What is a great inhibitor of diligence? Explain.

11. If we are being diligent, how much of our energy will we be focusing on spiritual growth?
How might this look considering all the responsibilities we might currently have?

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).

SETTLING FOR THE VESTIGES OF
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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.

Settling for the vestiges of virtue Christ left in the wake of His influence only to ignore His infallible

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. I.e. 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.

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.

“*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 does not effect in man 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.

WE MUST HASTEN TO THE
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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. What is the source of the faith upon which these virtues are to be added (cf. 2 Peter 1:1)?
7. Explain how faith is obtained "*through the righteousness of God*" (2 Peter 1:1, KJV).
8. 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?
9. How had the Corinthians viewed the message preached by Paul and Apollos? What significance, if any, did this have?

10. What is the only way to grow in the grace of God? As opposed to what?

LESSON 5

Virtue

“add to your faith virtue”

Peter has referred to *“things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:3) in the knowledge of Jesus. These *“things”* applied amount to participation in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). Peter later explains, *“For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge [epignōsis; cf. 2 Peter 1:2-3] of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:8). The *“things”* in context are the seven additions to our faith according to the Spirit’s instruction by Peter (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7).

Out of these seven, *“virtue”* is perhaps the most difficult to settle on a precise definition. A significant factor in understanding Peter’s use of *“virtue”* is in understanding the nature of his list. Opinions differ on this as well, but this writer is convinced the list has an ascending nature, beginning with *“virtue,”* and scaling the divine mountain to the summit of *“love [agapē].”*

THE LIST HAS AN ASCENDING NATURE, BEGINNING WITH VIRTUE, AND SCALING THE DIVINE MOUNTAIN TO THE SUMMIT OF LOVE.

Starting with *“virtue”* added to *“faith,”* each thing is connected to its predecessor by the phrase, *ἐν (en) δὲ (de) τῇ (ho)*. *ἐν (en)* is used in the sense of *“in connection with.”* Young’s Literal Translation gives the sense, *“superadd in your faith the worthiness, and in the worthiness the knowledge, and in the knowledge the temperance, and in the temperance the endurance, and in the endurance the piety, and in the piety the brotherly kindness, and in the brotherly kindness the love”* (2 Peter 1:5-7). Therefore, in connection with *“faith”* one is to add *“virtue;”* in connection with *“virtue,”* one is to add *“knowledge;”* etc. Each succeeding *“thing”* is added to the previous, manifesting in the very language a relationship to each other. This relationship is marked by progress in the context.

Peter’s instruction for growth in grace has as its goal being *“partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Peter 1:4). This fellowship is enjoyed through the participant knowledge (*epignōsis*) of Jesus. The all-encompassing description of God revealed in the Man Jesus is *agapē*. As John wrote, *“God is love [agapē]”* (1 John 4:8). The last *“thing”* Peter instructs us to add is *“love [agapē].”* Thus, the thought, becoming *“partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Peter 1:4). This in no way limits us to mastering one thing before adding the next. We must add them all with diligence – in haste. However, the logical progression grants powerful insight into the very concept of spiritual growth.

VIRTUE (ARETE) DEFINED

- “(1) a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action; (1a) virtue, moral goodness; (2) any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity” (THAYER)
- “properly denotes whatever procures preeminent estimation for a person or thing; hence, ‘intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue,’” (VINE)
- “uncommon character worthy of praise, excellence of character, exceptional civic virtue” (BDAG)
- “properly, manliness (valor), i.e. excellence (intrinsic or attributed)” (STRONG)

Each of the above definitions manifests the broadness of the term *aretē*. Thayer’s second entry especially highlights the difficulty in settling on a specific definition for our text (cf. 2 Peter 1:5). Everything Peter instructs to be added to faith fits the description of “any particular moral excellence.” For this reason, many refer to Peter’s list as “Christian virtues.” However, it seems redundant at best for Peter to utilize “virtue” in this sense as one of the virtues to be added to faith. Consequently, many settle on a common usage of *aretē* in koine Greek language. Arndt and Gingrich (BDAG) comment, “In Homer primarily of military valor or exploits.” No doubt, valor, manliness, and courage are imperative to growing in grace, and Christian living. However, it is not necessary to limit Peter’s use of *aretē* to this meaning. Understanding the Bible use of *aretē* is helpful.

VIRTUE (ARETE) IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (5X)

- Philippians 4:8 (“*virtue*”) – It is used here in the general sense. Meditation on anything that is of moral excellence is encouraged.
- 1 Peter 2:9 (“*praises*”) – It is used here in reference to the things of God that are praiseworthy. This includes things pertaining to God’s excellence.
- 2 Peter 1:3 (“*virtue*”) – It is used here in reference to the excellence of Christ’s character displayed in His fleshly dwelling. (See Lesson 2, “*Grace Multiplied Through the Knowledge of Jesus*”)
- 2 Peter 1:5 (“*virtue*”) (2x) – The text under consideration.

