

Holy Character & Holy Habits

2 Peter 1.3 – 11

God's saving grace works in the life of a believer in such a manner that He turns the sinner into the saint. The saintly characteristic that marks each Christian is the Holy Spirit's work in his or her life, conforming them to a likeness of Jesus Christ (Galatians 5.22; 2 Peter 1.3 - 11). Without these attributes there can be no assurance of salvation. However, this attesting grace of God is evidenced in personal joy, peace, goodness, meekness, love, patience, faithfulness, and self-control. In antiquity the Stoics commended the virtues of temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice. When Paul wrote of Christian virtues, he included temperance as a fruit of the Spirit, but he demonstrated that **love is better than prudence, long-suffering better than fortitude, and kindness better than justice**. The attesting grace of the Holy Spirit that works in the life of the believer is a true religious affection that gives evidence of God's gracious work of salvation. David Wells has written a series of five books that explore the character and function of the church at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. In his first book, *No Place for Truth*, he cogently argues that **truth as an absolute has become a foreign concept to Western men and women**. Not only have we lost a love for the truth, often, there is even an inability to recognize the truth when it is presented. In his second book, *God in the Wasteland* (an obvious allusion to T.S. Elliot's work), he persuasively argues for the need to regain a grasp of the transcendent nature of a holy God. Both of these books are worth reading, his third book, *Losing Our Virtue*, strikes at the heart of the American dilemma. He explores the new definitions of character and morality and how the Christian and the church have capitulated to the prevailing trends of post modernity. The fourth book *Above All Earthly Powers* wherein he writes "... the current evangelical disposition to shuck off its cognitive structures and minimize the practical place of revealed truth in the life of the Church means that it has brought itself to the edge of a precipice. It is a precipice precisely because as evangelical faith has chosen to minimize itself in these way ... it is losing what makes it distinctive from all of the other postmodern spiritualities" (p. 123). *The Courage to be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World*, the last in his series addressing the challenges to the church in a postmodern culture he summarizes the content of the previous five books with a frightening reference to Chesterton:

G. K. Chesterton once observed that when God and his truth vanish from a society, it would be natural to think that people would no longer believe in anything at all. That, however, turns out not to be the case. Now they believe in everything. How else do we explain the remarkable circumstance of highly sophisticated people, secularized or postmodern, who can assault any and every religious belief but who, at the same time, can indulge fantasies about aliens? Or sightings of Elvis? Or, on a more mundane level, how can these highly sophisticated people also think that every religious belief has validity as long as someone holds it sincerely? However, in this atmosphere, where everything is believed and anything is

believable, at least to someone, nothing can act as a norm. All that is left is power. And, in a fallen world, we do well to be cautious when all that remains is power.

Wells, David F.. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World* (p. 46). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

Wells writes that **the survival of our culture is contingent upon its citizens obeying that which is unenforceable**, that is, the internal law of virtuous character. There are two extremes in society: freedom and law. In between these two ideas resides character, or personal virtue. However, the pursuit of virtue that was prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries is now, at the end of the 20th century, being replaced by the subjectivism of personal values. These values have come to be equated with freedom and the pursuit of happiness (something I am not certain is attainable without the pursuit of responsibility). If we have learned anything from history, however, we should realize that personal freedoms cannot continue when divorced from virtuous character. Character is the buffer between law and freedom. It keeps these antinomic philosophies in proper balance. **When virtuous character is absent then the law must attempt to accomplish externally what character previously accomplished internally.** When the courts become the conscience of a society and attempt to constrain by force what ought to be compelled by the spirit, tyranny is born. When personal freedom is unrestrained by the spirit, chaos inevitably ensues. **What will not be contained by personal restraint must then be contained by law – the more the laws, the fewer the freedoms.** The more the ‘freedoms,’ the less there is of social order. By way of illustration, a local newspaper recently reported a California girl who came in second in a spelling bee and sued the girl who came in first for beating her. The court has become the parent. When character is lacking there is no end to litigation.

David Well’s writes:

Lying between law and freedom, however, has always been this third domain. It is the domain of character, the practice of private virtue, such as honesty, decency, the telling of truth, and all the other kinds of moral obligation. It is the domain of public virtue, such as civic duty, social responsibility, philanthropy, the articulation of great ideas and good policies, all of those things which might be encompassed in Paul’s statement to the Gentiles, “who have not the law do by nature what the law requires” (Romans 2.14). **This third domain is what must regulate life in the absence of legal coercion and governmental regulation. It is where law and restraint are self-imposed** (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 63 [emphasis mine]).

Since this internal discipline is more and more lacking, the law must do what was once done by churches, families, and even cultural expectations - namely, compel and constrain individuals in their social intercourse. **How can a society long endure when it fans the flames of excessive individualism?** This is where people believe they have the right to be left alone, to live in a way that is emancipated from the demands and expectation of others, to be able to fashion their own lives in a way which permits them to resist all authority (Wells p 67). People desire to be

emancipated from community values. Indeed, with the fragmenting of the family, the evolution of the consumer church, and a populous government manipulated by polls, we have little true authority which remains. We live in the midst of what Zbigniew Brzezinski called a *permissive cornucopia*. *We are*, he argues, *living in a world out of control because of the tremendous preoccupation with material and sensual gratification*.

Wells notes that not only have we replaced individual **character** with a **cult of personalities**, but we have replaced thinking about **virtues** with thinking about **values**. What was once universally held to be the **nature of man** has been replaced with a **subjective view of the self**. That is, in a religious sense, the acknowledgement that man was created in the image of God (moral, spiritual, and intellectual); in a secular sense, that all men have an innate understanding of *moral oughtness*. **Today moral absolutes are largely not acknowledged. Men and women no longer find meaning within the community; rather they seek it individually.** Thus, when the other's spouse no longer meets their needs they are free to find another one. The self is considered benign, and if you can get in touch with the inner 'god,' you can find healing. And finally, **guilt** has been exchanged for **shame**. This is frighteningly evident in the lives of many. Sadly, the media opens the doors to the private lives of many public figures and repeatedly we hear and read of their confession of shame but there is no mention of guilt. Indeed, those who are guilty of gross sin are at best embarrassed, there is no suggestion, however, that a sin has been committed.

All of this has come to us because the truth (sadly many are still asking: "what is truth?") does not weigh heavily upon the American people. The truth does not bear heavily upon the courts (they are often more political than judicatory), nor on the legislature, which cares less for truth than it does for popular opinion. Lastly, and most disheartening of all, truth rarely compels the church to speak or act. A constitutional republic is dependent upon a balance between freedom and law. This antinomy is maintained only by virtuous character that is ruled by the invisible internal compelling and restraint of the inner man. **When we lose our grip on the truth, we finally lose our hold on virtuous character and when this is lost, the tension between freedom and law will inevitably shred the republic.**

From a secular point of view we may commend the **Stoics for their appreciation of the classic virtues: temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice**. However, the Christian spiritual virtues are infinitely superior because they are born of the Spirit of God. Paul included temperance as a fruit of the Spirit, but **love is better than prudence, long-suffering is better than fortitude, and kindness is better than justice**. The attesting grace of the Holy Spirit is like pardon because it involves more than verbalizing forgiveness - it is turning from the old pattern of dealing with others with reciprocity to a new gracious acceptance.

The Bible addresses the moral dilemma of man by recognizing that his fundamental predicament is not his resolve to do right, however strong, or weak that might be, but his **alienation from God**. In order to rectify this moral crisis he must first be confronted with his

spiritual vapidness. Then he must recognize and respond to God's call upon his life. To do otherwise is analogous to treating a medical problem symptomatically when the real problem is systemic. That is, man's social and moral sin 'problem' can only be permanently solved by restoring his broken relationship with God, not by recovering the classical Greek virtues.

The Solution to Secularism's Social and Moral Sin

The opening section of Peter's second epistle attends to this very matter; it gives the Christian some very practical advice for developing virtuous, Christ-like character. **It is clear that Peter does not intend for the reader to think that he might, by his own effort, attain to any virtue that is acceptable to God.** This is evident because, first, he reminds us that the power we need for godliness comes to us because God has called us by His own glory and goodness (1.3). Secondly, he uses the noun *effort* and follows this with the two verbs *to add*, and *to apply* to stress our participation in the sanctification process he begins with the virtue of faith. He wants the reader to keep in mind that unless he is linked with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, none of the following virtues is possible (1.5; cp. Colossians 2.6-7).

