

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 11, 2019 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

WHAT TO KNOW TO ...



A STUDY IN 2 PETER

## THE PURSUIT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

*2 Peter 1:1-11*

*“<sup>1</sup> Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like<sup>[a]</sup> precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, <sup>3</sup> as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, <sup>4</sup> by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. <sup>5</sup> But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, <sup>6</sup> to knowledge self-control, to self-control<sup>[a]</sup> perseverance, to perseverance godliness, <sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. <sup>8</sup> For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither <sup>[a]</sup>barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ” -2 Peter 1:1-11 (NKJV)*

### **5 Important Background Information for the Book of 2 Peter:**

1. **The author of the book of 2 Peter is the APOSTLE PETER, the head and lead spokesman for Jesus’ twelve disciples** - The New Testament had four different names for Peter: Simeon (the Hebrew for Peter’s original name, Acts 15:14, 2 Peter 1:1), Simon (the Greek name for Simeon applied 49 times in the New Testament), Cephas (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for rock [ *ספיָ קִיפּוֹס* ]; this is used to play off of πέτρα), Peter (Πέτρος) the leader and spokesman for the early disciples. This is how he is addressed in the greeting emphasizing his authority to speak. The early New Testament Church almost exclusively regarded Peter as the author of the letter. And of course there is the internal

evidence supporting Peter's authorship, the letter claims to be from "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1), the writer claims to be the readers "fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed" (1 Peter 5:1), the writer identifies "Silas" (Silvanus) as one who helped him to write the letter ( 1 Peter 5:12; see also Acts 15:22 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the writer also sends greetings from Mark (1 Peter 5:13; see Acts 12:12).

2. **The book of 2 Peter (like Paul's letter to the Galatians) is actually a LETTER, meant to be circulated to multiple early New Testament churches and believers** - Peter is a letter written in normal epistle form and style. The rhetorical and didactic nature of the letter may mean that it was intended to be read aloud to the congregations. It is best to see this letter as a circular type of letter much like Peter's first letter in its present form which was directed to all the churches in the areas mentioned in northern Asia minor in 1 Peter.
3. **The recipient of Peter's second letter were the same recipients of Peter's earlier letter (1 Peter), a group of mostly GENTILE BELIEVERS/CHRISTIANS who were now living throughout the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor** – This area would be what is today, Turkey. Peter says nothing directly in the salutation to specifically name the recipients of this letter. But according to 2 Peter 3:1-2, "*Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),<sup>2</sup> that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of <sup>us</sup>, the apostles of the Lord and Savior...*" Peter was writing another epistle to the same people to whom he wrote 1 Peter. In his first letter, he spelled out that he was writing "to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). These provinces were located in an area of Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were mostly Gentiles.
4. **2 Peter is believed to have been written around AD 67-68, just before Peter death** – Tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were victims of persecution under Nero at Rome after the disastrous fire in the city of Rome on July 19 of AD 64. Peter's first letter (1 Peter) was written just after the burning of Rome as persecution broke out against Christians and they were literally scattered across the New Testament world, particularly into the area of Asia Minor. 2 Peter was written sometime later toward the end of Peter's life as he himself faced persecution and martyrdom at the hands of Nero. Consensus is that Peter wrote this second letter from prison in Rome, where he was facing imminent death. Nero died in AD 68, and tradition says that Peter died by crucifixion (upside down) prior to Nero's death. That would put the writing of the letter sometime in AD 67-68 just before his death.
5. **The purpose of 2 Peter was to warn these first century Christians of FALSE TEACHERS who had infiltrated church in the area of Asia Minor** - Unlike his first letter, written to encourage Christians being persecuted and scatter under Nero's brutal and tyrannical rule, 2 Peter was written to warn again and alert these vulnerable believers to the dangers of false religions and false professors that could undermine their own faith and sabotage the early church already reeling from these terrible times of persecution. Since the time of the writing and sending of his first letter, Peter had become increasingly concerned about false teachers who were infiltrating the churches in Asia Mino. Though these false teachers had already caused trouble, Peter expected that their heretical doctrines and immoral life-styles would result in more damage in the future. Thus Peter, in an almost last will and testament, wrote to warn the beloved believers in Christ about the doctrinal dangers they were facing.