The New Testament never uses *aretē* in the limited, specific sense of courage or valor. This is not to suggest the idea is especially foreign to the context at hand, however, it seems to be used more broadly. In fact, there is not a reason apparent to this writer for limiting it to any narrow sense. It seems the general sense of “*moral excellence*” (NASB) and the specific sense of courage and valor could be used in tandem.

As discussed in previous lessons, the focus of the context is growth in God’s grace, namely, being “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). This nature is displayed in the life of Christ, and we come to partake in it through “*knowledge (epignōsis) of Him*” (2 Peter 1:3). Specifically,

He “called us **by His own glory and excellence (aretē)**” (NASB) “**to his own glory and excellence (aretē)**” (ESV). *Aretē* is used in this verse in reference to the entirety of Christ’s character. Our goal is to be like Christ in all that He displayed in His life. This is Peter’s whole focus, and it fits his disapproval of those who profess to be Christians, though they live lives of immoral excess (cf. 2 Peter 2:18-22). They are those who have “*forgotten that [they were] cleansed from [their] old sins*” (2 Peter 1:9). It would be logical for Peter to begin with the general sense of “*virtue*” (*aretē*) as a goal added to initial faith. However, in the face of false teachers and their error of libertinism, courage and valor would be a necessary virtue from which the others would have to emanate. Thus, Peter is instructing the brethren to add **the goal of moral excellence** (Christ-likeness) to their faith, and the **courage** that reaching such a goal would require.

THE GOAL OF PARTAKING IN THE VIRTUE OF CHRIST

CHRIST CALLED US TO HIS OWN GLORY AND EXCELLENCE. HE DID NOT CALL US TO A LIFE OF MEDIOCRITY.

Christ called us “**to his own glory and excellence**” (2 Peter 1:3, ESV). He did not call us to a life of mediocrity. As has been discussed throughout this series of studies, many hold a view of God’s grace which caters to complacency, and a lax attitude toward spiritual growth; but being a Christian is not about coasting our way to heaven because not much is expected of us. A Christian is one who is seeking to imitate Christ.

Paul told the Corinthians, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Similarly, he called the Ephesians to be “*imitators of God as dear children*” (Ephesians 5:1). Imitation of Christ inheres in the term, “Christian.” Names have meanings, and we would do well to understand the name we wear. Luke records, “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26). “*Disciples*” is a translation of the Greek, *mathētēs*. BDAG defines the word, “one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, disciple, adherent.” Vine explains, “A ‘disciple’ was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher.” Hellenists in Antioch were converted to Christ through the preaching of His gospel. The church in Jerusalem heard of this, and sent Barnabas to encourage the brethren, and help them grow through further teaching. When he arrived, he saw the drastic transformation that had taken place by God’s grace as they served the Lord in accordance with His word (cf. Acts 11:23). They had turned from the darkness of sin and began imitating Christ – they were His disciples. Then God gave the disciples a new name (“*called,*” *chrēmatizō*, “to utter an oracle, i.e. divinely intimate, STRONG), “*Christians.*” *Christianos*, “‘Christian,’ a word formed after the Roman style, signifying an adherent of Jesus” (VINE).

Christ’s call to discipleship was a strongly worded challenge, “*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*” (Mark 8:34). Our goal is to follow Him exactly. This requires taking up the obligation of God’s will, and the shame and suffering which come with it. The cross we are to bear will be left on the ground unless we are willing to deny ourselves, leaving room for Christ to dwell in us (cf. Galatians 2:20). The bar is set high for us, and our goal is to ever strive to be like Him (cf. 1 John 1:7; 2:1, 6, 15; 3:3, 16-18).

THE NEED FOR COURAGE

The concept of courage and valor in *aretē* is appropriate, as the blessing of partaking of the divine nature also comes with adversity. If we are to imitate Jesus in all that He did, we must not be surprised by the opposition we will face in the process (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-13).

Following and imitating Jesus means we will be different. Jesus challenged the status quo. The scribes and Pharisees opposed His ways as they conflicted with their erroneous view of the Law. They sneered at His presence among the tax collectors and sinners (cf. Mark 2:13-17). He was derided for refusing to bend to the ungodly binding of traditions (cf. Matthew 15:1-9). Likewise, as we imitate Christ others will think it strange (cf. 1 Peter 4:3-4).

Being a Christian means we will be challenged. Jesus had a target on His back because of His devotion to God. He was bombarded with insidious questions meant to trap and indict Him (cf. Matthew 21:23; 22:15-40). We, too, will be faced with questions meant to undercut our faith, and discredit the truth. We must be ready with an answer in the fear of God (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

IF WE WISH TO GROW IN GOD'S GRACE, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE BLESSING COMES WITH IMMENSE CHALLENGE. YET, AS MUCH CHALLENGE THAT PARTICIPATING IN THE THINGS OF GOD BRINGS, GOD SUPPLIES US WITH THE GRACE SUFFICIENT TO WITHSTAND.

Adhering to the way of Christ means we subscribe to pointed hatred by those in the world. From early in His ministry to the bitter end, Jesus was the object of conspiracy (cf. Luke 6:11; 19:47-48; 22:2; John 5:16; 11:53). He was hated vehemently and assured the disciples they would face the same (cf. John 15:18-20). Disciples of Christ can expect persecution (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12; John 3:20; Ephesians 5:8).

