

Growth in Godliness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 February 2016

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] Good afternoon and welcome to our Wednesday lunchtime Bible talk. My name is Josh Johnston and I'm a minister in training here at the Tron Church. Last week we began the first of our four week look at the first chapter of 2 Peter. Today we're going to continue that. Please do turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 1. That's the focus of these four weeks and today we're going to be looking particularly at verses 5 to 11 but we'll read last week's passage as well. So we'll read chapter 1 verses 1 to 11. Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 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 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Therefore brothers be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure for if you practice these qualities you'll never fall away. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now please keep your Bibles open as we pray.

Heavenly Father we gather today to hear you speak to us as we look to your words. We thank you that you do speak. You speak that we might know you. We thank you that you've been so gracious to us not just to speak but to give us the Lord Jesus. We thank you for your great grace toward us. We thank you that you've given us all that we need to live godly lives that we can have great confidence in Jesus' power at work in us.

So we ask today that you help us to block out the many distractions that weigh on our minds as we turn to your words and we ask that you would work in us that we might display to the watching world the difference that you make that as forgiven sinners we live distinctly Christian lives, lives that honor you, that our lives may serve as a witness and might testify to the great grace you've given us in the Lord Jesus.

[3 : 32] Be with us now. Give us soft hearts to hear and grace to respond to your speaking. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last week we began our study in the first chapter of 2 Peter and we began to see that this letter is a little bit like riding a bike. With a bike you need to keep pedaling or you'll fall off and hurt yourself.

Peter is wanting Christians that he's writing to to keep growing so that they'll keep going in their Christian faith. That's what we see in chapter 3 verses 17 to 18 because just like a bike the same mystery of the mystery of the Christian life. We must keep growing or we won't keep going at all.

We'll fall and hurt ourselves. Peter says, You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be like the shark that stops swimming and sinks. If a Christian stops growing, in the way of Jesus, then Peter says he's bound to head to a great fall, a total loss of stability.

So Peter's message is an encouragement to keep growing. He repeatedly reminds them of the truth that he and the apostles were teaching. In chapter 1, we see a lot of positive teaching from Peter.

[5 : 04] He's saying clearly that those who stay with the truth will share the same standing as him, an apostle. And Peter then begins to describe how that works out in the life of a believer.

And in chapter 2, Peter spells out in depth what exactly the false teachers looked like. What are they like? And then in chapter 3, he summarizes it again for us. So what were they like? They were guilty of two connected things. First, they didn't believe that Jesus was coming back to judge them. Look at chapter 3, verse 4.

They will say, where is the promise of his coming? Where is the promise of his coming? So they might say things like, do not fret. Jesus isn't coming back to judge, so you can do what you want. And so this leads to their second error, their lives.

Chapter 2 is crammed full of strong and stark language about really bad behavior. They take sin lightly, and it fits, doesn't it? That the people who think there is no judgment will then live lives that reflect that belief. There's no consequence for what they do, so they can do whatever they want. They're greedy, and they exploit people. Their conduct is depraved.

They're like people from Sodom and Gomorrah. They follow all sorts of corrupt desires. They've eyes full of adultery, and they long to commit sin. They are slaves of depravity.

[6 : 41] This is disturbingly strong language. Many things that are wrong seemed right and good to them. Just like today, all sorts of things that are now said to be good and fine, but don't match up to the way of Jesus. And it's dangerous. It's dangerous for us, people who profess Jesus and look like they're okay, but they say things like the world and its values are fine. They're even good sometimes.

But Peter is saying Christians cannot be dragged into this. It's dangerous to think that you don't have to choose between knowing Christ and embracing the way of the culture around you.

We can't be Christian and display a liberty to live however we please. But that's what many people want for the church today, isn't it?

Peter knows how dangerous it is to dwell on the sinful lives of others and long to do the same. If we look lonely enough, then eventually its attraction will woo us in.

And eventually we'll start to adjust our theology to say things like, well, are we actually going to be judged for this? Is Jesus going to come back? The message of 2 Peter is like riding a bicycle. Keep going or you'll fall off and hurt yourself.

[8 : 09] And Peter says, keep growing in order to keep going. Last week we saw that Jesus has granted to us by his power everything that we need for a godly life. Isn't that great? We lack nothing to live a godly life.

As we trust the gospel promise, Jesus' power works to give us what we need. So now as we turn to look at today's passage, we must remember that context. Peter is writing to people who need reminders, and we need reminders as well, don't we? Especially when we're faced with temptation to live lives that are not what Jesus wants. This week, Peter goes on to show us what growing Christians look like.

He tells us what to do with Jesus' power. He's told us how we grow because Jesus has given us all we need. And now he tells us to use that, to use what we've been given in a particular way.

We must keep growing in order to keep going. And we know that we've got all we need to do that. So what does it look like? He's given us grace first, and now he moves on to tell us what that produces in the lives of a real Christian. So look with me at three things Peter says about godly living. First, in verses five to seven, a Christian's growth is growth in godliness. A Christian's growth is growth in godliness.