Second Peter was written for the purpose of exposing, thwarting, and defeating the invasion of false teachers into the church. Peter intended to instruct Christians in how to defend themselves against these false teachers and their deceptive lies. Dr. John MacArthur calls 2 Peter, “This book is the most graphic and penetrating exposé of false teachers in Scripture, comparable only to Jude.” The description of the false teachers is somewhat generic. Peter does not identify some specific false religion, cult, or system of teaching.

If anybody in the early church knew the importance of being alert, it had to be the Apostle Peter. Remember he had a tendency in his early years to feel overconfident when danger was near and to overlook the Master’s warnings.

**Lessons Peter learned the hard way: *Experience is the great teacher!***

- (1) **Matthew 16:13-23** – What might Peter have learned? He rushed ahead when he should have waited
- (2) **Mark 14:32-42** – What might Peter have learned? He slept when he should have prayed;
- (3) **Matthew 26:31-35 / Luke 22:31-34** – What might Peter have learned? He talked when he should have listened.
- (4) **John 18:1-11** – What might Peter have learned? He was courageous, but careless, Christians.

***In what ways are Christians “careless” when they should be cautious and courageous?***

But Peter learned his lesson, and he wanted to help us learn it too. In his first epistle, Peter emphasized the grace of God (1 Peter 5:12), but in this second letter, his emphasis is on the knowledge of God. **The word “know” or “knowledge” is used at least 13 times in this short epistle.** The word does not mean a mere intellectual understanding of some truth, though that is included. It means a living participation in the truth in the sense that our Lord used it in **John 17:3, “This is life eternal, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”**

Peter opened his letter with a description of the Christian life. Before describing the counterfeits, he describes the real thing... true believers. The best way to detect falsehood is to understand the characteristic of the truth. Peter makes some important affirmations about true or genuine Christian life. We might call these “Characteristics of True Christian Character”

**INTRODUCTION**

I have heard some incredible promises in my lifetime, just as you probably have also. Most often advertising promises far more than it delivers. But the promises of our text are completely reliable. Indeed, the benefits of heeding Peter’s words, and the consequences of neglecting them, are great. Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:8-11, **“*8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”**

Heeding Peter's words keep us from being useless or barren and unfruitful in our relationship with Jesus Christ (v.8) and enables us to live in such a way that we are not "shortsighted, even (to the point of) blindness, and so that we don't forget that we have been cleansed from our old sin and sinful way (v.9). **Doing as Peter instructs can keep us from stumbling and assure us a triumphant entry into the kingdom of our Lord.** Conversely, neglecting Peter's instruction diminishes our perception and confidence in the salvation God has provided and sets us up for a fall.

Peter's own words should convince us to pay careful attention, for the benefits pertain to our past, our present walk, and our future hope. May we approach our text with a deep sense of its importance and an open and willing heart eager to hear and heed what God's Spirit has revealed.

## OBSERVATIONS

In preparation for a more detailed study of Peter's words, we must stand back and look at the big picture to understand the context for our further study. Note these observations about our text.

### 7 Observations Concerning Our Text (2 Peter 1:1-11):

- (1) **Peter is writing to those who are saved about their sanctification, and not to the unsaved about their salvation (v.1)** - Peter does not challenge his readers to work hard in order to be saved, but to strive diligently because they are saved (see v.1).
- (2) **Peter calls for diligent, disciplined, life-long effort on the part of the Christian (v.5a)** - This is a discipleship text which requires discipline and self-denial. It is a challenge to every Christian for all the days of their lives. No Christian ever works his way through this text to move on to other pursuits.
- (3) **The Christian's efforts are based on the sovereignty of God and the sufficiency of His provisions (vv.1-4)** - Peter has already laid the foundation for the Christian's exertion. In verses 1-4, Peter emphasizes the sovereignty of God in salvation. **Salvation has been accomplished by God, through Christ, apart from human works or merit.** Peter also stresses the sufficiency of God's provisions for our salvation and sanctification. God has provided all that is necessary for life and godliness (v.3).
- (4) **Verses 5-7 contain a list of character qualities for which God has made provision and for which every Christian should strive (vv.5-7)** - This is not a list of imperatives, duties, or activities. **Peter is not writing about "how to," but about the kind of person the Christian should strive to become.**
- (5) **The character qualities we are to pursue are also the character traits of God (v.4)** - Peter has written in verse 4 that God has provided for us to become **"partakers of the divine nature."** These character qualities he then lists are the particular character qualities of God which should also be evident in our lives.
- (6) **Peter gives us a list unlike any other list in the Scriptures** - In **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul lists the "fruit of the Spirit," **"<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."**