If we wish to grow in God's grace, we must understand the blessing comes with immense challenge. Yet, as much challenge that participating in the things of God brings, God supplies us with the grace sufficient to withstand (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). We must add bravery to our faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:13). We must be strong and courageous (cf. Joshua 1:6-9).

LESSON 5 QUESTIONS

1. Is there any pattern to Peter's list of virtues (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7)?
2. What phrase connects each virtue to the previous? What does it indicate?
3. What connection, if any, is there to the last thing Peter instructs us to add ("*love*"), and the goal of being "*partakers of the divine nature*?"
4. What does "*virtue*" (*aretē*) mean? Is there any narrow use of the term that is notable?
5. "*Virtue*" (*aretē*) is used three other times in the New Testament in addition to the verse in question (cf. Philippians 4:8; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3). Look at each in context and explain how it is used.
6. In what way does Peter use "*virtue*" (*aretē*) as the first thing in his instructed list? What in the context of 2 Peter might lead one to this conclusion?
7. What, or who, is the standard of imitation Christians are called to?
8. Explain the context in which the name "*Christian*" first appears in scripture (cf. Acts 11:26). What does "*Christian*" mean? What does it mean practically?
9. Why is the concept of courage within the term "*virtue*" (*aretē*) important as one of the first things we add to our faith?

LESSON 6

Knowledge

“[add] to virtue knowledge”

In the context of pursuing participation in the *“divine nature”* (2 Peter 1:4), Peter emphasized the necessary means in apprehending this goal to be the *“divine power”* (2 Peter 1:3). In the gospel – *“the power of God to salvation”* (Romans 1:16) – God reveals *“all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:3). Specifically, the knowledge of Jesus, especially His *“glory and virtue”* (2 Peter 1:3), draw us in and enlighten us concerning the *“divine nature.”*

GROWING IN THE GRACE
AND KNOWLEDGE OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR
JESUS CHRIST IS ABOUT
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Our response to Jesus’ call *“by His own glory and excellence”* (2 Peter 1:3, NASB) is faith. Our initial faith that obeys in baptism (cf. Colossians 2:12) leads to our escape from the corrupt world (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) by God’s grace. This faith is the beginning of a new life in the heavenly places in Christ – a life which includes good works God prepared for us to walk in (cf. Ephesians 2:4-10). These prepared good works guide us in the way of the divine nature. This new life where we walk by faith is characterized by daily renewal of the inward man (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16) – spiritual growth. Growing *“in the grace and*

knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) is about faith taking us to spiritual heights God has created us for in Christ Jesus. So, faith does not stand alone, but is built upon.

The first thing Peter instructs us to add to our faith is *“virtue.”* If the point of growth in grace is partaking in the divine nature, then our start should be fixing our focus upon that goal. We are called to share in the excellence of Christ, not to rest on His laurels. However, the path to this goal is described by Jesus as being narrow and difficult (cf. Matthew 7:13-14). Therefore, we add virtuous courage, and manly valor to our faith.

Yet, a general goal of partaking in the divine nature, and the addition of courage is not enough. The very idea of a goal implies knowledge. We cannot aim for something we know nothing about. Also, courage for the sake of courage is not virtuous in the least. It is the courageous stand for what is true and good that is praised. Thus, Peter instructs, *“to virtue [add] knowledge.”*

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) DEFINED

- “knowing (the act), i.e. (by implication) knowledge” (STRONG)
- “primarily ‘a seeking to know, an enquiry, investigation,’ denotes, in the NT, ‘knowledge,’ especially of spiritual truth” (VINE)

- “(1) comprehension or intellectual grasp of something, knowledge; (2) the content of what is known, knowledge, what is known” (BDAG)
- “(1) knowledge signifies in general intelligence, understanding; (1d) moral wisdom, such as is seen in right living, 2 Peter 1:5” (THAYER)

These definitions show dimensions that are important in understanding Peter’s emphasis of “*knowledge*” as an addition to “*virtue*.” It is not mere “fact knowledge” he wishes us to add. *Gnōsis* connotes the comprehension and grasp of what is known. There are those with good memory who know a fact, but do not comprehend the principles of the fact, nor the effects it may have in any given situation. *Gnōsis* involves utility; it is not trivial. Also, as noted in BDAG’s second entry, knowledge of any sort has an object, and therefore a source. The knowledge Peter instructs Christians to add is not general but is a comprehension of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-3; 3:18) – His life, character, and revealed will. What we seek to know is far more important than the mere act of knowing itself.

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OF VIRTUE (ARETE)

As stated before, one cannot achieve the goal of Christ’s virtue without knowing what it amounts to. People throughout history have painted portraits of the Savior without any possible accuracy due to a lack of knowledge concerning His features. However, the gospel is the true portrait of Christ, and if we are to look like Him, we must come to know it.