Peter tells these Christians that they are to work hard at their Christian lives, verse five. Make every effort to supplement your faith with the seven qualities and traits that follow. We participate in growing in these with Jesus' power. We exert ourselves in this. That's what Peter's saying.

[10 : 04] But we do so depending on the power that Jesus has granted us. We must not forget that. God works to produce this in Christians, and we confirm the work as we participate with him.

We must remember that Peter's command is grounded in God's grace in verses three to four. We have everything that we need to live a godly life through Jesus' power.

And as we listen to his words, as we trust his promises, as we love Jesus, we escape from past sin. But Peter says we now must make every effort to live Christian lives, making every effort depending on Jesus.

Because that's what Jesus' power is for. It is power to live godly lives. And so Peter is telling us what it looks like. A list of traits that are distinctively Christian.

A list of traits that find complete antithesis with all that we see in chapter two. The Christians Peter was writing to were being tempted by teachers that claimed to be Christian, that were maybe wearing dog collars, but were letting their lives slip completely out of line with the gospel.

[11 : 23] And they did this secretly. It was not obvious to Christians how dangerous these people were. Now, did you notice that word secretly?

That shows how dangerous this threat is. Most Christians are not going to willingly jump into following a blatant charlatan. Most Christians are not going to follow someone who blatantly lives lives that don't honor Jesus.

It's the secrecy. It's the ministerial robes. The dog collar. The pulpit. That provide the secrecy and the deception that really is dangerous.

So as Peter spells out here some distinct behavior that actually marks out God's people from these false teachers. It's the same behavior or lack of it that ought to expose the dangerous teachers to us.

In verses five to seven, we have faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Let's look at a few of them to show the contrast between a real Christian who's growing in godliness and these false teachers who are trying to woo people to the ways of the world.

[12 : 58] Peter urges self-control from Christians, and we see a clear lack of it from those who deny Jesus' return. Look at 2.10. Look at 2.2. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemous.

Instead of doing all that they can to resist the pleasures that the world loves to say are good, these people cave into the desires easily. They're described as greedy.

They lack self-control. In 2.10, we see that they are those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion, and they despise authority. They will not stop and think, is this a godly and wise thing to do?

Instead, they'll say something like, I want to do that, so I will. And the effect of their behavior is the complete opposite of the fruit that Christians long for.

See verse 7, where Jesus' people are to love their brothers. These teachers have a complete lack of love for their brothers. What do they do?

[14 : 07] They offer them freedom, but really it's slavery. That is not loving. And more pointedly, if we look at 2.18, for speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

They woo away the vulnerable. They entice away those barely escaping the clutches of sin, the struggling, the new Christians, drawn away by behavior that looks attractive to the world.

That is not loving the brothers. We could look much more at these traits alongside chapter 2, and we would find many clashes with what Christians should be like and with what these people are like.

But the key here is that Christians are distinct from the ways of the world. Christians are to strive, by the power of Jesus, to be good, to be wise, to be controlled, to persevere, to be godly, and to love.

That is what a growing Christian looks like. That is what a powerful Christian life looks like. Jesus' power at work in us is power for those things.

[15 : 25] His power in us as we believe and trust His promises gives us what we need to be good, to be wise, to be controlled, to keep going, to be godly, and to be loving.

That is what growth as a Christian looks like. It's displaying these things distinctively, even when the world around us is saying, but it's okay to do this.

It's okay to enjoy a bit of this world now. A growing Christian displays these traits. And we also see in verses 8 to 9 that becoming godlier keeps us growing.

Becoming godlier keeps us growing. Growth as a Christian is growth in living distinctly God's way. It is growth in these traits that Peter has already laid out.

And Peter goes on to say that the more we are growing in godliness, the more we will keep on growing. And we'll keep going. Look at verse 8.

[16 : 30] If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we increasingly possess these qualities, they keep us from stagnating.

In fact, if we possess these, then we'll be effective and fruitful. Peter is saying that these qualities prove our faith is living and genuine, showing outwardly what Jesus is doing in us.

It's possible for people to say true things about God. It's possible for people to know in some way the truth about God, but not be sharers of Jesus' glory, but not be Christians.

That's ineffective knowledge of God. You see, Peter is saying that real Christians, Christians who possess the power Jesus gives us, will be increasingly displaying these traits.

A real faith, one that knows and loves Jesus, is one that works out in lives that begin to look godly. Even if it feels like it's baby step after baby step, there is some progress.

[17 : 41] If you look back in five years, you can see I get angry a little bit less than I used to. I don't get annoyed with that person as much as I used to. Actually, I was able to forgive that person when before I wouldn't have.

Baby step by baby step in progress is still increasing in these things. God's power is at work in Christians. His power is working to help them live godly lives.