1 Timothy 6:11 has yet another list of godly qualities the Christian should pursue, **"<sup>11</sup> But you, O man (or woman) of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness."**

**Noted important points about Peter's list of Christian character qualities:**

- *None of the New Testament lists are exactly alike, which suggests that Peter has given us a selected list and that there are other character qualities to pursue.*
- *It also implies Peter's list was compiled for a particular reason - I believe this list of qualities was chosen because of the false teachers who will seek to distort the truth of the Scriptures and seek to seduce men to follow them.*
- *If the character qualities of verses 5-7 are also the attributes of God, they are in dramatic contrast to the character of the false teachers and their followers –*

(7) **A purposeful order and relationship is evident in this list of character qualities** - This list of character qualities is not presented in a way that suggests a random order. Each quality builds upon the qualities before it. The sequence of qualities begins with faith and ends with love. These qualities are similar to the ingredients in a cake recipe where all ingredients are needed, but they should be added in the proper order.

*faith→virtue→knowledge→self-control→perseverance→godliness→brotherly kindness→love*

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A GROWING CHRISTIAN**

Notice Peter's words in 2 Peter 1:5-7, "<sup>5</sup> But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, <sup>6</sup> to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, <sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."

There you see the list of these character qualities of a genuine believer. We might further identify these as "Characteristics of a Growing Christian." Let's face it not every believer/Christian is growing and maturing in their faith... we should be, not all are as evidence of the health and climate that often characterizes the church today. The qualities that Peter identifies in our passage are particular to a growing Christian, one who is maturing and spiritually growing. The goal and aim of every believer ought to be growing in an ever deepening and widening relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the first key in being able to guard ourselves against the false and misleading philosophies and teaching of our day, to ground ourselves in Him. Let's look at these "Characteristics of a Growing Christian":

*faith→virtue→knowledge→self-control→perseverance→godliness→brotherly kindness→love*

**8 Characteristics of a Growing Christian:**

(1) **Faith** - The first characteristic of the growing Christian has a uniqueness to it—the Christian is not instructed to *supply* faith. Faith is a given, something upon which the Christian builds. According to Peter, faith is given, for the readers of this letter are those "*who have obtained like precious faith*" (v.1). Faith is something we have received, not something we are to supply—because faith is a gift from God (see Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2:8). This is an interesting concept. Dr. John MacArthur writes about this faith in 2 Peter 1:1, "Peter is speaking of a subjective faith, i.e., the Christian's power to believe for his salvation. Faith is the capacity to believe (Ephesians 2:8-9). Even though faith and belief express the human side of salvation, God still must grant that faith. God initiates faith when the Holy Spirit awakens the dead soul in response to hearing the Word of God (Acts 11:21, Ephesians 2:8, Philipians 1:2)."

### **What we know about faith according to Scripture?:**

- **Hebrews 11:6** – *“<sup>6</sup> But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”* Faith begins as saving faith and then becomes the faith without which it is impossible to please God.
- **Romans 14:23** – *“<sup>23</sup> But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”* Whatever does not originate through faith is sin.
- **Romans 10:8 & 17** – *“<sup>8</sup> But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach).”* And in **Romans 10:17**, *“<sup>17</sup> So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*
- **1 Peter 1:6-7** – *“<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Our faith is tested, proven, and strengthened by the trials and adversity God allows to come into our life.

Faith is not only the basis for belief but also the basis for our behavior as seen throughout the great faith chapter – Hebrews 11.

**Our Lord Himself is the object and the source of our faith; Christ is also the model for our faith.** It is easier to think of the Lord Jesus as the object of faith than to think of Him exercising faith.

But His faith was exercised when He submitted to the will of the Father by taking on human flesh and suffering and dying at the hands of sinful men. Back in **1 Peter 2:21-23** Peter wrote, *“<sup>21</sup> For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: <sup>22</sup> ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; <sup>23</sup> who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”*

If you have not come to a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you cannot possibly pursue the course Peter prescribes in our text. To enter into that “faith,” which is of the same kind as the apostles (verse 1a), you must know God through Jesus Christ and find the righteousness you desperately lack in none other than Jesus Christ (verse 1b). Knowing Him brings grace and peace (verse 2). Only by His power are we granted everything necessary for life and godliness (verse 3). The basis of our salvation is the work of Christ, and the basis for our future hope is the promises of God. All we need to know about these is recorded in God’s Word (verse 4a). Trusting in God’s provisions, as revealed in God’s Word, makes us partakers of the divine nature and delivers us from the corruption of fleshly lusts (verse 4b). Taking on the divine nature does not happen quickly; it happens by the process of sanctification (verses 5-11). While this sanctification is individual, it also takes place through the body of Christ, the church (Ephesians 4:11-16). The process of sanctification is completed not in this life, but when we are with Him in glory (Philippians 3:8-14; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 3:13; 1 John 3:1-3).