"Peter says that we participate in God's nature, not in God's being. He has chosen the term nature because it indicates growth, development, and character ... Peter borrows the term *divine nature* from the philosophical vocabulary of the Greeks. To refute his opponents he employs their terminology but gives the words a Christian meaning. **Greek philosophers taught that man who is living in a corrupt world of physical pleasure must become like the gods.** They advised their followers to share the divine nature. Peter resorts to using the same expression, 'participate in the divine nature.' But whereas the philosophers took their point of departure in man and claimed for him a share in the nature of the gods, **Peter views our sharing of God's nature in the light of God's promises. There is a world of difference between these two concepts. The first is humanistic and reflects the vaulted self-appraisal of natural man. The other is Christian and exalts the gracious provision of God**" (Simon Kistemaker, *Peter & Jude*, NTC p. 248 [emphasis mine]).

The men or women of God who are eager and diligent in their response to the call of God upon their life will have an eye upon a heavenly kingdom. The eight spiritual virtues of this pericope will increasingly dominate the character of the believer's life being formed into the image of Christ.

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH – 2 Peter 1.4

This second letter of Peter, most probably written to the church in Asia minor (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia 1 Peter 1.1; 2 Peter 3.1), may be loosely thought of as **Peter's last testament**; something akin to Paul's second letter to Timothy, or his farewell address to the church at Ephesus (Acts 20). There is a great danger facing the church because of the false teachers who have infiltrated the Christian community. The **letter divides logically into three parts** which, in this rare case, are the chapter divisions of the Letter. The first section which concerns our study is an **exhortation to the believers to be grounded** in *the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*. They

should make every effort to **cultivate those spiritual qualities** of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. In doing so they will demonstrate the proper balance between God's call upon their lives (election) and the believer's responsibility in his salvation. Chapter two instructs them how to **oppose the teaching of the false teachers**. These things will prepare them for the final day of the Lord, the end of the world and final judgment (chapter three).

If it is a wise and profitable thing to listen attentively to the final instructions of a godly man, how much more so to the last words of a true apostle of God (1 Peter 1:13-14). **Peter counsels the believer to develop the spiritual qualities that the Spirit of God has given him; remain firmly established in the truth by paying attention to the gospel proclaimed by eyewitnesses and study the Scriptures.**

At the heart of Peter's epistle is an emphasis on the divinity of Jesus. In the opening verse he writes: *To those who through the **righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ**...* (emphasis mine). This is a description of the Divine Christ who is both Lord and Savior (cp. 2 Peter 1.2, 11; 2.20; 3.2,18). **The believer is encouraged to increase in his knowledge of Jesus the Lord** (2 Peter 1.2, 3, 8; 2.20; 3.18). Certainly, without a knowledge of God revealed in holy Scripture there can be no hope for salvation. (Psalm 19.7 – 14). However, **it is not knowledge alone** which is the basis of salvation, but God's call upon the believer's life. Having been called by God the Christian begins to participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world, caused by evil desires. **The believer lives in the tension of the "already" and the "not yet,"** that which is a present reality and that which is promised, the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior. **This tension is evident in Peter's letter. On the one hand God has given the believer everything he needs but on the other hand he must strive to make his calling and election sure (1.11).**

Because the believers are elect, they are told to cultivate Christian virtues. Thus, being firmly established in the truth, they will never fall (1:10-12). Nevertheless, they are facing the destructive heresies of false teachers who live among them (2.1). **Is it possible, then, that believers lose their salvation? Peter reassures the readers of God's protecting care.** He illustrates this truth by teaching the believers that God protected Noah, the preacher of righteousness, from the waters of the flood and that God rescued righteous Lot from the city of Sodom (2:5-8). Peter concludes by observing, 'If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials'" (Kistemaker, NTC *Peter and Jude*, P. 227).

SALUTATION – (VERSES 1-2)

Perhaps you have heard the expression, "more is caught than taught" and Peter is a model of the truth he is proclaiming. **Of course modeling Christ-like behavior is an effective manner of teaching, and this, like his contemporary Paul, is what Peter is doing.** He is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and as such is their servant. Peter does not put himself above the reader, rather he endeavors to bring the reader alongside. **He refers to himself first as a servant** (*doulos* lit. slave cp.

Romans 1.1; Titus 1.1) and then as an apostle; this at the end of his life when he is at the apex of his apostolic authority. It is a subtle reminder that Jesus calls people to be in fellowship with himself not to serve a cause. If the apostle Peter is a servant to the High King of Heaven then the reader too ought to consider that there is no greater calling in life than to be in intimate fellowship with Christ and as a consequence of this they will serve the purpose of the kingdom of heaven. In this general epistle **Peter sees the reader as one, who like himself, has received a saving faith that comes from the righteousness of God.** This faith, given to them by God, is of the same value as that of the Apostle's faith. Unlike the Gnostics who taught there was an inner circle of special knowledge to which only a few might hope to aspire, **the believer enjoys the same rights and access to God as the apostles and prophets.**

Saving faith does not originate with the will of man but with the will of God (John 1.12-13). The word for receive suggest the casting of lots (Luke 1.9; John 19.24). That faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2.8-10) is foundational to all that Peter has to write. **This faith of which Peter speaks is not that objective belief in a body of Christian truths articulated in its creeds and dogmas, but a subjective faith.** A personal trust in God who imparts righteousness to the believer (Kistemaker p. 241).

Such a faith is described by Matthew Henry as: *vastly different from the false faith of the heretic, and the feigned faith of the hypocrite, and the fruitless faith of the formal professor, how orthodox soever he is. It is the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1), wrought by the Spirit of God in effectual calling.* Faith is a gift coming from the righteousness of our God and Savior. **It ought not to be lost on the reader that Peter's opening comment is one of the great Christological passages suggesting Jesus' divinity.** This is evident in that God and Savior are two substantives connected by one Greek article (*the*). Five times in this brief letter Peter refers to Christ as Savior. It is clear that Peter intends for us to understand that Jesus is coequal in nature with God the Father (cp. Matthew 16.16; John 1.1, 20.28; Titus 2.13).

The formalistic use of grace and peace by Peter ought not to be minimized because of its commonality within the Pauline corpus. Indeed, the words are rich within the Christian faith community and these virtues are appropriated through our knowledge (*eipгноesi*, "full [*epi* additional] knowledge") of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Bible Knowledge Commentary). **This implies an intimate and personal relationship with God. It is the means by which God's grace and peace are received** (cp. 1.3,8; 2.20). It is also the means by which the believer is able to combat those false teachers who claim to have a special knowledge of God but who practice immorality.

THE CHRISTIAN NATURE. (1:3-4)

"Peter challenged believers to take full advantage of the divine power and promise of God which made it possible to participate in the divine nature and thus overcome the corruption caused by evil desires (vv. 3-4). Based on this promised power, Peter further challenged Christians to practice

the characteristics of the divine nature so that they would experience the assurance of eternal rewards (vv. 5-11)” (Bible Knowledge Commentary).

“All that believers need for spiritual vitality (life) and godly living (*eusebeian*, “godliness,” “piety”; cf. comments on 1:6; 3:11) is attainable **through our knowledge of Him** [Christ]. An intimate “full knowledge” (*epignouseous*; cf. 1:2) of Christ is the source of spiritual power and growth (cf. Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9-10; 2:2).”

God does not intend for his children to ever be satiated with his grace. No matter how full your cup, He desires to overfill it. Peter wants his reader to understand that **the normative Christian life in one where spiritual grace is always increasing**. The maturing believer recognizes there is no limit to God’s ability to give; no matter how much he has; he may ask for more; **God will enlarge his capacity for grace**. The apostle John phrases it: *From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another* (or grace upon grace).

What do we have in the promises of God? Is He not the rock of our salvation? The fountain of all spiritual blessings? Has not Jesus mediated on your behalf before the Father (1 Timothy 2.5), and will he not continue to do so as you pray (Romans 8.26)? All the fullness of the Father dwells in Christ and you abide in him (John 15.7), if you are a part of the vine, are rooted in him, built up and established in the faith (Colossians 2.6). God who has called you will also perfect that which he has begun in you (Philippians 1.6). **As the believer acknowledges that God has called him out of darkness into light by his glory and goodness, he becomes increasingly aware that God’s effectual call continues to convert or conform him into a state of glory and moral excellence** (cp. Ephesians 1.17-19). His faith is strengthened by the promises of God; his salvation is a result of God’s promise to pardon sin (1 John 1.9,10; Romans 10.9-10); and his ongoing spiritual maturity is dependent upon the promised Holy Spirit. It is by God’s good work in his life that he escapes the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires (James 4.1-6; 1 John 2.15-17; Titus 2.11-14; Galatians 5.24; Ephesians 4.22 – 32; etc.).

Additional reading: Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks. I am not certain this book is still in print, but if you can find a copy, it is very much worth reading – though it may seem a bit heavy reading at first.