Paul began the practical portion of his epistle to the Ephesians with a call to unity of the faith and of the knowledge of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:1-

16). This unity would be achieved by the body growing into the maturity of Christ through the growth and share of each individual member (cf. Ephesians 4:16). The section is followed by the corresponding call to rid ourselves of the old man, be renewed in our mind, and to put on the new man as we have learned Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:17-24). Ephesians 5 elaborates on the character of the new man by beginning with the call to “*be imitators of God as dear children*” (v. 1). In a brief, yet profound and potent sentence, John described God – “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5). Therefore, in being “*imitators of God as dear children*,” we are “*children of light*” (Ephesians 5:8). Paul instructs the Ephesians to walk according to their identity by having no fellowship with darkness, but rather exposing it (cf. Ephesians 5:8-14).

Putting on the new man, imitating God, being children of light, and exposing darkness are all dependent on knowledge of God’s will in Christ. Thus, Paul penned, “*See then that you walk*

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circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17). We must be careful to walk exactly in the way of Christ and redeem each opportunity to do His will. However, we must come to an understanding of His will to do this.

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) IS NECESSARY TO AVOID THE WRONG PATH

Paul wrote to the young evangelist, Timothy, to charge him to wage the good warfare using the very word which brought him to faith in Christ (cf. 1 Timothy 1:18-20). This charge came to Timothy because some were teaching perverted doctrines and giving heed to useless and harmful discussions (cf. 1 Timothy 1:2-4). Timothy was to *“instruct the brethren in these things”* (1 Timothy 4:6) – i.e. the truth, the present and impending error, and the apostasy to which it leads. He was not to give heed to useless information, but to godliness (cf. 1 Timothy 4:7-11). Only if he was careful to conduct himself according to the doctrine of Christ, and to teach only that doctrine, would he *“save both [himself] and those who [heard him]”* (1 Timothy 4:16).

Paul’s concluding words in his first epistle to Timothy shows the concern he had for the gospel in a time when it was being threatened, and the young evangelist to whom it was entrusted. He wrote, *“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen”* (1 Timothy 6:20-21). He spoke of *“what is falsely called knowledge.”* It was profane (unholy), idle (useless, vain), contradictory (to the faith), and therefore false. Those who professed it and lived by it *“strayed concerning the faith.”*

NOT ALL KNOWLEDGE IS
GOOD KNOWLEDGE. AND
NOT ALL KNOWLEDGE IS
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GROW IN WHAT IS TRUE.

Not all knowledge is good knowledge, and not all knowledge is true. Paul described some as *“always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (2 Timothy 3:7). We must avoid false knowledge and grow in what is true. Growing in knowledge fortifies us against false teachers and their error (cf. 2 Peter 3:14-18). Only the true knowledge of Christ can guard us against wandering down the wide path leading to destruction (cf. Matthew 7:13-14).

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) IS NECESSARY TO AVOID DESTRUCTION

There is no true vacuum in the spiritual realm. Some would like to believe that ignorance is bliss. However, the void in one’s mind due to the ignorance of a matter will only be filled with something different – for better or worse (usually the latter) (cf. Matthew 12:43-45).

Understanding the nature of God’s word will impress us with the danger of ignorance. For example, Moses told the Israelites he set before them blessing and cursing, each conditioned upon their obedience or disobedience to the revealed commands of God (cf. Deuteronomy

11:26-28). Their ignorance of God's word would not simply lead to missing out on a blessing but would secure the cursing. Nobody stumbles into God's favor on accident, but plenty of people stumble down the path to destruction. Ignorance of God's word is a leading cause.

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There are some who would have you believe that ignorance is a mitigating factor in God's judgment. Do not be deceived! God plainly stated, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). Ignorance was the impetus for the unnerving cycle of disobedience and apostasy in the book of Judges (cf. Judges 2:10-11). Ignorance means sure destruction. The solution is obtaining knowledge.

HOW TO OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE

1. **Expect to understand:** There is a sad and unsettling trend in the church today concerning the belief in an inability to understand God's word. Like any error, it sits on ulterior motives known to be at odds with scripture – in this case, an extended boundary of fellowship. Regardless, it completely undermines scripture's internal claim to be understandable (cf. Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13). If we do not expect to understand God's word, we will not.
2. **Desire to do God's will:** For some, the problem is not the thought that they cannot understand, but the lack of desire to understand. God told Ezekiel that those who inquired of God with idols in their heart would be given an answer according to their idols (cf. Ezekiel 14:1-5). I.e. they did not want to know God's will, so God would give them the answer they were truly seeking. We will not be able to know God's will if we have ulterior motives. Jesus said His doctrine would be known as the Father's will if the Jews willed to do the Father's will (cf. John 7:16-18). They did not desire God's will, so they rejected the word of His Son.
3. **Apply mental industry:** Nothing can replace the effort God requires of us individually. As Peter wrote, "*giving all diligence, add to your faith...knowledge*" (2 Peter 1:5). We must put our minds to work if we are to understand. God revealed Himself just enough that we would have to seek Him and grope for Him to find Him (cf. Acts 17:26-27). To understand His word, we must be diligent in study (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15).
4. **Seek the blessing of God:** The reason we can know God is due to His desire for us to know Him. Knowledge of Him is itself a part of His grace (cf. Titus 2:11-14). If we wish to know, then we must seek His blessing. If we ask, seek, and knock we will receive, find, and it will be opened to us (cf. Matthew 7:7-11). God gives liberally and without reproach to those who ask (cf. James 1:5). He wants us to know, so we should seek His blessing of knowledge in faith.