(2) **Moral Excellence** - Peter writes in verse 5, “<sup>5</sup> But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue...” The word “virtue” is the one I am calling “moral excellence” as the New American Standard Bible translates it. Of all the virtues listed by Peter in our text, this is by far the most difficult virtue to grasp. Two problems have troubled me in my study of this quality.

### 2 problems with this second character quality:

1. **The precise meaning of the Greek term translated “virtue” or “moral excellence” –**  
The precise meaning of the term rendered “moral excellence” by the New American Standard Bible or “virtue” in the King James and New King James. The difficulty in defining the word Peter uses here can be inferred from the various ways it is translated:
  - “moral excellence” – NLT, NASB,
  - “virtue”—KJV, NKJV, ESV, NEB, Berkeley
  - “resolution”—Moffatt
  - “goodness”— NIV, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Goodspeed, Jerusalem Bible
  - “moral character”—Williams
  - “manliness”—Helen Montgomery—The Centenary Translation
  - “Noble character”—Weymouth
  - “real goodness of life”—Phillips
2. **The place this character quality of “virtue” or “moral excellence” appears in this list of qualities -** The second problem is that “moral excellence” precedes “knowledge.” One would think “knowledge” would be a necessary prerequisite to “moral excellence,” rather than the reverse.

The key to resolving these two problems seems to be found in the usage of this term in the Greek Translation of the Old Testament in the texts below:

- Isaiah 42:8, “*I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images.*”
- Isaiah 42:12, “*Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the coastlands.*”
- Isaiah 43:21, “*The people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.*”

When we compare these Old Testament uses of Peter’s term with all the New Testament occurrences of this same term, the meaning begins to come into focus:

- Philippians 4:8, “<sup>8</sup> Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”
- 1 Peter 2:9, “<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
- 2 Peter 1:3, “<sup>3</sup> as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.”

The King James and New King James Version of “virtue” most often refers to a characteristic or quality of God. In the Isaiah texts, it is that for which God is praised or

praiseworthy. In Isaiah 42:8 and 12, it is an expression poetically paralleled with the glory of God. God's glory is His virtue, His excellencies, for which He is worthy of praise. No wonder Paul will instruct the Philippian saints to set their minds on that which is both "excellent" and "worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8).

If His "excellencies" are God's very nature, His glory for which men should praise Him, then our condition as unbelievers is exactly the opposite. As Paul says it in **Romans 3:23**, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Man in his sinful state refuses to give glory to God, deifying himself instead we see this in **Romans 1:18-28**, "*<sup>8</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and <sup>1d</sup>Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup>because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. <sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup>Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. <sup>28</sup>And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.*"

God revealed His nature, His divine power and glory to sinful men, but they refused to give glory to Him. Instead of worshipping God their Creator, they worshipped created things. Instead of believing the truth, they believed a lie. As a consequence of their sin, God gave them over to a depraved mind so they could no longer grasp the truth. Apart from divine grace and intervention, sinful men were hopelessly lost.

The good news... God did act. He sought out sinful men and gave them faith in His Son. He enabled them to become partakers of His divine nature... **2 Peter 1:4** says, "*<sup>a</sup>by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the <sup>1a</sup>corruption that is in the world through lust.*"

Since a part of this nature is His "own glory and excellence" (verse 3), it is little wonder this should become a part of our character as well. The "moral excellence" we are to "add" to our faith is the excellence of God's nature, which He makes available to us in Christ. We are to "add" it to our faith by acknowledging it as good, as desirable, as worthy of praise, and as that which we wish to emulate in our own lives.

