

2Peter 1:5b-7 "Follow the Way of Love"

2PE 1:5-7 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

As we continue our study through 2Peter it's imperative we keep it in the context of what Peter is conveying throughout the bulk of this letter and that is that there are false teachers who would try to disrupt and confuse the body of Christ.

Peter's desire is to see soldiers of Christ who not only appreciate the great salvation they have received by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, but that this salvation is meant to be actively demonstrated in our lives as well as we learn to distinguish, to discern the truth and then walk in that truth.

This takes work. Many people have the impression that to be a Christian alleviates us from any work regarding our salvation. Though it's true that we could never work enough to earn our salvation, it is equally true that God has called us to work, to labor in His kingdom with the express purpose of bringing Him glory as He works in us.

And so we must never think that there is no effort when it comes to our walk with Christ. This is what Paul points out.

PHI 2:12 "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,..."

But Paul would never suggest that this working out of our salvation, in its practical outworking, is something which we do in our own strength which is why the next verse in Philippians is so important.

PHI 2:13 "... for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

And so when Peter gives us this list in our text in verses 5 through 7 he is basically giving us a picture of what an active Christian looks like. This is also a list or a touchstone of how we can begin to measure our progress in the Spirit.

Once again, we must be careful not to view this list as a stepping stone to the next level of spiritual maturity. Like the list we see in Galatians 5 we must understand that the Spirit of God is working all of these things in our lives, but He is expecting us to cooperate with Him as we submit to Him to grow in all of these areas simultaneously.

Notice what Paul says in GAL 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

What part of that list should we exclude as we work on the others? What part of that list does the Spirit of God want us to place on a back-burner while we concentrate on just one at a time? The answer is none. It's not a matter of working on them one by one, it's a matter of understanding that it is the Spirit who is working all of these things out in our lives in such a way that none should be neglected.

We may see one particular area that needs attention in our lives, but it doesn't mean we leave the others behind, or neglect them to reach the goal of growing in any particular area. For example, we may have a problem with patience. Does this mean that the Spirit of God will only deal with that one area to the neglect of joy or peace or self-control? Of course not.

And that's not how life works. We don't notice an area of weakness and only work on that area 24 hours a day. I'm starting to play guitar again. And there are a variety of chords I already know. But I'm very weak with some of the chords. And so what I'm doing is learning those new ones and putting a concerted effort in it.

But it would be crazy to only play one new chord over and over again without playing the ones I already know. It's difficult to play a song with one chord. And so in the process of becoming proficient with an unfamiliar chord I still play all the ones I know and in the process you can make real music.

It's the same with life. We may have to work hard on an area of weakness, but we should never neglect the areas where we already honor the Lord with our lives. Someone may excel in kindness toward unbelievers and yet has no patience with their own spouse. That patience must be worked on, but not at the expense of not continuing to reach out to unbelievers with kindness and the truth of the gospel.

And this is what Peter is conveying to us here in our text. He is giving us the ideal, knowing that no one will be perfect in every area. But if you want to know what God desires of you as a goal, with His Son being the perfect example, then this list is instructive.

Again, Peter assumes this list will only apply to believers. He begins with faith and then says you must apply all diligence in your faith as you supply moral excellence or goodness as the NIV puts it. We touched on this last week.

But, he then adds in your moral excellence, knowledge. The word knowledge here is the Greek word *gnosis*. This is a little different from the word for knowledge that we have in verses 2 and 3.

2PE 1:2-3 "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

The Greek word for knowledge in these two verses is *epignosis*, and essentially it means a precise and correct knowledge. In this case it would be a correct knowledge of Jesus Christ which would lead to salvation.

Paul uses this same word in ROM 10:2 "For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge (*epignosis*)."

Here Paul is saying that they have chosen to not have a correct knowledge of the one true God and the only salvation found in Christ. They are certainly zealous, but they've twisted the correct knowledge and in the process they have missed the mark.

The word *gnosis* without the prefix *epi* suggests a knowledge which is practical and useful in this new life we have in Christ.

For example we may have an *epignosis*, correct knowledge of the combustion engine. We know how that engine works and how it runs. But to have a *gnosis*, or a practical knowledge of the combustion engine we would need to understand how to utilize its power; everything from connecting it to a drive train to knowing how to start the engine and then put it in gear.

Peter wants us to have this kind of knowledge of our Savior and the salvation He's given us. Yes, we have a correct knowledge of what it takes to come into a personal relationship with God through

faith in Christ alone, but how do we utilize the power of God to walk in this relationship?

The knowledge Peter speaks of here is a practical knowledge which is found in the word of God which is then translated to wisdom. In other words, if we utilize practical biblical knowledge effectively it will give us the wisdom to then know what God desires and then to seek God in achieving His will.

However, we don't want to make such a sharp distinction between epignosis and gnosis that we lose sight of how they work together. A correct knowledge of God and His salvation, together with a practical knowledge must go hand in hand.