LESSON 6 QUESTIONS

1. Why does “*knowledge*” follow “*virtue*” in Peter’s list?
2. Define “*knowledge*” (*gnōsis*). What are some important aspects of the term noted by the supplied definitions?
3. We are called to the “*virtue*” of Christ and are to add the goal of that “*virtue*” to our faith. What is a fundamental necessity for reaching the goal of Christ’s “*virtue*?”
4. As an evangelist, what was Timothy instructed by Paul to pursue, and to avoid, to be a good minister?
5. Explain Paul’s description of “*what is falsely called knowledge*” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).
6. How is ignorance destructive?
7. Does ignorance lessen the severity of an offense before God?
8. What are some necessary factors in obtaining knowledge?

LESSON 7

Self-Control

“[add] to knowledge self-control”

THE MEANS BY WHICH KNOWLEDGE IS CARRIED FURTHER DOWN THE PATH OF TRANSFORMATION IS SELF-CONTROL. KNOWLEDGE IS OF NO USE TO THE ONE WHO DOES NOT APPLY IT.

It is not difficult to understand the natural progression in Peter’s list thus far. Having been called “to his [Jesus’] own glory and excellence [*aretē*]” (2 Peter 1:3), the Christian is to add the goal of virtue (*aretē*) to his faith. This requires an addition of knowledge (*gnōsis*) for guidance in the aim of faith, participation in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) – the substance of virtue (*aretē*). However, as stated before,

knowledge (*gnōsis*) involves utility – i.e. it is meant to have an effect on the knower. The means by which knowledge is carried further down the path of transformation is “*self-control*” (*egkrateia*) (2 Peter 1:6). Knowledge is of no use to the one who does not apply it. Applying knowledge requires “*self-control*.”

SELF-CONTROL (EGKRATEIA) DEFINED

- self-control (especially continence): — temperance. (STRONG)
- restraint of one’s emotions, impulses, or desires, self-control (BDAG)
- self-control (the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites) (THAYER)
- from *kratos*, “strength,” occurs in Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:6 (twice), in all of which it is rendered “temperance”; the RV marg., “self-control” is the preferable rendering, as “temperance” is now limited to one form of self-control; the various powers bestowed by God upon man are capable of abuse; the right use demands the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Spirit of God; in Acts 24:25 the word follows “righteousness,” which represents God’s claims, self-control being man’s response thereto; in 2 Pet. 1:6, it follows “knowledge,” suggesting that what is learned requires to be put into practice. (VINE)

As Vine notes, “*self-control*” is the preferable rendering of *egkrateia*. This translation is good, though the thought involves implications important for us to understand. In what way does one who employs *egkrateia* control himself? Strong mentions “continence” and “temperance.” In referencing “temperance,” Vine is correct in noting it as a limited form of self-control (concerning consuming alcohol). The same is true for “continence” (concerning sexual activity). BDAG notes

the broadness of the field in which self-control is exercised – emotions, impulses, or desires. Thayer does the same in mentioning desires, passions, and sensual appetites. These are not problematic, nor sinful, but are a part of our design by God. Self-control restrains them lest they exceed their God-ordained boundary.

This self-control is not an arbitrary practice but is the proper response of gaining knowledge from God. When Felix sent for Paul to hear from him concerning the faith in Christ, Luke records that Paul *“reasoned about righteousness, self-control [egkrateia], and the judgment to come”* (Acts 24:25). *“Righteousness”* would not simply include the concept, but the precise standard as it relates to *“the faith in Christ.”* To submit to the *“righteousness of God”* (cf. Romans 10:3) there is the need for *“self-control.”* The *“judgment to come”* will be in consideration of the self-control regarding righteousness, or lack thereof. So, in connection with the *“knowledge” (gnōsis)* of Christ and His will we are to add *“self-control” (egkrateia)*.

THE NATURE OF MAN

The consideration of *“self-control”* beckons us to reflect on the nature of man. Most in the religious world take the position that there is an inherent inability within man due to a corrupt nature. Some in the church have been influenced by this erroneous doctrine. The inclusion of *“self-control”* in Peter’s list is at odds with a thought of inherent depravity of the flesh.

