

Shepherding Notes

2 Peter

By Caleb Bunch

How would God describe your Christian walk? What would you consider to be a good report? What would you consider to be an abysmal report? According to 2 Peter 1, there are some Christians that the Lord would consider to be ineffective and unfruitful. "Ineffective" is likely a reference to our calling to make disciples. "Unfruitful" refers to spiritual growth and maturity. I think that everyone would agree — these are not words that you would like the Lord to use to describe your Christian life.

2 Peter 1 provides a number of qualities that Christians should pursue. But Peter is also very careful to recognize that these qualities do not cause, earn, or initiate salvation. Verse 9 provides the scope of this exhortation by revealing that the audience he is speaking to is exclusively those who have already experienced forgiveness of their sins: "For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." Or, as it says in verse 5, these various character traits are to "supplement your faith." Faith in Christ precedes and supersedes the rest of the list.

Although unbelievers can both understand and attempt to enact certain virtues, there is a decidedly Christian flavor to the qualities that Peter is presenting. Let's work through each one.

Virtue

Virtue was the Greco-Roman way of speaking of actions that are good, right, and true. As Christians, we don't have to guess or philosophize about ethics the way that the world does. This word for virtue doesn't show up often in the New Testament — only five occasions. 1 Peter 2:9 is the most instructive: "...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The word translated "excellencies" is the very same word Peter is using in our passage today for "virtue." We have the revealed Word of God that informs our understanding of what true virtue looks like. Most specifically, we see virtue in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Knowledge

There are kinds of knowledge that are not good. (See Adam and Eve when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or Paul's words about knowledge that puffs up in 1 Cor. 8:1.) Christianity, however, is not opposed to knowledge or learning. We are to love the Lord with all of our mind (Matthew 22:37), be transformed by the renewing our mind

(Romans 12:1–2), and have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). If the apostles didn't think that we were to grow in knowledge, they would not have written the New Testament for Christians to study. Peter has already told us what kind of knowledge we should pursue in 2 Peter 1:2: "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." This does not mean that the only things you will ever learn will be about God. It does mean that everything we ever learn should be understood in the light of who God is and of the gospel of His Son.

Self-Control

This specific Greek word is only used in the New Testament four times, most famously in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. This word means "dominion or mastery over that which is within you." It is very ironic that it is translated into English as self-control when the truth is that our only way to truly have control over the evil thoughts and intentions of our hearts is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Steadfastness

This word is very common in the New Testament. It is sometimes translated as "perseverance," "endurance," or "patience." James 1:1–3 tells us that God allows us to experience trials of various kinds so that the testing of our faith will produce this very kind of steadfastness. Anyone can stick to a project if they try hard enough. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we will endure to the end in faith.

Godliness

Verse 3 of this chapter reveals to us exactly how we are empowered to live a life of godliness: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." We are not left to manufacture godliness from our own willpower. The divine power of Christ Himself is the engine behind every step of progress we make toward godliness.

Brotherly Affection

This is a Greek word with which you are certainly familiar: philadelphia. The city of Philadelphia is a poor representation of the richness of this concept of rich devotion that we are to have toward one another. Notice what Peter said about this same concept back in 1 Peter 1:22–23: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born

again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." Our regeneration, or new birth, precedes our ability to have the kind of love that Peter is describing. We now have the power to share this brotherly affection, and we are called to carry it out.

Love

Closely related to brotherly affection is the larger, more encompassing virtue of love. 1 John 4:7–8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Of course, unbelievers can display a form of love through empathy, self-sacrifice, and care. However, there is a deeper kind of love that only Christians are able to display because it is born out of an understanding of who God is. 1 John 4:9–11 explains it like this: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

"Faith in Christ precedes and supersedes the entire list. These qualities do not cause, earn, or initiate salvation — they supplement a faith that has already been given."

2 Peter 2 is written as a stern warning about false teachers. One of the most interesting facts about this chapter is its similarity to the book of Jude. There are three possible reasons for the nearly identical structure and occasional identical language.

- Jude used 2 Peter 2 as a template for his letter.
 - Peter used Jude as a template for his letter.
 - The Holy Spirit inspired both authors with a very similar message for their audiences.
-

Regardless of the reason, we can have confidence that both of these chapters of the Bible are true and relevant. Since the very beginning, the church has been plagued with false teachers. Satan knows that he is far more effective at harming the body from within than he is from without. Notice three things that are common traits of false teachers that Peter mentions right off the bat.