For example Paul points out in COL 3:10 "... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge (epignosis) in the image of its Creator."

Our new life, or the new man must grow in the correct knowledge of Christ. We see the same thing in the letter he wrote to Titus.

TIT 1:1-2 "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness - a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,..."

Here a correct and true knowledge of Jesus Christ will in fact lead to what Peter is mapping out in 2Pet.1:5-7.

Now, there's always the danger of seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge and this was a danger in Peter's day as well. There was a group known as the Gnostics who boasted of having secret knowledge. Followers of this cultic practice would desire to know the mysteries of this world and the next. But their pursuit of knowledge was an end in itself as it puffed themselves up and gave them a sense of superiority.

This is not what Peter is suggesting. He's not saying that we simply fill our heads with facts. He wants us to practically utilize the truth in the power of the Spirit. Simply gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge can lead to the problem God addresses with Israel.

ISA 5:21 "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight."

Paul addresses a similar problem when he writes in 1CO 8:1-3 "... We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.

Paul is not putting knowledge down, specifically biblical knowledge. It's imperative for our growth in Christ. But to misuse that knowledge in a way that puffs ourselves up is to have a lack of love which is not acceptable.

1CO 13:2 "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Using the knowledge of God properly exalts Christ as His love is shed abroad in our hearts as we submit to His will found in this knowledge.

But where do we get this knowledge? As I mentioned earlier we get this knowledge from God's word. This doesn't discount the knowledge we gain from the world, but that kind of knowledge will never give us what we ultimately need to walk with God to His glory.

Again, this is why Peter begins the way he does in 2PE 1:3 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

And this is also the reason he ends this letter the way he does.

2PE 3:18 "But grow in the grace and knowledge (gnosis) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

But in gaining this knowledge we want to be able to use it in a way where our lives are affected and come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And so, in your knowledge, Peter says, self control..." (2Peter 1:6a)

Self-control is the ability to control oneself. The word in the Greek literally means to "take a grip of oneself". (William Barclay)

This can be a really tough area for the Christian who finds that other things in life have a tendency to control them rather than

those things which promote godliness. I mean how many times have we all said, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

In fact, it was on the night Jesus was betrayed that He said to His disciples, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the [flesh] is weak." (MAT 26:41)

We must be able to bring ourselves under control. But the question is whose control? And the answer is the control of the Spirit of God as we submit to our Lord. As we come under His Lordship we find that we become self-controlled to where this world will not take that position in our lives.

We do need to be careful here, however, because willing ourselves, if you will, to bring our lives under the Spirit's control is a bit like trying to use the law to become sanctified. In other words, to use this list in this letter and check our progress by how we think we're doing is to attempt to live in the Spirit where in fact, it could very well be a fleshly approach.

Benjamin Franklin was a man who approached life like this in his early days. He believed that gentlemen should be self-controlled in all areas of life. But the motivating factor for his approach was mere pragmatism as his desire was to be respected in his community so that his business ventures would be well received by those who were touched by his moral life.

He had an actual list that he would go down each day and would check off at the end of each day. He would then evaluate how well he did and what he needed to work on the next day. Of course, when it becomes inconvenient or unreachable this approach is usually abandoned.

And in Franklin's case this is what ultimately happened. Though he lived a disciplined life in many ways he could never reach the perfection he originally sought and decided that his best, however he defined it at the time, was alright.

As his goal involved more of an "intestinal fortitude" approach this is not how we live the Christian life. Yes, Peter says, to apply all diligence and in your faith supply moral excellence and so on as he goes through the list.

But it is still in our faith in Christ that we are able to do these things in the power of the Spirit. Trusting God as we seek Him in His word and humbling ourselves before Him is the only way that we can even begin to apply diligence and in our faith supply the

things Peter lays out. It is a work of the Spirit and we need to not only recognize that but to glory in the fact that God has placed these desires in us with the new life He has given us in Christ.

Now, as we move through the text we need to see the connection to knowledge which also plays a vital role in this self-control. Because as we gain the mind of Christ through His word and through walking in the truth our lives are being conformed into the image of Christ and under His control. Here is practical godly knowledge working itself out in our lives. The flesh comes under the control of God who then gives us the strength and ability to practice self-control.

But again, we must keep in mind that self-control carries with it the will to come under the control of God. We may find that we don't want to bring certain things in our lives under control. The flesh is simply not willing to submit to what the Spirit can certainly enable us to do.

It's interesting that this word self-control is found in a very similar form in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. There he uses this similar word in describing an athletic contest.

1CO 9:25 "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

The word games in the Greek in 1Cor. 9:25 and the word self-control in our text are similar and both convey the idea of bringing the body under control. The athlete who competes goes into strict training. The Christian who represents his God and Savior disciplines himself to walk not after the ways of this world, but after Christ.

When speaking of the qualifications of an elder Paul says to Titus, ..." he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. (Tit.1:8)

But when we speak of self-control, perseverance must also be working. It's not enough to say, I'm self-controlled, and then two days later going back to the world. We're in this for the long haul to glorify Christ to the end. As was said recently at the Pastor's conference, 'it's not just that we start well, we want to be found faithful to the end.'