But why does excellence precede knowledge? I think we can understand this in light of Romans 1. Sinful men rejected the glory of God and established their own glory. As a result, they were darkened in their minds, unable to grasp divine revelation and truth. As a result of our salvation, we are now able to recognize the excellencies of our Lord and regard His excellencies as worthy of praise, embracing them as qualities we desire in our own life. When we embrace these virtues, we are then able to grasp the knowledge which comes next in the list of virtues. The apostle Paul puts it this way:

In summation, the excellence or virtue of God is God's glorious nature, which is our ultimate good we should pursue as the goal of our character to the praise and glory of God. Doing so produces a mindset receptive to the knowledge of God revealed through the Scriptures. "Excellence" is greatly emphasized these days in the secular culture and also in the church. I must say with deep regret that none of the excellence sought after today is that of which Peter speaks in our text. The "excellence" often sought by Christians concerns numbers and worldly standards and appearances rather than the moral character which emulates the excellencies of our Lord to His praise and glory. But this is not a new problem.

- (3) **Knowledge** - In our former state as unbelievers, we were not knowledgeable; we were ignorant. As Peter reminded us in his former letter he write in 1 Peter 1:14, *"<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance."*

Ephesians 4:17-18, *"<sup>17</sup> This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as <sup>[a]</sup>the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, <sup>18</sup> having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."* The solution to our ignorance is having our minds transformed with the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, knowledge which comes from the Scriptures. Paul spoke of this in Romans 12:1-2, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your <sup>[b]</sup>reasonable service. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* This is a doctrinal knowledge, a knowledge revealed in Scripture with clear biblical support. While it must be a doctrinal knowledge revealed in Scripture, it is also an experiential knowledge of God. This experience is not divorced from Scripture; rather, it is the experiencing of Scripture. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way in Hebrews 5:12-14... just listen to this, *"<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the <sup>[c]</sup>oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are <sup>[d]</sup>of full age, that is, those who by reason of <sup>[e]</sup>use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*

Paul writes in Colossians 1:9-12, *"<sup>9</sup> For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; <sup>10</sup> that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and*

*longsuffering with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”* This “knowledge” must also be understood as contrasting and contradicting the false knowledge of the false teachers who would undermine both the truth and the faith of the saints if they could (READ: 2 Peter 2:1-3 & 17-19) The knowledge of God is essential to our growth in Christian character and our ability to recognize and avoid those who teach what is false.

- (4) **Self-control** - William Barclay informs us that the term rendered “self-control” means literally “to take a grip of oneself.”<sup>27</sup> Self-control is the opposite of self-indulgence. As unbelievers, we are dominated by our physical appetites, enslaved as we are to them as Peter reminded us in his first letter in 1 Peter 1:14, “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts [which were yours] in your ignorance.*”

Paul write in Ephesians 2:1-3, “*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked according to the <sup>1a</sup>course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup>among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”* But we have been delivered from our bondage to the flesh. Living a godly life requires us to master the flesh and make it our servant, rather than our master (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Sin uses the flesh to keep us in bondage (Romans 7:14-21). Satan and the world encourage us to live according to the flesh. But being a child of God requires that we live no longer for the flesh or in the power of the flesh. Our flesh still has a strong attraction, as Paul’s words in Romans 7 and our own experience make painfully clear. Only by God’s grace can we overrule fleshly lusts, and because of His provisions, we must diligently strive to do so. The prompting of the flesh must be brought under control, and we are to heed the prompting of the Spirit of God, as He speaks through the Word of God (see Romans 8:1-8; 1 Corinthians 2:1-16; 3:16-17; 4:6). **False teachers appeal to fleshly lusts.** They gather a following by proclaiming a gospel which indulges the flesh rather than crucifying it: Such false teaching is not uncommon in the pulpit today. The “good-life gospellers” offer a different gospel than the apostles. Rather than proclaim a gospel which involves suffering and self-denial, they proclaim a “better” gospel of self-indulgence and success in life. They promise that those who possess enough faith can escape suffering and adversity and be guaranteed peace and prosperity. They promise that when one gives a little, one may be assured of receiving much more in return. These rewards are not looked for in heaven as much as on earth, now.

- (5) **Perseverance** - “Faith” brings us into relationship with God through Jesus Christ. “Moral excellence” seeks the character of God as the standard and goal for our own character. “Knowledge” describes what God is like, and what we should be like as well. “Self-control” enables us to curb our physical passions and to make our bodies servants of the will of God. The next character trait—“perseverance”—enables us to persist in our pursuit of godly character, even when we suffer for doing so.