ADDING TO FAITH GOODNESS – 2 Peter 1.5

Reason alone is sufficient to postulate the existence of God. That, of course, is exactly what the Bible tells us, namely, **that men are without excuse before God because all men know of His existence, His eternal power and divine nature** (Romans 1:20). Philosophers have presented numerous arguments from reason that set forth the reasonableness of God and his eternal qualities (e.g. cosmological and ontological arguments). **The Scripture declares a person a fool who says there is no God** (Psalm 14.1; Proverbs 14.1). However it is not enough to know that God exists. That little bit of knowledge might easily lead to despair, because unless God reveals truth about himself man can have no hope of fellowship with him. But the Scriptures do make God

known to man; more than that, they declare the way of salvation (2 Peter 1.16-21). This salvation is found only in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4.12). This salvation comes by faith and is a gift of God's grace free of any human effort (Ephesians 2.8,9). Those who are thus saved participate in God's gracious work by participating with the Holy Spirit who is working in their life (Ephesians 2.10; cp. Philippians 2.13; 2 Corinthians 9.8; Galatians 2.8; Ephesians 2.20; 1 Thessalonians 1.3).

Peter has made it clear that the salvation his readers have received originated with God. It was God's calling, for God's glory, stemming from God's goodness. Peter's account of God's efficacious work is but an echo of the broader New Testament teaching regarding God's elective work in salvation. For example, consider Paul's opening comments to Timothy in his second letter: *So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and brought to life and immortality light through the gospel* (2 Timothy 1.8-10).

Thus, Christianity both as a religion and as a lifestyle is quite reasonable. Not only does the Bible make it clear that God has accomplished a mighty work of salvation for those who place their trust in him, it clarifies what it is that God expects from those who are considered children of God. Moreover, he gives his children everything they need for this new life of godliness. Indeed, it is the power of God at work in the believer's life in such a way that God's grace is evidenced in their living. **The impetus for this new life is an eternal fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus** (cp. 1 John 1.3). Additionally, the Christian's life is an expression of a sincere heart devoted to the honor and praise of God (1 Timothy 1.5). God has, through the vicarious work of his Son, purchased for himself a people who belong to him and are, constrained by their new nature, eager to do that which is pleasing to him (Titus 1.11-14). **Because of God's most gracious work, it is sensible and fitting that all believers should comport themselves in such a manner as to reflect their proper station in life, namely, that they are children of God** (2 Corinthians 7.1).

Because of all this Peter argues that it is reasonable to *make every effort to add to your faith goodness...* In one sense it may seem incompatible that the believer who is saved by faith, which is itself God's gift, must also make every effort to secure his salvation. Is this not contrary to the teaching, that faith is an unmerited gift of God (Ephesians 2.8,9; Romans 4.4,5 etc.)? I think not. In Scripture we find a natural antinomy between grace and work, and though it may seem odd to the modern reader, it is very natural for those who suppositionally begin with the premise of God's sovereignty. That God is sovereign is clearly evident in his elective purpose of calling and saving those whom He alone chooses. **Nevertheless, once chosen, the elect become a part of that coterie of righteousness, marked by the seal of his Holy Spirit and it is only reasonable to expect that such people would be marked by an eagerness to please God.** It is also sensible to assume that these same men and women should become morally and spiritually accountable for their behavior (Micah 6.8; Ephesians 2.10; Philippians 2.12-13; Matthew 12.36). **So then both things are true:**

God's grace is full and free, and men are responsible for their actions. James, who is often falsely accused of writing an epistle which extols a salvation by works, writes: *God chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all that he created.* However, he also writes in that same context: *Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* This tension between work and grace is present in Paul, Peter, John (1 John 3.4-6) and even Jesus (Matthew 11.28 cp. 5.19; John 8).

In a similar vein Paul, who is well known for his teaching on the grace of God, also writes: *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more so in my absence – continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose* (Philippians 2.7; cf. Romans 1.5; 16.25-27; 1 Corinthians 9.24-27; 15.58; Galatians 6.7-9). The tension between these two ideas is in some manner answered by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1.3: *We continually remember before our God and Father **your work produced by faith**, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ* (emphasis mine).

God's great love for his children (John 1.12) has expressed itself in promises to give each believer what he or she needs to live in such a way as to escape the corruption that is in the world and also participate in the God's divine nature (1 Corinthians 10.13). This, as we have seen, comes by way of his very great and precious promises. What do you suppose would be the most natural response to such a promise? Would it not be to please the Giver? Certainly, this is what the authors of the New Testament believed. Paul writes: *Having these promises dear friends let us perfect holiness out of reverence for God* (2 Corinthians 7.1). John likewise writes: *The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2.4; cp. 1.1-4). **What God desires from his children is what all parents wants from their children, they want them to be good.** A young child asks her mom "what do you want for your birthday." The parent may say, "I just want you to clean your room," or "I want you to apply yourself to your studies," or "be nice to your sister." The child usually ignores this request, buys some knickknack for the bookcase and hits his sister over the head with his schoolbook for coming into his messy room and reminding him that mother told him to clean it. God, however, really does want, indeed, expects his children to be good. Moreover, he wants them to be just like his Son, Jesus Christ. This he enables them to do by the sending of his Son to take up residence in their lives, reminding them that they have been forgiven of their past sins.

This is what Peter has in mind when he is writing about the spiritual virtues in the opening lines of his second letter. Having noted the tension between grace which comes by faith (Romans 5.1-8) and the natural expression of gratitude that is the response of faith, we observe that Peter's list of spiritual virtues begins with that which God supplies, that is, faith. **There must be a foundation upon which to build that is not contaminated by sin. So God gives faith to his children and with it his precious promises.** God's offer of salvation is procured only by faith (Ephesians 2.8-10). No one secures any favor with God by his kind deeds, pleasant speech, or his philanthropic generosity.

For everything mankind does is tainted by his sinful nature and is therefore unacceptable to God. Once justified by faith, however, he is now at peace with God and may come to God through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having been granted this position of right standing with God, the believer is now encouraged to add to it goodness or, more correctly, moral excellence. **There is in Scripture a predominant theme of right versus wrong behavior. Right behavior of course is always associated with a faith dependence upon God.** Whenever a person is in a right kind of relationship with God, there is an assumption that he is behaving in a manner that is pleasing to God, and conversely, when a person is in a wrong relationship with God, his behavior is reprehensible to God. The general truth of this is readily evident when you consider the dominance of law of God in both the Old and New Testaments. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, a central teaching in the gospel of Matthew, has a profoundly moral leaning. The author of Hebrews writes *you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil* (Hebrews 5.13). That is to say, Christian maturity is marked by the ability to discern good from evil and to do what is good. Jesus instructs his disciples on the night of his betrayal by Judas to be obey what he has commanded them to do.

The fool of Scripture, to whom I alluded earlier (Psalm 14.1), is a *moral* fool. He denies God's existence in order to justify his behavior as a reprobate. It is the truth captured in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*: "If God is dead anything is permissible." But God is not dead, and everyone will be judged for what he has done (Ecclesiastes 11.9).

ADDING TO GOODNESS KNOWLEDGE – 2 PETER 1.5-6

We have already considered the foundation of faith established by the gift of God. To this foundation the believer makes every effort to be good, or more correctly, to perfect moral excellence. And **although it is not always clear exactly what the Christian is to choose, as he matures in his faith he will be able to make a proper distinction between good and evil** although true goodness is not always as simply and easily defined as one might wish. Nevertheless, it is God's desire that his children be good (Hebrews 5.14). To do this well they must be growing in knowledge; knowledge of God, his Word and of themselves (Psalm 139.23-24; 2 Corinthians 13.5; Galatians 6.4).

There is in theology something called the communicable attributes of God. These are the qualities of God which are shared by man having been created in God's image. One of those attributes is the ability to know and act accordingly. It is everywhere evident in scripture that God requires his children to know truth about himself both from that which has been revealed to all mankind (Romans 1.20) and from special revelation (Psalm 119). **Moreover, he expects them to be able to**

deduce both from Scripture and from the natural order of creation the good and necessary consequences of revelation (WCF 1. 6).

General revelation (e.g. Psalm 19.1-6) makes it clear to all that there is a God. Beyond this they may also surmise something of God's nature and character. However, the rationalist denies the existence of any world beyond that which the natural senses perceive, even though people of all nations and various degrees of culture have discerned from nature and providence and an inward working of their own souls that God is present and active in the world as they know it.