And Peter contrasts people who display these with people who lack them. Verse 8, if these qualities are yours, and then in verse 9, who have relaxed these qualities.

So verse 8 first says that those who display self-control, those who love other Christians, those who persevere will have a faith in Jesus that is growing. It's a faith that is real and will escape the corruption of this world.

Those who display a truly godly life will look forward to the return of Jesus. They will know that with him they will leave behind all that has disgraced them.

[18 : 50] They will enjoy not judgment, but glory with Jesus. Contrasted with verse 9, those who lack these qualities will forget that they've been cleansed from sin.

Even if they can quote the Bible, even if they know the catechism, if they completely lack these qualities, then they haven't escaped the grasp of this world.

This will be as good as it gets for them. If you've forgotten that Jesus has rescued you from sin, if you've forgotten that he's forgiven you for all the hurt you've caused other people, for the shameful things you've done, if you've forgotten that you have lost all direction in life, he says, you're not just nearsighted, but you're blind.

You forget where you've come from, so you cannot see where you're going. Just like these false teachers who couldn't see that Jesus is coming back.

if these qualities are yours and increasing, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus. Becoming godlier prevents us from stopping.

[20 : 05] Growing in godliness keeps us growing in Jesus. And finally, growing in godliness with Jesus keeps us from falling away.

Growing in godliness with Jesus keeps us from falling away, verses 10 and 11. Is there anything more frightening for a Christian than the prospect of falling away?

That's why Peter's writing, because he doesn't want that to be a prospect. He doesn't want these Christians to fall away. And the big danger to them is that they get caught up in thinking that they can have Jesus and live whatever way they want.

because that is a sure path to falling, a very great fall with a very loud bang. That's why these teachers are so dangerous, because they're making Christians think they can have Jesus and do what they like.

So coming to the world around, listening to those who say that the church ought to adapt to 21st century culture, listening to people who say how we live is not as important as believing in Jesus, that as long as we do that, we can do what we want.

[21 : 19] Peter says that is a path certain to lead to a fall, because Peter says in verse 10 that those who practice these Christian qualities of godliness, love, self-control, and the rest will never fall.

Therefore, brothers, he says, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. How encouraging.

Peter says that those who embrace God's power that's working in them to make them godly, for those who exert themselves in dependence on that, they will not fall.

If you desire to grow in godliness, if you have confidence in Christ to help you do that, if you believe his promises and work at being godly, then Peter says, not only will you grow, but you will not fall.

We've been given all that we need for a godly life, but we must exert ourselves in dependence upon that power. That is a fruitful knowledge of Jesus.

[22 : 26] That is confirming his work in our lives. That is how we prevent ourselves from slipping to a great fall. And much more than that, verse 11, it is the way that will be richly provided an entrance to the eternal kingdom of Jesus.

We don't earn that entrance. Verse 11 says it's provided for us. We don't make ourselves godly. We don't do it on our own strength because we know from last week that that's provided for us too.

We merely confirm what has already been given to us. We participate. We partner. We rely on God's power to do what it's going to do.

That's what Peter is saying. A Christian's life will at some point begin to be recognizably Christian by God's power. because our effort to grow in godliness won't be wasted.

That's a guarantee. If we're exerting ourselves in this because it's relying on Jesus' power, it will achieve what it's meant to. We don't labor for no reason.

[23 : 37] We don't work for no reason. We work with a great guarantee because it is driven by God's power and God's grace.

That's the path that we won't fall from. If we're growing in these qualities that Peter lists, then we're heading for glory with Jesus. I don't know if you've ever been bowling.

I quite like a bit of 10-pin bowling. But think of this. As you send the ball down the alley, some people who aren't very good, it might fall into the gutter, might not reach its target.

What Peter is saying is that as the ball is heading down the alley, the bumpers are up and you won't fall. We will reach our goal because it's provided for by Jesus.

As long as we're making effort to grow in godliness, we will do it and we'll get there. Peter says, make every effort to have these qualities, but this effort is driven by grace.

[24 : 43] That's what it looks like to keep peddling, to keep growing. That's what it looks like to grow as Christians so that we keep living lives that honor Jesus, living lives that await his coming, not living lives that deny it.

Christian growth is growth in living godly lives. It is exerting ourselves in dependence on God's power to make us godly, knowing that our exertions will not be wasted.

Growing will stop us from sinking like a shark that stopped swimming. So keep trusting his promises, keep loving Jesus, and you'll confirm his work in you.

You'll grow and keep growing and not fall away. Amen. Let me pray. Father, we thank you that you have given us so many great things that we can look with confidence ahead to sharing glory with you, that we can eagerly anticipate your return because we don't need to be fearful.

And we pray that as we look ahead to that, as we trust your power, that you will be shaping us to be more and more people who reflect what you look like, that the on-watching world would see that we're distinct, that we belong not here amongst a culture that doesn't love you, but that we belong to your eternal kingdom, that we are really and truly your people.

[26 : 21] For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.