If self-control has to do with physical pleasures, perseverance has to do with pain. Our natural tendency is to pursue pleasure and flee from pain. The gospel calls for us to identify with Christ, which includes identifying with Him in His suffering. Perseverance is the frame

of mind and character which persists in doing what is right even though doing so may produce difficulties, suffering, and sorrows. Perseverance is the commitment to suffer in the short term in order to experience glory for eternity. Perseverance was exemplified by our Lord. Hebrews 12:1-3 is a great encouragement and reminder of this truth for us, *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking unto Jesus, the <sup>1a</sup>author and <sup>1b</sup>finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”*

Perseverance also includes patience. In the light of eternity, suffering is light and momentary (see 2 Corinthians 4:17), but when our Lord’s tarrying seems to be endless, we desperately need patience to persist in the stewardship God has given to each of us. The false teachers point out that our Lord has not returned as proof that He will not. They urge men to live for the moment and to pursue fleshly pleasures, doubting the reality of a day of judgment or even our Lord’s return as told in Scripture (2 Peter 3:1ff.). Knowing that in God’s economy one day is as 1,000 years, and 1,000 years is like a day, we must patiently persist in doing what is right, looking for our eternal rewards when He returns.

- (6) **Godliness – Godliness = practiced religion** The terms Peter employs here for “godliness” are infrequently used in the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> This may be because the same expression was the most common word for religion in the pagan culture of Peter’s day.<sup>30</sup> Godliness refers to practical religion, or, perhaps we should say, practiced religion. Godliness is the religion we practice in our day-to-day walk.

The Old Testament Law related true faith to the daily aspects of living. The New Testament does the same: *14 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.... 23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others”* (Matthew 23:14, 23). *27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of [our] God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, [and] to keep oneself unstained by the world* (James 1:27). We were once “ungodly” as unbelievers, ripe for the judgment of God (see 2 Peter 3:7). Now that we have come to newness of life in Christ, we must put off our old way of life and put on the new: *14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts [which were yours] in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all [your] behavior; 16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY”* (1 Peter 1:14-16). *8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him* (Colossians 3:8-10).

- (7) **Brotherly kindness (Greek: Philadelphia)** - “Brotherly kindness” is the love saints should have for one another as fellow-believers. It is a love based in part on what we share in common with the One we love. There is a certain element of reciprocity involved, for ideally

we should be a blessing to our brother in Christ, and he should be a blessing to us. This love, based on a shared relationship with Christ, can be sensed immediately even though two saints may never have met before.

This does not mean that brotherly love is a snap, that it is automatic. If it were, Peter would not have found it necessary to command us to pursue it with diligence, not only in his second epistle but also in his first letter in 1 Peter 1:22, *“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.”* Sin not only alienates men from God, it also alienates them from one another. Thus, when men come to faith in Christ, they are united with Him and also with their fellow believers. This union of believers with one another crosses every barrier, racial or social:

While God has removed the barrier between fellow-believers, this is something we must strive to practice and to preserve. It is a humanly impossible task for which God has provided the means to accomplish. As believers, we must diligently strive to practice brotherly kindness by employing these means.

- (8) **Love** - This love is “*agape* love,” which might be called the highest love. It is also the capstone of all the virtues the Christian should pursue. Michael Green shows its uniqueness: *“In friendship (*philia*) the partners seek mutual solace; in sexual love (*eros*) mutual satisfaction. In both cases these feelings are aroused because of what the loved one is. With *agape* it is the reverse. God’s *agape* is evoked not by what we are, but by what he is. It has its origin in the agent, not in the object ... This *agape* might be defined as a deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person’s good. That is what God did for us (Jn. 3:16). That is what he wants us to do (1 Jn. 3:16). That is what he is prepared to achieve in us (Rom. 5:5). Thus the Spirit of the God who is love is freely given to us, in order to reproduce in us that same quality.”*<sup>36</sup> While “Phileo love” is directed toward fellow-believers, “Agape love” is universal in scope. **READ: 1 Corinthians 13.**

## CONCLUSION

This 2 Peter passage makes several contributions to the Christian.