Even though the natural order of things is such that a man may deduce the existence and active presence of God, **this knowledge is insufficient to secure his salvation** (1 Corinthians 1.21). **The moral foundation necessary for fellowship with God has been disrupted by sin** and any natural knowledge he may have about God fails to provide any suggestion as to how he might remedy this situation. There is, however, a knowledge that comes from God that addresses man's sinful condition (2 Peter 1.20). **The Bible is the only reliable source of information about God.** It is a supernatural revelation wherein God declares truth about himself. The Bible informs us that God is omniscient (cp. 1 Samuel 2.3; Psalm 139.1-6).

That God places a high premium upon knowledge is plain from the great pains he took to give us Holy Scripture. Furthermore, within Scripture there is a great emphasis upon the pursuit of wisdom and a knowledge of God. Consider, by way of example, the first nine chapters of Proverbs which have as their theme the wisdom of God; or reflect on Psalm 119 which has the singular theme of knowing and applying the Word of God to one's life; or the somewhat heady existential wisdom of Ecclesiastes to the exigencies of daily living. Moses prefaces the giving of the law with an admonition to the Israelites that they should know and keep the statutes of the Lord: *Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below, there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time* (Deuteronomy 4.39-40; cf. Ezra 7.10). Immediately after the giving of the law, Moses gives additional instructions about teaching God's laws to their children: *These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and your children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life* (Deuteronomy 6.1-2).

Moreover, the apostle Paul writes: *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,* (Philippians 1.9). **By increasing his knowledge of the Word of God the Christian is in a better position to make the best possible decision when confronted with a variety of good options.** This is analogous to a multiple-choice test wherein all the answers are

right but one is better than the others. As we have already discovered, goodness, that is, discerning right from wrong is a mark of Christian maturity.

The following lengthy quote from Thomas Watson illustrates the practical use of Biblical knowledge for the believer:

“Is God infinite in knowledge? Is he light, and in him is there no darkness? Then how unlike are they to God who are darkness, and in whom is no light, who are destitute of knowledge, such as the Indians who never heard of God! And are there not many among us, who are no better than baptized heathens? Who need to seek the first principles of the oracles of God. It is sad, that after the sun of the gospel has shined so long in our horizon, to this day the veil should be upon their heart. Such as are enveloped in ignorance cannot give God a reasonable service (Romans 12.1). **Ignorance is the nurse of impiety.** The schoolmen say, *Omne peccatum fundatur in ignorantia* [Every sin is founded upon ignorance] (Jeremiah 9.3). “They proceed from evil to evil, and know not me, saith the Lord.” **Where ignorance reigns in the understanding, lust rages in the affections** (Proverbs 19.2). ‘That the mind be without knowledge, it is not good;’ such have neither faith nor fear: no faith; **for knowledge carries the torch before faith.** (Psalm 9.10). “they that know thy name shall put their trust in thee.” **A man can no more believe without knowledge than the eye can see without light.** He can have no fear of God; for how can they fear him whom they do not know? The covering of Haman’s face was a sad presage of death. When people’s minds are covered with ignorance, it is a covering of the face that is a fatal forerunner of destruction.” (Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity* p.57 [emphasis mine]).

The Christian who does not want to be culturally annihilated needs, as much as ever in history, to develop a Biblical worldview. He must learn to think critically within a Biblical framework. There are three stages to gain a mature knowledge of God. First, there is **rote knowledge** (Psalm 119). This is how we begin to teach our children. A child may not understand all the scripture they are memorizing but they are acquiring the words of God as a part of their lives. Secondly, there is **reflective knowledge** (Psalm 1). This is a knowledge that comes by way of meditating on the Word of God. Finally, there is **redemptive instinctive knowledge**. This is that final work of grace that is evidenced when your first instinctive response to trouble is Christ-like (Acts 7.54-60; Romans 9.1-4; 1 Samuel 12.23-24).

To know God is the true goal of learning. Malcolm Muggeridge said “To see God is the highest aspiration of man and has preoccupied the rarest human spirits at all times. Seeing God means understanding, seeing into the mystery of things. It is, or should be, the essential quest of universities...” (*Jesus Rediscovered* p. 95). This has not only failed to take place in our universities, but in large measure it has failed to take place in our churches as well. Carefully examine the ten causes suggested by R. C. Sproul that keep the Christian from coming to spiritual maturity and developing a deep understanding of God. If the shoe fits, resolve to do something about it.

1. **Childlike Faith Error** (Mark 10.15) - There is a difference between childlike faith and childish faith. (Hebrews 5.12-14; 1 Corinthians 13.11; 14.20).
2. **Fear of Theological Skepticism** - This has evolved as a result of Biblical vandalism, a product of **nineteenth** century theological liberalism..
3. **Error of Easy Believism** - is a modern variation of antinomianism. Once a person makes a “decision for Christ” or prays to receive Jesus as Savior their salvation is secured and any “religious” activity embracing Jesus as Lord may be a good thing but does nothing to evidence or alter one’s assurance of being “saved.”
4. **Neo-Monasticism** - glorifying **withdrawal** from the world. Christians are often taught to drop out of the world, not just in rejecting worldliness, but intellectually, socially & politically.
5. **Fear of Controversies** - “Never discuss religion or politics.” While we are called to avoid *godless controversies* we are, nevertheless, admonished to engage in the “Mars Hill” debates. The problem with many of these **conversations** is the monumental ignorance of the half-trained “theologian.”
6. **Antirational Spirit of the age** - Ironically, we are living in the most anti-intellectual era in history ever known. People use the words feeling and thinking about an issue interchangeably.
7. **Seduction of Worldliness** - we understand the seduction of sensuality, materialism, hedonism but fail to avoid the dangers of popular world views. Alan Bloom contends that relativism is almost universal in the American University. **To say that truth is relative is mindless.**
8. **A Pietistic Substitution of Devotion for Study** - C. S. Lewis said *studying the Bible seriously is an act of devotion*. Solid theological and doctrinal books are at their root devotional.
9. **Slothfulness** - “Karl Barth once remarked that the **three most basic and primal sins** of fallen humanity are *pride, dishonesty, and slothfulness*.” Theological error is sin. It is not the Holy Spirit who fails to do His work, it is we who fail to do ours.
10. **Disobedience** - Sums up all the Christian’s failings (R.C. Sproul *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. xi - xxi).

ADDING TO KNOWLEDGE SELF-CONTROL – 2 PETER 1.6

Self-control is one of those spiritual disciplines that may be frequently overlooked; when not overlooked, it is often either misunderstood or underrated. The term is not commonly used in the Bible. It is found once in the Old Testament (Proverbs 25.28) and sixteen times in the New. It does not occur in the gospels at all. Paul uses the term in 1 Corinthians 9.25 as an example of service not, however, with respect to the believer’s salvation. Paul mentions it five time in his letter to Titus (1.8; 2.2, 5-6, 12). By way of contrast, when Paul lists the virtues of the Spirit in Galatians five, he mentions love first (Peter mentions it last) and self-control last. Perhaps, as we shall see, because **self-control is not a virtue that stands alone for the Christian**. On the three occasions

that Peter references the term in his first epistle, he uses it in the context of being dependent upon the grace of God. “The sparse use of this ethical term is due to three things: 1) for Christians life is directed by God’s command, so that there is no place for autonomous self-mastery; 2) belief in creation excludes dualism, for all things are good as they come from God; and 3) salvation in Christ leaves no place for meriting salvation by asceticism” (W. Grundmann, Kittel’s *TDNT*, II, 339.42).

Although self-control is not mentioned often in the New Testament its several occurrences are very important. Clearly self-control does not come naturally or merely by hard effort, but it is a product of the Spirit’s work in the believer’s life (Galatians 5.23; 2 Timothy 1.7). It is because of God’s promised inward work of grace that the believer may pursue with confidence a disciplined life. Thus, living a self-control, upright and godly life that is pleasing to God is a realistic expectation for the Spirit controlled Christian. Indeed, it is to be the goal of all Christians (2Cor 7.1). Just as an athlete exercises self-control (1 Corinthians 9.25-27) with the hope of winning the prize, so too, the Christian competes for the prize, *well done, good and faithful servant* (cf. Matthew 25.21-23). Self-control, in a Biblical context, is first and foremost a work of God in the life of a self-surrendering believer. “This is the primary reason why a concept so central to Greek ethics found such a small place in biblical ethics. “The reason for this is that biblical man regarded his life as determined and directed by the command of God. There was thus no place for the self-mastery which had a place in autonomous ethics” ([*TDNT*, II 342] ISBE 4. 386).