They Secretly Introduce Destructive Heresies

First, he notes in verse 1 that they secretly bring in destructive heresies. The best lies are mostly true — they simply twist the Scripture enough to drain the gospel of its power. False teachers are sneaky, but not always for the reason you may think. This does not mean that all false teachers are aware of their destructive heresies. They may believe everything that they are saying. But the message that they carry cannot save; it can only condemn.

They Are Led by Their Senses, Not the Spirit

The second quality that Peter highlights is the "sensuality" of these false teachers. In our modern language, this word is usually limited to descriptions of sexuality. It certainly includes that, but the Greek word *πορνεία* could also be translated as "licentiousness" or "worldliness." It means that they are led by their senses rather than by the Spirit, just like the rest of the world. Their lifestyle is not marked by a pursuit of holiness and a rejection of the sinful morays of the culture. This is often difficult to see in modern false teachers because they are treated like celebrities and are able to hide much of their personal life from their followers. Nobody knows what they are really like because they do not spend their lives with their "flock" — they remain hidden away with their wealth,

only displaying themselves publicly on stage.

They Are Marked by Greed

The third notable character flaw that Peter describes is their greed. False teachers are often very obvious about their love of money. Do you remember when Kenneth Copeland argued that he needed to be given a private jet because "a bunch of demons" fly commercial? Where does he get that from? Not the Bible. Jesse Duplantis said it this way: "I really believe that if the Lord Jesus Christ was physically on the Earth today, he wouldn't be riding a donkey, He'd be in an airplane flying all over the world." False teachers are not always so brazenly forward, but they are often marked by an open love of money. And how do they get it? Peter says that it is by the exploitation of their listeners.

There are many famous false teachers deceiving people today — Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, TD Jakes, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Kenneth Copeland, and others. But the overwhelming majority of false teachers are not famous. They are in small churches where they have weaseled their way into a pulpit and are systematically destroying the body by poisoning it with false teaching.

So, what are you and I to do? We are to ensure that what is taught in our church is from the Word of God. We are to ensure that whatever information we are absorbing outside of our church is from faithful teachers and preachers of the Word. We are to make sure that the gospel is never distorted or twisted for personal gain.

"Satan knows that he is far more effective at harming the body from within than he is from without. The best lies are mostly true — they simply twist the Scripture enough to drain the gospel of its power."

As we close out this second letter from Peter, let's simply consider three observations from his final exhortation.

Remember the Predictions

Peter teaches the elect exiles to remember the "predictions" of the prophets and the apostles. Based on the context of verse 4, we know that he is speaking about the return of Christ. There are going to be many people who do not live as though judgment is coming. He compares it to those who lived before the flood of Noah's day. That flood was coming, but the people lived as though life would go on the same way forever. They believed that God either did not exist, or that He was too weak or forgetful to actually punish them for their sins. But Peter reminds us that there currently exists fire that is stored up for future judgment for the purpose of destroying the ungodly. (vs. 7)

God's Relationship with Time

Verse 8 may be the most well-known in the whole letter. The point being made is that God is not slow to keep His promises. It may seem to us that the fulfillment of the promise of His return has been delayed or that He is dilly-dallying. Peter's point is that God does not view time the way that you and I do. By saying that "a day is like a thousand years," it indicates that God is much more aware and involved in each day than you are — He pays closer attention than you do. And by saying that "a thousand years is like a day," it is a reminder that God always sees the big picture. When you put them both together, the fact is that God's relationship with time is much different than ours.

To borrow something I once read somewhere: "Tomorrow is not a place that God knows about. It is a place where He is right now." God is seemingly outside of time similarly to how He is outside of physical space. He interacts with time, but simultaneously transcends it. For someone in that position, there is no delay in fulfilling promises. If He says He will do something, He will do it — and it will come to pass at exactly the right time.

God's Will to Save

There has often been confusion regarding the meaning of verse 9 that I would like to help clear up. Many have been taught that it means God desires to save all people without exception. That is not what this verse is saying. This book is being written to Christians —

specifically, all the way back in the very first verse, Peter addresses the words herein "to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." The promises found here are promises made to the people of God, not to unbelievers.

Look at verse 9 closely and notice that this sentence has an intentional limitation: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The patience of God is toward His people. In other words, God does not wish for any of you to perish, but all to come to repentance. This is not a statement of God's universal desire to save all people without exception. If He wanted to do that, He would do that — He never fails in His efforts. God's desire is to redeem His elect people from every corner of the earth, and His return will not occur until the Lamb has every sheep for whom He died.

"Tomorrow is not a place that God knows about. It is a place where He is right now. He interacts with time, but simultaneously transcends it."