God created man in His image (cf. Genesis 1:26), but it is not our flesh which bears the image of God. Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, *“God is Spirit”* (John 4:24). The record in Genesis manifests the duality of man – *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Genesis 2:7). When Adam could not find a helper comparable to him (cf. Genesis 2:18-20), it was not merely due to an incompatibility of physical form with the other members of creation, but the missing image of God. Eve, though differing from Adam, was the exact same insofar as being spiritual – created in the image of God. Mankind is unique, for like the beasts of the field he was created from the dust of the ground (cf. Genesis 1:24; 2:7), though upon his demise his spirit will return to God who gave it (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Unlike the rest of creation, man is presented with a choice. Namely, will he live life according to his flesh, or will he live a spiritual life in pursuit of God? The flesh itself is not sinful (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:29), otherwise, when Christ *“likewise shared in the same”* (Hebrews 2:14) by partaking of flesh and blood He also partook of sin. Yet, Christ was sinless (cf. Hebrews 4:15; 7:27). The flesh merely poses a challenge when one is confronted by the will of God. Paul noted, *“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish”* (Galatians 5:16-17). *“Lust”* is translated from the

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Greek, *epithymia*, and simply means “a longing” (STRONG). The longing itself is not sin, but when the longing of the flesh is against the Spirit of God, and the longing of the Spirit of God is against the flesh, the longing of the flesh must be restrained. To fail is to sin.

Jesus was sent “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3). This must be understood in harmony with the rest of scripture. He was flesh as are we (cf. Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 4:2-3), and that is still called “*sinful flesh*.” In what way is it “*sinful flesh*?” It is prone to sin. This does not mean it is inherently defiled by sin. Nor does this mean a choice does not exist, but that the flesh contains several factors which, if unchecked by the direction of God, will lead one to sin. Man is equipped by God with emotions, impulses, passions, desires, and appetites. These were given by God to be presented to Him in service (cf. Romans 6:13; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If they are not brought under the reign of God’s word they will lead to sin. So, one must exercise *egkrateia*, “*self-control*,” and put his body and spirit in subjection to God.

THE ROLE OF REVELATION

God revealed His will through the Holy Spirit so that man could fulfill his created purpose (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). As noted, the Spirit reveals positive commands and restrictions which conflict with the urges of the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:17). Paul proceeds to give specific restrictions concerning the works of the flesh, and specific requirements concerning the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:19-23). He then presents his readers with the implications of their choice to follow Christ – “*And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:24-25). If we claim to be Christ’s, should we not be walking in line with His teaching by the Spirit?

WHEN ONE DESIRES TO
DO GOD’S WILL. HE MUST
DENY HIMSELF THE
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AND SUBMIT TO GOD.

Self-control is to be exercised in conjunction with the knowledge of the Spirit’s revelation. When one desires to do God’s will, he must deny himself the urges of the flesh and submit to God (cf. Mark 8:34-38). He must be mindful of the spiritual, or the spiritual revelation of God will not appeal to him (cf. Romans 8:5-8). Paul explains, “*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God,*

for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). He must first choose to lead a spiritual life according to his spiritual nature before he can rightly discern the revelation of God. Then, by God’s direction, he will control himself accordingly.

THE RESPONSE OF SELF-CONTROL (EGKRATEIA)

In our text, “*self-control*” (*egkrateia*) is in response to the invitation and promise to be “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). Because God has promised this, we add to our faith the goal of moral excellence (*virtue, aretē*), and to that we add the knowledge (*gnōsis*) necessary to reach that goal. Our aim for

OUR AIM FOR SOMETHING GREATER AND ETERNAL LEADS TO SELF-CONTROL. OTHERS THINK IT STRANGE THAT WE KEEP OURSELVES FROM SUCH TEMPORAL SATISFACTION. THEY DO NOT KNOW SELF-CONTROL BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO REASON TO. IF THEIR AIM WAS AS OUR OWN, THEY WOULD NOT GIVE THEMSELVES TO SUCH INDULGENCES.

something greater and eternal leads to “*self-control.*” Others think it strange that we keep ourselves from such temporal satisfaction (cf. 1 Peter 4:3-4). They do not know self-control because they have no reason to. If their aim was as our own, they would not give themselves to such indulgences.

Yet the aim for fellowship with God, and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom (cf. 2 Peter 1:11) does not make “*self-control*” an automatic occurrence. It must be decided upon and developed. “*Self-control*” (*egkrateia*) requires:

1. **Humility:** James sought to bring his readers to terms with their role in temptation. Temptation is an act of Satan to accuse us before God (cf. Revelation 12:9-10), but it is also a personal problem. Temptation is being drawn away by one’s own desires (cf. James 1:13-15). We need to acknowledge our weakness. What tempts me? Brutal honesty is necessary to develop self-control.
2. **Self-denial:** Jesus demonstrated the heart of self-control when confronted by Peter. When his disciple rebuked Him for speaking of His suffering, Jesus told him his mind was on the things of men, not God (cf. Matthew 16:21-23). This was in contrast to Jesus’ mindset to fulfill His Father’s will. His application in the following verses was a challenge for His disciples to do the same thing He was doing (cf. Matthew 16:24-28). Allowing God’s will to gain ascendancy over our own is key in developing self-control.
3. **Self-discipline:** Using a sports metaphor, Paul noted, “*Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things*” (1 Corinthians 9:25, NASB). He then demonstrated what self-control looks like – “*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection*” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul utilized violent language to describe the measures necessary to achieve self-control. In acknowledgment of our vain desires we must defeat ourselves lest we forfeit the true prize.