For the biblical Christian, self-control is concomitant with his self-abnegating surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth that they are not ethically autonomous people; rather, they have an obligation to another because they have been purchased (like a slave) and now have responsibilities and obligations to their new Lord [1 Corinthians 6.20; 7.23]. **One ought not to miss the irony of being a slave to the one who sets you free while in being free one is slave to all** (John 8.32-36; 1 Corinthians 7.22; cf. 9.19). Moreover, believers should honor God by being self-controlled, i.e. free of avarice, godly in speech, sexually pure, gentle, etc.. However, the believer’s self-control is not rooted in his own ability to curb his passions as though it were merely a variation on the stoic disciplines. Rather, it is the believer’s redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ that gives him the strength to live a self-controlled, upright and godly life: *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works* (Titus 2.11–14). **Peter makes this clear when at the end of his list of Christian virtues he reminds his readers that if any of them are failing to ‘grow’ in these things, it is because they have forgotten that they have be cleansed of their past sins.** Notwithstanding all the hardships that Paul endured for the cause of Christ, he never claimed to have developed a self-mastery that allowed him to accomplish all those things. To the contrary, he maintained that it was

Christ in him that gave him strength (2 Corinthians 12.9; Philippians 4.13; Colossians 1.28-29; cf. Hebrews 4.16).

This of course is precisely what Jesus enjoins as a lifestyle for his disciples. *Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light* (Matthew 11.28-30). **Again, this is the reoccurring theme, that Christ may be formed in you.** Indeed, this motif is everywhere present in the Scriptures. Jeremiah speaks of it as a promise of God: *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart* (Jeremiah 29.12). *Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable thing you do not know* (cf. 33.3). Certainly the Psalms are replete with the affirmations that dependence upon God is a source of strength. Even when everything is failing the Psalmist reminds God that he does not depend upon his own resources. His dependence has always been upon the LORD, and he will not turn to any other for help no matter what: *I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever...We are brought down to the dust, our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love* (Psalm 44.6-8, 25-26).

It is God's purpose that his creation should live in a state of constant dependency on him. When he provided sustenance for the Israelites in the wilderness, he did so on a daily basis, not a weekly or monthly one. It is, therefore, not surprising that when the people of God attempt anything, whether great or small, without consulting him or relying upon his provision, they will inevitably meet with failure. **That is not to say that they may have an appearance of victory (certainly Saul had this) but the end result (as Saul found out) will be rejection from a covenant relationship with God.** Consider the example of the Israelites, who, after winning the battle at Jericho in a miraculous manner, moved on to an embarrassing defeat at hands of the inhabitants of the small town of Ai. They presumed everything was right between them and the Lord; however, they had not kept themselves pure and they failed (Joshua 7). Ironically, a short time later the Gibeonites came to them with a deceptive story about being from a far land and wanting to establish a treaty between themselves and the Israelites because they had heard of the great renown of their God. The Israelites were flattered and make a judgment on the "obvious" appearance of things and formed a treaty with them. Once again they failed to consult the Lord because the evidence was so 'obvious' (Joshua 9). **This kind of self-sufficiency so characteristic of the self-disciplined, self-controlled individual is not a character trait that is enjoined by God on his followers. Quite to the contrary, at every point the believer is instructed to depend upon the LORD GOD for everything.**

It is natural for people to seek to advance their own cause, to secure a place for themselves in the world, to defend themselves against injustice, and to justify their actions. As compared to this the seemingly more altruistic impulse of self-denial, self-surrender seems absurd and counter

productive. Indeed, to surrender the self and at the same time to be self-controlled seems to be an oxymoron. **For the modern mind, to be self-sacrificing, self-effacing, and self-denying is to be out of control; it goes against every natural impulse of self-preservation. Nevertheless, this is what the Scriptures require of anyone who is to live a self-controlled life.** This obvious conundrum that confronts the believer arise from what appears to be conflicting commands in Scripture. The one extols the cardinal Greek virtue of the self-will (predicated on a fallacious dualistic supposition) being dominant over the flesh. The other being submission to the Spirit. Does Paul mean when he says, *I beat my body and make it my slave* (1 Corinthians 9.7) that it is solely his strength of will that dominates the unruly sin nature of the body (*soma*)? Or is it, as we have indicated, his submission to Christ that makes it possible to gain victory over sin and to bring every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10.3).

That the victory of self-control is gained through submission to God is everywhere present in Scripture. Certainly, Abraham and Moses both yielded to the call of God upon their lives, and in so doing, they succeeded in doing what God required of them. **The prophets all experienced a call of God upon their lives that required that they speak not their own words but God's** (Ezra 1.3; 3.14; Isaiah 6.8; Jeremiah 1.1-10). Even the rebellious Jonah eventually capitulated to the divine will of God and spoke not the word that was in his heart but the Word of God (Jonah 3.3).

Of course, as evidenced in Christ's prayer in Gethsemane he modeled precisely what it meant to be self-controlled and under the discipline of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 26.38-39; cf. John 8.28-29). That a disciple must surrender his life to Christ is evident from a variety of gospel passages (Matthew 10.38-39; 16.24; Luke 9.23-24, 59-62; 14.27,33 cf. Matthew 19.27; Mark 8.34). **When the disciples followed Jesus they did so by breaking all ties that inhibited their complete devotion to Christ** (Matthew 4.20; 9.9; Mark 2.14). However, surrender to Christ is not the loss of personal identity (Mark 8.34; Matthew 10.39).

Jesus himself demonstrated his self-surrender in every area of his life. As a child he was obedient to his parents (Luke 2.51). Self-surrender marked his baptism and temptation (Matthew 3.15). He clearly stated that it was not his will that he had come to do but that of his Father's (Jesus 4.34; 5.30; 6.38). The problem of the tension between self-surrender and self-control, is not following a path to religious asceticism (clearly, Jesus was not an ascetic Matthew 11.19); rather, it is submitting the sinful self-will to the holy will of God.

Those who belong to Christ learn to crucify the sinful nature with its passions and desires (Galatians 5.24); rather they *set their minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth* (Colossians 3.2). They *put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator* (Colossians 3.9-10). Believers who exercise self-control know the requirements of the Word of God (2 Timothy 2.15 – 19). They guard their hearts, knowing it is the well-spring of life (Proverbs 4.23) and they guard what comes out of their

mouths (James 1.26; 3.4-12). Above all, they know that they need a help that is quite beyond themselves (Psalm 56.3; Philippians 4.13; 1 Corinthians 10.13).

ADDING TO SELF-CONTROL PERSEVERANCE [STEADFASTNESS] – 2 PETER 1.6

BELIEVER'S WORK IN PERSEVERANCE

While each of the character traits listed in 2 Peter 1:3-11 are significant in and of themselves and may be studied individually in light the larger context of Scripture, it is nevertheless good not to lose sight of their collective value. **Collectively they function as a character collage of the Christian man or woman who has, through the Holy Spirit's work in his or her life, found that he is experiencing Christ being formed in him.** It is not a thing that happens all at once. It happens by degrees. That is why Peter says to make every effort to add one spiritual grace upon another. As with any difficult undertaking, the believer may struggle with one thing more than another. It is natural to experience different seasons in life. Perhaps for a time the problem of goodness is the main issue; at another time it may be the pursuit of Biblical knowledge. Though the believer makes some headway in these virtues, when he considers how much he yet has to learn, he may become discouraged and even entertain thoughts of giving up. **We have already examined faith, goodness, knowledge and self-control and found that there is so much to these traits that it would take a lifetime to master anyone them – if indeed that were even possible.** But at just this point Peter encourages the reader not to give up; it is perseverance in these things that makes all the difference.

We can, I believe, easily see how Peter constructs a picture of the mature Christian who cultivates these spiritual virtues. Furthermore, we have seen that behind each of these spiritual virtues there is the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Perseverance is no exception. As with self-control, which is dependent upon self-surrender, so too with perseverance: it is God who is at work to keep you from falling. **As with the other Christian virtues, perseverance is not mastered by a reliance upon inherent strength, but by learning to live in faith dependence upon God.** Consequently, the fundamental importance of the doctrine of perseverance is evident in the contrast between the permanence of God and the mutability of creation. The Bible informs us that the things of God endure forever, i.e., His counsel and Word (Isaiah 7.7; 14.24; 40.8; Romans 9.11; 1 Peter 1.23, 25), the eternal city in the new heaven and the new earth (Zechariah 14.10 – 21; Isaiah 66.22 – 23; Revelation 21.1-2), the righteous who partake in God's eternity (Psalm 112.2-9), the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3.11), and faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13.13). Of course, Christ himself remains forever (John 12.32 – 36).

Finally, **there is an eschatological dimension associated with the admonition to persevere in faith.** This is why John instructs his readers to abide in those things which will endure, such as God's word (John 15.4 – 11), abide in his love (1 John 3:17), abiding in truth (2 John 1.2), anointing of the Spirit (1 John 2:27), light (1 John 2:10), and in doctrine (2 John 2.9). This is in contrast with the unbeliever who abides in darkness (John 12:46) and death (1 John 3:14).