Being self-controlled contributes to that. The word perseverance means, "to remain under a particular conflict. Perseverance is

defined as the characteristic of a man who is unswerving from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings." (Simon Kistemaker)

But this perseverance must be found in faith as Peter does here in the beginning of this list. There is no perseverance without faith in the God who enables us to persevere. I like the way Michael Green puts the concept of perseverance. He says, "the mature Christian does not give up. His Christianity is like the steady shining of a star rather than the brilliance (and speedy eclipse) of a meteor."

Here today gone tomorrow. True faith endures. But perseverance is not just finding ourselves in the middle of something which is testing our faith. It's not the attitude that, 'well I guess I'll just have to grit my teeth and bear this pain.'

That's not perseverance. Perseverance is always looking forward as we continue to look at the God who holds our futures and trusting that He will go with us and make our paths straight. The ultimate perseverance is found in Christ.

In fact, essentially the same Greek word for perseverance found in our text is the same word used of Jesus as He went to the cross when the writer of Hebrews says, "... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

His endurance was not some fatalistic approach to our salvation. Rather, it was His goal and joy knowing that it was the very means God used to reconcile us to the Father. He endured because He knew it was the will of God and that it pleased the Father. In that sense Jesus took joy in suffering the wrath of the Father for His people.

We endure and persevere because we have a heavenly perspective knowing that it pleases the Father when we don't waver, especially when the world expects us to. We rely on our Almighty God to see us through to the end. Remember, He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. He has every intention of bringing us home. But He wants us to put forth the effort in the power of the Spirit to endure.

In our perseverance Peter says to add godliness. Again, what we find here is that all of these things mentioned are working together. It's not as though we can persevere and expect to be godly if we're not self-controlled or walking in the true knowledge of Christ.

But godliness is very important. The word godly actually implies a reverence toward God which then in turn affects our behavior so that we follow after Him as we imitate Him. But according to one commentator the word godly carries with it 2 ideas.

"The man who [has godliness] always correctly worships God and gives Him His due; but he always correctly serves his fellow-men and gives them their due. The man who is [godly] is in a right relationship both with God and his fellow-men." [In this way godliness is in its most practical aspect.] (William Barclay)

But like perseverance godliness isn't something which just sneaks up on you and then grabs you. It is something we apply in the power of the Spirit to be godly. After all if we know God then it would follow that we would begin to show signs of life that God is our true Father. Paul makes a contrast between that which is godly and that which is not.

1TI 4:7 "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Godliness shows us to know God and that it is derived from God. And godliness is also a goal in our lives that is constantly growing as we utilize the means of grace. This is why Paul could say that our faith in Christ and our knowledge of him is meant to lead to godliness.

TIT 1:1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness -

But our godliness must always be practiced in a way that doesn't just show us to know God but also to be servants of our Most High God. Jesus Christ practiced godliness as He loved the world, as He confronted falsehood and as He warned of judgment for those who rejected the truth. And so we see His godliness worked itself out in the real world, and so should ours.

And this is where our godliness should lead to brotherly kindness. We're all aware that the city of Philadelphia means the city of brotherly kindness. In fact, the word philadelphia is the actual Greek word which could be literally translated, love of the brethren.

In our godliness we never want to become so "religious" that we don't want to have contact with people. We don't want our service to God not to include service to people. The false teachers of Peter's day were out to destroy God's people whether they fully understood it or not.

We must have an affection or love for people that wants to promote their best. For the believer that would be their love for God growing more and more. To have a brotherly kindness intimates a love for the family of God, for other believers especially those within your local family church home.

It's no coincidence that our Lord Jesus puts this love for the brethren on top of the list of things which distinguishes us from the world.

JOH 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

ROM 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

But brotherly love is not an end in itself. It's not enough to love each other and not love the world with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is why Peter ends this section with the word agape. We must add agape to our brotherly affection. The kind of agape which gives of ourselves to all people because Christ gave Himself for us.

A true agape love is not something the false teachers are able to give. They give to get. Theirs is a love of self which satisfies their own appetites. Peter wants us to give because Christ first gave to us. We deserved nothing from Him and neither does the rest of the world. And yet the rest of the world must hear it from us that the Savior came to give them life as well.

It's not a coincidence that Peter begins with faith and ends with love. It was the love of God which enabled us to place our faith in the object of our faith who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

1JO 4:10 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Remember, that God makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and He sends rain on the just and on the unjust. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes on Him will not perish but have eternal life.

How can we do less than to love the world with the love of God. I like the way the apostle Paul put it.

ROM 13:8 "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."

Goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and brotherly kindness. They're all different sides to the same coin. And they all are a result of the Spirit of God dispensing His fruit in our lives as He gives us the gift of faith and love in our one true God and Savior.

1CO 13:12-14:1 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love... "