LESSON 7 QUESTIONS

1. What connection does “*self-control*” (*egkrateia*) have with the preceding “*knowledge*” (*gnōsis*)?
2. Explain “*self-control*.” What is it about self that requires control?
3. Why does the discussion of “*self-control*” require a consideration of the nature of man? What is an error regarding the nature of man that is contrary to the idea of “*self-control*?”
4. If the flesh is not inherently sinful, what challenge does it present to man?
5. Explain Paul’s description of flesh as “*sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3). Did Christ partake of flesh?
6. What role does the revelation of God have in the concept of “*self-control*?”
7. What promise of God is the basis of our desire to exercise “*self-control*?”
8. What roles do humility, self-denial, and self-discipline play in developing “*self-control*?”

LESSON 8

Perseverance

“[add] to self-control perseverance”

The goal of the Christian is to be like Christ – to become “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). Knowledge (*gnōsis*) is an indispensable element in achieving this goal. We must know who we are seeking to imitate. The mechanism which converts knowledge into practical spiritual living is self-control (*egkrateia*). Knowledge is of no value when left unapplied. However, this application of knowledge through self-control is to be understood in light of the standard of Christ. He is our measure (cf. Ephesians 4:13). Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Christ’s earthly tenure was the longevity of His moral excellence. I.e. He did not simply exhibit virtue in one grand gesture at the end of His life despite an otherwise flawed existence. He constantly practiced self-control in submission to the will of God. In the call to be “*partakers of the divine nature*,” Peter instructs us to add “*perseverance*” (*hypomonē*) to our self-control (*egkrateia*).

PERSEVERANCE (HYPOMONE) DEFINED

- “lit., ‘an abiding under’ (*hupo*, ‘under,’ *meno*, ‘to abide’)” (VINE)
- “cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy” (STRONG)
- “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance” (BDAG)
- “(1) steadfastness, constancy, endurance; (1a) in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.” (THAYER)

“*Perseverance*” (*hypomonē*) is only fully appreciated and understood when considered in the context of proactive faith. It is not a passive quality of the Christian. It is the continuation of activity in Christ – submission to His will – despite opposition of any kind. When one abides in Christ under the weight of adversity he is persevering. This is not a reluctant trait exhibited as a grudging obligation. “Like Jesus

himself, who for the joy set before him endured the cross (Heb. 12:2), we are enabled to see our apparent misfortunes in the calm light of eternity” (Green, Michael, *Tyndale New Testament*)

PERSEVERANCE...IS THE CONTINUATION OF ACTIVITY IN CHRIST – SUBMISSION TO HIS WILL – DESPITE OPPOSITION OF ANY KIND. WHEN ONE ABIDES IN CHRIST UNDER THE WEIGHT OF ADVERSITY HE IS PERSEVERING.

Commentaries). It is a cheerful endurance which looks to the realization of hope beyond the adversity. “*Patience*” only considers a part of *hypomonē*. “*Perseverance*” gives the fuller sense.

PERSEVERANCE (HYPOMONE) IS A CALL TO SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE

CONTINUANCE IN BEARING
FRUIT IS CHRIST’S
EXPECTATION FOR US.
NOT FOR A LITTLE WHILE;
NOT IN SPURTS; BUT
CONTINUALLY.

The Parable of the Sower revealed four conditions of the human heart in relation to the reception of God’s word. Part of that which manifests the quality of heart is the element of time. The wayside soil prevented the seed from ever germinating. It was immediately snatched away. The stony soil allowed the seed to sprout and produce fruit, but only for a little while. It then withered away. Similarly, the thorny soil saw

the production of fruit, but only for a while. Fruit was not brought to maturity. Jesus explained the good soil as representing those who “*bear fruit with patience [hypomonē]*” (Luke 8:15). Young’s Literal Translation translates the verse, “*bear fruit in continuance.*” This contrasts with the thorny soil, “*bear not to completion*” (Luke 8:14, YLT). “*Continuance*” in bearing fruit is Christ’s expectation for us. Not for a little while; not in spurts; but continually.

Even in secular contexts, value is seen in sustained excellence, and not isolated successes. Anyone can do good once, but it is those who continue to do good that impress us. The Christian has been raised to “*walk in newness of life*” (Romans 6:4), not to live mostly the same way as before save a few moments in time. In explaining the impartial nature of God, Paul explained that His reward – whether good or bad – would be in accordance with the deeds of each person (cf. Romans 2:6). In noting those who would receive the blessing of God in the end, he wrote, “*eternal life to those who by patient continuance [hypomonē] in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality*” (Romans 2:7). Therefore, those who do good and seek for glory, honor, and immortality only to cease before the end of the race will not receive eternal life. Among Paul’s companions in the gospel was a man named Demas. His greetings were included by Paul to the recipients of his epistles (cf. Colossians 4:14; Philemon 23-24). However, regardless of the amount of time he labored with Paul in the gospel, and the great feats for Christ in which he was involved, Paul sadly informed, “*Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica*” (2 Timothy 4:10). In the end, the appeal of the world reigned triumphant in his life. He did not persevere.

Jesus’ call to discipleship is telling – “*Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’*” (Luke 9:23). “*Daily*” connotes continuance and perseverance in the text. He is calling us to sustained excellence.