Perseverance (*hypomoneu*^μ) is generally ethically neutral. Perseverance, is for the early church, a prominent virtue evidenced in the believer's life as he demonstrates courageous endurance in the face of life-threatening opposition. It is distinct from patience, a fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul (Galatians 5:23). **To be successful in persevering in the faith does not necessarily mean you will overcome all opposition, but it entails the bearing of pain by the wounded, and the calm acceptance of God's providence, no matter how bleak the circumstances.** True perseverance is not motivated outwardly by public opinion or hope of reward, but inwardly by love for God – a love that finds its source in God's love for the believer.

In the Old Testament, Job is an example of Biblical perseverance in the face of God's judgment. The central truth of Job is that **humans cannot endure in their own strength** (6:11) to sustain themselves when God appears to be silent and the very source of one's affliction (9:4). God shatters their expectations (14:19). **God himself reminds Job that no one can stand against him (41:3). Nevertheless, Job waits for God to intervene (14:14) there is no fallback plan.** While this kind of endurance resembles the Greek Stoic virtue, it is ultimately higher because it comes from God and is evidence of faith and reverence of God.

“In the New Testament *hypomoneu*^μ is naturally a basic attitude of believers in view of the eschatological orientation of their faith. Over against a hostile world, they wait confidently for the fulfillment of the kingdom and their own salvation. Jesus uses the term three times. In Lk. 8:15 *hypomoneu*^μ characterizes true believers; it is here an active force that finally bears fruit. In Mk. 13:13 endurance will be needed in the trials of the last period if one is to be saved. Lk. 21:19 offers an active formulation of the same thought (cf. Acts 14:22).” (F. Hauck, TDNT IV, 574-88)

In the Pauline corpus perseverance is not derive from bravery or dullness of one's circumstances, but from faith and hope (Romans 8:25). The Christian willingly endures the wickedness and injustice of the present age (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 3:7) because he has a hope for the age to come (Romans 5:1-8). The Christian practices perseverance and finds that it produces good works (Romans 2:7). There is also a passive element to perseverance which endures under suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:4; cf. 1 Peter 2:20). By way of contrast the Greeks regarded the passive suffering of evil as shameful. “However, Christians know that they are called to suffer (Acts 14:22), and they show their faith by persevering all the same (cf. 2 Timothy 2:10). **Affliction produces endurance, and endurance character** (Romans 5:3-4). This endurance is given by God (Romans 15:5) and is closely related to faith and love (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:10). Titus 2:2 has the triad faith, love, and (hoping) steadfastness. If hope focuses on the future, the steadfastness of hope is its expression in the present time of affliction. It has the promise that those who die with Christ, if they endure, shall also reign with him (2 Timothy 2:11-12)” (ibid. 574-88).

The author of Hebrews encouraged a persecuted church to persevere in the face of great suffering (Hebrews 10:32, 36; 12:1). **The Christian should consider Christ, who himself endured the cross**

(Hebrews 12:2), as a **model of perseverance**. Trials serve as tools of God's discipline (Hebrews 12:7). James, too, shows that trials confirm faith and thus strengthen the believer and helps to bring them to maturity and completeness (James 1:3-4).

Of course, the book of Revelation is a book of the martyr church and, unsurprisingly, one would expect John to extol the perseverance of the believer. **And so he does as the church is waiting for Jesus and the great victory (3:21) and at the same time is the enduring of suffering and persecution (2:2-3; 19)**. We know there is to be a final confrontation between good and evil; it is the supreme test for the church and demands absolute persistence from the faithful lest it all be for nothing (13:10; 14:12).

There is a popular idea that perseverance is a solitary endeavor. It may be hard to imagine perseverance as a group activity. **Yet, as it is clearly seen in John's Apocalypse, the believers did indeed persevere as a community of faith**. Furthermore, this is precisely what Paul admonishes the church at Galatia to do: *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (6.2)*. And of course Hebrews gives us a similar admonition in 10.23-25, *Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching*.

It was this attitude of encouragement demonstrated by Barnabas that no doubt revitalized the discouraged John Mark. When Paul refused to allow Mark to accompany him on the second missionary journey (Acts 15.36-40) Barnabas stood by the young Mark, taking him to Cyprus while Paul and Silas left for Syria and Cilicia. **With the encouragement of Barnabas Mark persevered in the ministry** and much later Paul was to write to Timothy from prison: *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry (2 Timothy 4.11)*. Perseverance is very much an activity of the community of the faith.

You may find the following excerpt from the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* helpful in gaining an understanding of the believer's part in persevering in his faith.

Perseverance is rooted in confidence (in the Lord). It is produced by suffering (Rom 5.3; Jam 1.3) and produces character, 'so that we may be mature and complete not lacking anything' (Jam 1.4); also Rom 5.4). Faith requires perseverance (Heb 12.1) because the world hates believers and works to discourage them from finishing the race, perseverance is the mark of an apostle (2Cor 12.12) and anyone who does the work of God. In perseverance, strength comes from God, and God is glorified by it (Heb 11.27). He notices Christians' perseverance (Rev 2.2, 19) and rewards them with his compassion and mercy (1Tim 4.16; Heb 10.36; Jam 5.11).

Paul's perseverance is perhaps the prime biblical example: 'I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (1Cor 9.16). After being stoned by the Jews and left for dead in Lystra, Paul gets up and goes back into the very same city (Acts 14.19-20). In fact, Paul is so set on preaching Christ that he endures terrible hardship and persecution (2Cor 11.24-33).

Paul's perseverance is marked by humility and lack of concern for himself. Always on his mind is the glory of Christ and his concern for the churches. He does not care for himself but continues to faithfully serve the Lord according to the calling he received.

But perseverance is not reserved for the apostle; in Hebrews we are called to 'Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful' (Heb 10.23-25).

GOD'S WORK IN PERSEVERANCE

For the Christian there is no higher aspiration than for Christ to be formed in his or her life; not partially formed, but completely formed. As we have already observed, this is difficult and requires that God himself preserve in the believer's progression of sanctification. Knowing that God is at work within us, believers need to encourage one another to persevere in godliness. However, even with the faithful pursuit of righteousness by the Christian (Hebrews 12.14) and with the collective effort of the larger body of Christ (Hebrews 10.23-25), **the believer cannot hope to succeed without the persevering work of the Holy Spirit.** The Christian's hope for perseverance is secured in his confidence that God is preserving him. Indeed, it is Christ who is at work within you to will and do His good pleasure (Philippians 2.13). It is God who has begun the work and will, in due time, bring it to completion (Philippians 1.6).

God has, on the one hand made it clear that He will *render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation* (Romans 2.6). But God has also said: *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified* (Romans 8.30). **So the Christian is required to persevere in holiness, but his confidence is in God's preserving him.**

J. I. Packer observes in his book, *Concise Theology*, that it is more proper to speak of God's work in preservation than is commonly done. "Perseverance means persistence under discouragement and contrary pressure. The assertion that believers persevere in faith and obedience despite everything is true, **but the reason is that Jesus Christ through the Spirit persists in preserving them.**"

Scripture frequently emphasizes this plain truth. For example John informs the reader that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has been guaranteed by his Father that all who have been promised to him will indeed come to him (John 6.37 - 40). Moreover, his sheep belong to him, and they are completely secure in that relationship. To the Pharisees he says *you do not believe because you are not my sheep*. But to his disciples he says: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand* (John 10.26-29). Jesus' prayer in the garden before his passion was that those whom the Father had given him would be preserved to glory (John 17.2, 6, 9, 24). **"It is inconceivable that his prayer, which still continues (Romans 8.34; Hebrews 7.25), will go unanswered"** (ibid.).

Paul too portrays God's plan for the salvation of his elect as complete in Christ. This salvation consists of the believer's justification, sanctification, and finally his glorification (Romans 8.29-30). "On this basis he builds the triumphant peroration of Romans 8.31-39, in which he celebrates the present and future security of the saints in the almighty love of God" (ibid.). **Paul assures his readers that there is an absolute certainty that God will complete the "good work" that he began in them** (Philippians 1.6 cf. 1 Corinthians 1.8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5.23-24; 2 Timothy 1.12; 4.18).

This teaching of God's work of perseverance is clearly affirmed in the Westminster Confession which reads: *They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.* (XVII.1)

"The doctrine declares that the regenerate are saved through persevering in faith and Christian living to the end (Hebrews 3.6; 6.11; 10.35-39), and that it is God who keeps them persevering. That does not mean that all who ever professed conversion will be saved. False professions are made; short-term enthusiasts fall away (Matthew 13.20-22); many who say to Jesus, 'Lord, Lord,' will not be acknowledged (Matthew 7.21-23). Only those who show themselves to be regenerate by pursuing heart-holiness and true neighbor-love as they pass through this world are entitled to believe themselves secure in Christ. Persevering in faith and penitence, not just in Christian formalism, is the path to glory. To suppose that believing in perseverance leads to careless living and arrogant presumption is a total misconception" (Packer).