### **5 Significant Contribution of 2 Peter 1:5-11 for Christian Character and Growth:**

- 1. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man are not incompatible** - We need not choose one in place of the other. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man are interdependent truths. Man cannot contribute to his salvation. Though the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. All we must do is receive it, and even this occurs by divine grace. But once we have come to faith in Christ, we are to diligently strive after godly character—for God has provided the means for “life and godliness.” We strive in our Christian walk because He has given us the means. The sovereignty of God should never be an excuse for passivity or inactivity; rather, His sovereignty is the basis for disciplined living. The Christian life is not: “Let go, and let God;” it is “Trust God, and get going!”
- 2. The first lesson is discipleship is salvation** - Salvation is the first step of discipleship. We must first believe in the gospel and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Having done so, we

must then forsake our former manner of life and former manner of thinking and engage ourselves in the pursuit of holiness. We are not merely saved to be rescued from the torment of hell and enter into the blessings of heaven. We have been saved to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). We have been saved to become partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and, by so doing, bring glory to Him. We must be careful that our presentation of the gospel does not minimize what salvation is all about. Jesus never did (Matthew 5:1-16; Luke 9:57-62), and neither did Paul (Acts 14:22; 24:25; 2 Timothy 3:12). While men and women are saved so they may enter into God’s blessings, they are *saved primarily to bring glory to God by manifesting His excellencies to men and to celestial powers* (Ephesians 1:1-12; 3:10). How interesting that Peter speaks of love as the end product of the Christian’s striving and not the source of it. Many wait to “feel” love and then act upon it. Peter tells the Christian he or she has already received faith, and they are to act on it so the outcome is love. For Peter, love is a result and not merely a cause. It seems to me we must say from the Scriptures as a whole that love is both a cause and an effect. Peter would have us strive to obtain love by obediently pursuing the characteristics of the divine nature.

3. **The means for Christian growth and also the means for how stumbling can be prevented** - I wish the Christian community would wake up and see how we have exchanged Peter’s inspired list for another list, a list provided not under inspiration but from the warped thinking of unbelievers. According to a distressing number of believers, the key to understanding success in the Christian life, as well as failure, is “self-esteem.” Poor self-esteem is the source of failure; good self-esteem is the basis of success. Not according to Peter. Who, then, will you believe?
4. **The qualities God produces in us through the Holy Spirit** - This leads to one of the most significant contributions of our text. In Galatians 5, Paul lists the “fruit of the Spirit” (verses 22-23), the qualities God produces through the work of the Holy Spirit. The key to manifesting the “fruit of the Spirit” is to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). Peter has a list of qualities which includes some in Paul’s list in Galatians 5. But Peter does not emphasize the work of the Spirit, as true and as essential as the Spirit’s work is. What does Peter emphasize as the basis for Christian growth? Peter emphasizes *the Word of God*. He speaks of our salvation and our sanctification as the result of knowing God through His revealed Word. This is the thrust of his entire first chapter. In chapters 2 and 3, Peter shows how false teachers seek to undermine the Word and turn saints from the truths of Scripture. How quickly, how easily we are turned from the truths God has revealed in His Word to the alleged “truths” of men, who appeal not to the spirit but to the flesh. Let us recognize that the knowledge of God not only saves us but sanctifies us. This does not happen independently of the Spirit, *but through the Spirit, as He illuminates the Word of God in our hearts*.
5. **Teaches that Christian growth is neither automatic nor is maturity merely a function of time** - I fear many Christians have a “civil service” mentality concerning their Christian growth. They seem to think that time alone results in growth and maturity. This is not the case: 11 Concerning him we have much to say, and [it is] hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes [only] of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:11-

14). Christian growth does take time, but growth occurs as believers diligently and obediently seek to grow, in the power of the Holy Spirit and through the provision of the Scriptures. The writer to the Hebrews rebukes his readers for failing to grow. Growth results from the application of biblical truth to daily living. Growth occurs when we employ the resources God has supplied through His Word. Failing to grow does not mean that we simply grow stagnant, never moving beyond where we are in our spiritual life. No; failure to grow means we move backwards. According to Peter, failure in striving toward Christian growth and maturity sets us up for a fall. That which we once possessed we can lose. This happened to the church at Ephesus, who lost their first love (Revelation 2:4). If we do not use what we have, we lose it: 24 And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. 25 For whoever has, to him shall [more] be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him" (Mark 4:24-25). Believer friend, I urge you: press on toward Christian maturity. Do not be content with where you are; press forward, even as the apostle Paul revealed about his own walk: 10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained [it], or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of [it] yet; but one thing [I do]: forgetting what [lies] behind and reaching forward to what [lies] ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same [standard] to which we have attained (Philippians 3:10-16).

Are you growing colder as you get older in your Christian life? Or, are you, like Paul, pressing toward the upward call, seeking to know the Lord Jesus more and more intimately? May we all press on in the power of the Spirit of God, and through the provision of the Word of God.