PERSEVERANCE (HYPOMONE) IS EXCELLENCE SUSTAINED THROUGH TRIAL AND TRIBULATION

“If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small” (Proverbs 24:10). Perseverance is important because God has promised the test of adversity. He is not content with people who will merely seek fellowship with Him in times of ease. Demas and others forsook Paul, in part, because of the pressure of persecution (cf. 2 Timothy 4:16-18). The test Paul was put through proved his faith; it shattered Demas’. Peter demonstrated what a great hope Christians have in Christ, but then explained the necessity of trials we go through to reach the object of hope (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-9). We are kept for that hope by the power of God through faith, and the trials test *“the genuineness of your faith”* (1 Peter 1:7). Perseverance (*hypomonē*) is the ability to stay faithful, i.e. abide in the word of Christ, under the weight of trial and tribulation.

Perseverance is telling. Paul explained that *“tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope”* (Romans 5:3-4). The NASB translates what follows perseverance as *“proven character.”* When tribulation arises, it is an opportunity for the child of God to prove himself. To persevere is to do just that. This is true to such a degree that Paul said the perseverance in persecutions and tribulations is *“manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer”* (2 Thessalonians 1:5). Our holding up in faith under the advances of Satan through suffering will be proof that God saving us, though destroying the sinners, is a righteous action. Contrariwise, for God to save us despite our folding under pressure and returning to sin would show Him to be unrighteous in His judgment.

Perseverance (*hypomonē*) is a key component in our confidence of salvation. The Spirit revealed that we are *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8:17). Our suffering, by God’s design, stresses the future aspect of our reward. We do not receive our reward in full while on this earth but must suffer for a little while. Paul explains, *“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance [hypomonē]”* (Romans 8:24-25). People with hope persevere, and people who persevere can be confident in hope.

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PERSEVERE, AND
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DEVELOPING PERSEVERANCE (HYPOMONE)

Paul concluded his explanation of the gospel plan of justification by faith in Christ with the eleventh chapter of Romans. The next chapter began a discussion of the proper response to the mercies of God, namely, to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God according to His will (cf. Romans 12:1-2). Among several responsibilities Paul listed is a powerful trio – *“rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer”* (Romans 12:12). These three exhortations go hand in hand and will lead one to the development of perseverance (*hypomonē*).

1. **Rejoicing in hope:** Paul prayed thanks for the Thessalonians, *“remembering without ceasing your...patience [hypomonē] of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father”* (1 Thessalonians 1:3). The language shows that inhering in hope is perseverance. Those who have hope *“eagerly wait for it with perseverance”* (Romans 8:25). Hope is the motivation of perseverance. If there is not reward on the other side of tribulation, there is no incentive to persevere. The confident expectation (hope) of an eternal reward promised by God transcends all physical circumstances. Therefore, the Christian can *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice”* (Philippians 4:4). This rejoicing, then, is ultimately in hope. When we constantly recall with joy and look forward to our eternal reward, then perseverance will be our response to any trial.
2. **Patient in tribulation:** It may at first seem odd that to develop perseverance we must persevere, but that is the most fundamental tool at our disposal. Like self-control, the essence of perseverance is the inherent created quality of free-will. Perseverance is the protracted exercise of free-will in self-control. James said, *“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (James 1:4). To be mature in perseverance we must decide to persevere in trial which means we do not cut it short. This initial perseverance leads one to be suited to persevere again. But this also necessitates something to persevere under. After noting the hope in which the Christian rejoices, Paul wrote, *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance”* (Romans 5:3). We rejoice in tribulation because it is the crucible in which our perseverance is forged.

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3. **Continuing steadfastly in prayer:** In a context of developing perseverance, James instructed, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5). God is the giver and source of all that is good. This includes perseverance. He is called *“the God of patience [hypomonē]”* (Romans 15:5). If we are to grow in grace in any way, perseverance included, we must continually pray to God to bless us with it and maintain the corresponding submission to His conditions to receive it. Paul expressed his confidence in God’s protection of the Thessalonians, and their resolve of faith. He then followed by writing, *“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience [hypomonē] of Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 3:5). We must petition God to lead us to persevere like Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-25).

LESSON 8 QUESTIONS

1. How is “*perseverance*” (*hypomonē*) connected to the preceding “*self-control*” (*egkrateia*)?
2. Define “*perseverance*” (*hypomonē*). Is this an exercise devoid of joy? How does the idea of *hypomonē* reach beyond our simpler concept of patience?
3. What quality set the good soil apart from the rest in the parable of the sower?
4. According to Romans 2:6, who will God grant eternal life?
5. What role does adversity play in our walk of faith?
6. How should the Christian view trials and tribulations?
7. How is persevering through trials “*manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God*” (2 Thessalonians 1:5)?
8. How does “*rejoicing in hope*” (Romans 12:12) develop perseverance?
9. How does being “*patient in tribulation*” (Romans 12:12) develop perseverance?
10. How does “*continuing steadfastly in prayer*” (Romans 12:12) develop perseverance?