There are numerous admonitions in Scripture for the believer to examine himself. Our present passage is a case in point. Paul writes to those in Corinth: *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?* (2 Corinthians 13.5; Lam 3⁴⁰; Haggai 1.5 – 11; Hebrews 12.12 – 14). So, too, Paul instructs his young protégé: *Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers* (1 Timothy 4.16).

Although the regenerate may backslide and fall into foul sin this is out of character with the new nature he has received in Christ. When he does violence to his new nature and makes himself miserable **there is no succor for his misery until he finds restoration in Christ and resumes righteous living.** "When regenerate believers act in character, they manifest a humble, grateful desire to please the God who saved them; and the knowledge that he is pledged to keep them safe forever simply increases this desire" (Packer).

Regarding the perseverance of the saints, we may note the following from the *Confession of Faith*:

THEY whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved¹.

THIS perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father;² upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ,³ the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them;⁴ and the nature of the covenant of grace:⁵ from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof ⁶.

NEVERTHELESS they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins;⁷ and for a time continue therein;⁸ whereby they incur God's s displeasure,⁹ and grieve his Holy Spirit:¹⁰ come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts:¹¹ have their hearts hardened,¹² and their consciences wounded;¹³ hurt and scandalize others,¹⁴ and bring temporal judgments upon themselves ¹⁵.

¹Phil. 1:6; 2 Pet. 1:10; John 10:28,29; 1 John 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:5,9. ²2 Tim. 2:18,19; Jer. 31:3. ³Heb. 10:10,14, 13:20,21, 9:12-15; Rom. 8:33-39; John 17:11,24; Luke 22:32; Heb. 7:25. ⁴John 14:16,17; 1 John 2:27; 3:9. ⁵Jer. 32:40. ⁶John 10:28; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 2:19. ⁷Matt. 26:70,72,74. ⁸Ps. 51:14. ⁹Isa. 64:5,7,9; 2 Sam. 11:27. ¹⁰Eph. 4:30. ¹¹Ps. 51:8,10,12; Rev. 2:4; Cant. 5:2-4,6. ¹²Isa 63:17; Mark 6:52; 16:14. ¹³Ps. 32:3,4; 51:8. ¹⁴2 Sam. 12:14. ¹⁵Ps. 89:31,32; 1 Cor. 11:32.

Perseverance is a state of grace stemming from the gracious work of God in the life of the believer. It does not proceed from anything inherent in the life of the regenerate soul but is solely a result of God's mercy towards that individual. There can be no assurance that the Christian will not fall from grace and lose his salvation except for God's unchanging work of grace to keep his covenant of love and sustain the elect whom He has called. **The true believer, having been regenerated and justified by God, can never totally fall away from grace, but will persevere in his salvation to the end.** This is certain. It is not the free-will of the saints that is the source of their salvation, but the free and elective purposes of God in their salvation (2 Timothy 1.8 - 9). Salvation is rooted in the intercession of Christ and in the constant indwelling and preserving power of the Holy Spirit.

No doubt the true believer may succumb to the seductions of Satan (1 Peter 5.8 - 9) or yield to the corruption of his own nature (James 1.13 - 14), or neglect grace given him in Christ (2 Timothy 4.14) and even grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4.30). However, **he will, for any of these things, suffer the privation of God's grace and comfort. With his heart hardened and his conscience wounded, the unfaithful Christian is plunged into a state of misery because he is out of fellowship with God.** In due course, the Lord will bring him to repent of his obdurate behavior (1 Timothy 1.18 - 20) or, perhaps, take him home (1 Corinthians 11.30).

The doctrine of perseverance is *not* that salvation is certain if we have once believed, but *that perseverance in holiness* is certain if we have truly believed. A believer may be certain of his salvation only through his perseverance in holiness. There is no assurance of the Spirit for those

who live in opposition to the known will of God. The tendency to relax one's diligence in grace, because of the doctrine that true Christians will not be allowed completely to fall away, is itself evidence that he is not in a state of grace. Consequently, the threats of the law, and the invitations of the gospel, are the truths applicable to such an individual. The consolations of eternal security (God's perseverance) are only for those who evidence the disciplines of the Spirit. It is not merely persistent effort on our part that guarantees we will persevere in our salvation, **rather our efforts are certain to succeed because it is *God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*** (Philippians 2.13; Ephesians 2.4; 2 Thessalonians 2.13 – 15; Titus 3.4 – 7).

Additional Biblical References Regarding “Eternal Security”

Ps. 37:23–24; Ps. 138:8; Jer. 32:40; John 5:24; John 6:37, 39–40; John 6:68–69; John 10:27–30; John 16:27, 29–33; John 17:8, 11; Acts 1:3; Rom. 4:9, 20–22; Rom. 5:1–5; Rom. 8:15–17, 28–30, 33–35, 37–39; Rom. 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:8–9; 2 Cor. 1:21–22; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:4–5; Eph. 4:30; Phil. 1:6; Phil. 2:12–13; Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:23–24; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 6:11; Heb. 7:24–25; Heb. 10:14; Heb. 10:22–23; Heb. 11:1; 1 Pet. 1:3–5; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 John 2:1–2; 1 John 3:9, 14, 18–20; 1 John 4:13; 1 John 5:10–11, 13, 18; Jude 1; Jude 24

Additional Biblical References Regarding the Exhortations to Persevere:

1 Chron. 16:11; Job 17:9; Ezek. 18:24; Hos. 12:6; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 10:22; Mark 4:3–8; Luke 22:31–32; John 8:31–32; John 15:4–10, 14; Acts 11:23; Acts 13:43; Acts 14:21–22; Rom. 2:6–8; 1 Cor. 10:12–13; 1 Cor. 15:1–2, 58; 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:1–4; Gal. 6:9; Eph. 6:13, 16, 18; Phil. 1:27; Phil. 3:12–15; Phil. 4:1; Col. 1:22–23; Col. 2:5–6; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Thess. 2:15–17; 1 Tim. 6:11–12; 2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:14; 2 Tim. 4:7–8; Heb. 2:1; Heb. 3:14; Heb. 4:14; Heb. 6:4–6, 11–12; Heb. 10:23, 35–36; Heb. 11:27; Heb. 12:1–13; James 1:2–4; James 1:12; James 5:10–11; 1 Pet. 1:5–7; 2 Pet. 1:10–11; 2 Pet. 3:17; Jude 21; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 3:5; Rev. 3:11–12; Rev. 3:21; Rev. 14:12; Rev. 16:15; Rev. 21:7; Rev. 22:11

ADDING TO PERSEVERANCE GODLINESS 2 PETER 1.6 - 7

“Christ is being formed in me.” When a Christian makes this claim he has engaged himself in the greatest enterprise a Christian may undertake. **From one perspective, it seems to be a daunting task. From another, it is surprisingly simple.** As we have seen, it requires that the Christian strive after faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance. But we have also discovered that it is the Spirit of God that is at work in the life of the Christian. So, despite the enormity of the task, God is at work to bring it to completion (Philippians 1.6).

Peter instructs his readers to add to all these spiritual virtues that catchall virtue of godliness (cp. James 4.17). To be truly godly or godlike seems to be an impossible task. Peter might as well ask the believer to be perfect. In essence, that is what he does when he writes, *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written ‘be holy because I am holy’* (1 Peter 1.14 – 15). **Of course, this is what Jesus required of his disciples** in Matthew 5.48, *Be perfect, therefore, as your*

heavenly Father is perfect. But exactly what does Peter mean by godliness? Certainly he does not mean for the believer to attempt to be something he cannot be, namely, to have the transcendent attributes of God. These are attributes that we can know about God, but which we cannot share. When we speak of the eternal, incommunicable attributes of God, we can only know them cognitively, not experientially.

1. **His independence:** that is, His self-existence and self-sufficiency.
2. **His immutability:** that is, He is entirely free from change and thus is utterly consistent in all action.
3. **His infinity:** that is, He is free from all the restraints of time and space: e.g., He is eternal and omnipresent.
4. **His simplicity:** that is, He is free of conflict; He cannot be of two minds on any given matter. When we say God is simple or not complex we mean His being is not a result of the balance of parts, but the absence of parts. So to say that God is love (1 John 4.8) and that God is jealous, and avenging (Nahum 1.2) is not to balance these emotions as you might with a person, but to recognize there is no distinction in His attributes. The one exists because it must - His love is perfect.

These attributes describe the absolute being of God. However, there are other attributes that **describe the personal nature of God**, and in these things man is meant to be like God. When Peter writes that we share in the divine nature (2 Peter 1.3; cf. Genesis 1.27), **he is no doubt thinking, at least in part, that the moral and holy character of God ought to be evidenced in the life of the believer** (cp. 1 Peter 1.14 - 15). The Bible portrays God as moral and ethical (e.g. Mark 10.18). The supreme revelation of God's character is manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, when Jesus says to Philip, *anyone who has seen me has seen the Father* (John 14.9), He is not speaking of God as a Spirit, but of God's personhood. J. I. Packer writes that to know God at all is to know something of His perfection. That is, "the aspects of His moral character which are manifested in His words and deeds - His holiness, His love and mercy, His truthfulness, His faithfulness, His goodness, His patience, His justice" (Packer *Knowing God*, p. 16). All of these attributes of God are evidenced in the life of Jesus.

If the believer is to aspire after true godliness, he can do no better than to aspire to be like Jesus. This is precisely what we find the authors of Scripture exhorting their readers to do. They admonish believers to be like Jesus in this life so that they may be like Him in the life to come. Indeed, being like Jesus is the final reward for those who seek Him (Philippians 3.21; 2 Corinthians 3.18; 1 John 3.2; cp. Psalm 16.11). **Paul encourages the Philippian believers to follow his example by seeking to identify with Christ (3:10).** In everything they must be constantly pressing toward the goal of heaven where their true citizenship is located. The prize to which they aspire is to be like Christ, transformed in their character and in their body (cp. 1 John 3.1-3). The author of Hebrews says, *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*, and

then goes on to describe the life of a believer as one that is shaped by the discipline of God that leads to holiness and righteousness (Hebrews 12.1 - 13).

Paul's instruction to Timothy, his young protégé, is to train himself to be godly because such training has a present value and a value in the life to come (1 Timothy 4.7). Such piety and desire for God's favor produces actions that are pleasing to God. No doubt this attitude is what Paul has in mind when he writes, *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons, and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* Since we have these promises, dear friends, set us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor 6^{17ff}). Within the family it is a natural thing for a child to emulate his parents. In a similar fashion, the child of God naturally seeks to emulate his heavenly Father (Ephesians 5.1 - 2).

Biblically speaking, we do not associate godliness with mystical encounters or 'out of the body' experiences; rather, godliness is associated with upright and moral behavior. Paul writes to Titus, *The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age...* (2.11 - 12). **That Jesus expects this behavior of his disciples is evident in the discourse on the vine** (John 15). *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing* (15.5). John's emphasis upon remaining or abiding in Christ is emphatic. Whatever Jesus' disciple hopes to accomplish in this life is contingent upon remaining in Him.

In the beginning, the Bible tells us, man was created in God's image (Genesis 1.27). That does not mean, as we have already seen, that man is like God in every respect, but that something of God's own nature is inherit in Adam's nature. God intended to share the moral, spiritual, and even corporeal nature with mankind in order that He might have fellowship with his creation. These **moral attributes** - goodness, truth, holiness, righteousness - as well as the qualities of **spirituality and freedom became the foundation for man's fellowship with God**. However, as a **result of Adam's rebellion, these moral qualities were damaged and fellowship with God was lost**. All attempts by mankind to restore his relationship with God through religion, philosophy, and 'moral behavior' were like houses built on foundations of sand (cp. Matthew 7.26). All true godly behavior was lost.

Despite man's fall, a vestige of the image of God remained in him. Although every facet of man's being is affected by the imputation of Adam's sin, there still remains **moral responsibility to do what is right in God's sight**. This **sense of moral oughtness** includes an obligation to choose between right and wrong behavior. The dilemma, of course, is that man is no longer free to choose fellowship with God, and all his "moral choices" are distorted because his character is marred by Adam's sin. Prior to his expulsion from the garden man enjoyed unhindered fellowship with God. Since the fall man has been enslaved to sin and he has lost the freedom from sin. Augustine wrote that man's

original state with God, *posse non peccare* (able not to sin), has become *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin). In essence, he lost the ability to have a godly character.

The Word of God speaks to the heart of man regarding the lost estate of fellowship with God. This is the spiritual condition of all mankind outside of a saving faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible declares that what was lost with Adam has been regained with Christ. **The imputation of Adam's sin is more than atoned for with the imputation of Christ's righteousness.** In the opening verses of his second epistle Peter assumed a relationship of faith with the Savior; he is now addressing the outworking of that faith. This is the same faith of which Paul writes in Romans 5^{1ff}: *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.* Peter now describes how it is that the Christian shall be like Christ. **Those who would be disciples of the Master must attach themselves to Him for the purpose of becoming like Him.** Jesus says you must listen to His words and put them into practice (Luke 6.47; cf. John 15.7). Paul writes that you ought to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5.1). The word of God has been handed down to Christians and if they hope to be godly they must pay attention to the words entrusted to their charge (2 Peter 1.19). If you are to practice godliness you must familiarize yourself with the content of God's word regarding holiness.

Although it must be remembered that true godliness is derived relationally in Christ, the child of God nevertheless endeavors to become familiar with expectations of his heavenly Father. **Throughout Scripture there are distillations, as it were, of God's expectations regarding righteousness.** For example, the ten commandments found in Exodus twenty and Deuteronomy five summarize the right conduct of believers with God and man. Jesus, of course, summarized this further when asked what the greatest commandment was. Jesus replied: *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* *This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'* (Matthew 22.37 – 38). More significant is the question asked of Him by the rich young ruler: *'Good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?'* Jesus answered, *'No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'* When the man replied that he had indeed kept these commandments, Jesus said: *You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me* (Luke 18.18 – 30). **Is Christ being formed in you?** If so, you are in company with the great apostle Paul in pressing toward the mark of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

ADDING TO GODLINESS BROTHERLY AFFECTION

The spiritual virtues that we have studied thus far are all attributes that may be practiced independent of the community of faith. **A Christian does not necessarily need to be in fellowship with other believers to be good, increasing in knowledge, self-controlled, persevering, or godly.** Indeed, it might be very much easier to gain a degree of mastery of these virtues living in a monastic environment. Our best intentions are often undermined by the miscreants with whom

we are forced to live. “Oh, how patient I would be if I did not have to live and work among so many rude and incompetent people.” **But we do live in community! We must have some rule for living harmoniously with each other.** This is particularly true of the community of faith if its members are to bear witness to power of the resurrected Christ to the community of unbelief. The rule by which Christians live is simple. Love the brethren (1 John 4.11). Francis Schaeffer calls this witness of love, the mark of the Christian or the final apologetic (John 13.34 – 35).

Familial love within the Christian community is a motivational act. It is something that is sometimes difficult to quantify. Yet, though many cannot put it into words, they know when it is missing, and they feel its effects when it is present. Love is the foundation of all meaningful relationships. **Jesus summarized man relationship with God and man in two statements about love.** Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. As noted above, Jesus, ironically, tells his disciples, just before being betrayed by one of the inner circle of disciples, that there is but one commandment and that is to: *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another* (John 13³⁴⁻³⁵). But just what does this mean in practical terms? Before we answer that question let us consider what Peter says about love.

Peter uses two separate words for love in this passage. The first, *philadelphia*, refers to a love for brothers or sisters. The second word, *agape* (noun), is used in the New Testament as an attitude that God displayed towards His Son and that Jesus’ disciples would display towards Himself and one another. It is a love that has particular meaning in the love of the Father for the Son but is used broadly in Scripture. However, *agape* is the subject of following attribute. **It appears here that Peter is making a distinction between these two loves – at the very least he is building one upon the other and not merely being redundant.** As a rule the two words are never used together as synonyms for one another, although there is some reason for thinking that the Johannine epilog is an exception to that general pattern (John 21.15 – 17).

Regarding the verbs *phileo* and *agapao* Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* says that “the two verbs are used for the love of the Father for the Son, John 3:35, and 5:20; for the believer, 14:21 and 16:27; both of Christ’s love for a certain disciple, 13:23 and 20:2. Yet the distinction between the two verbs remains, and they are never used indiscriminately in the same passage; if each is used with reference to the same objects, as just mentioned, each word retains its distinctive and essential character.” If you want a more thorough understanding of the distinction between the various meanings of the Greek words for love, you may find C. S. Lewis’ book *The Four Loves* helpful reading.

Peter has stressed the obvious importance of imitating the moral and spiritual character of God as it is uniquely displayed in the life of Jesus. The believer is able to live this life by the enabling of the divine power given to every believer. With this penultimate virtue, Peter focuses on the life of the believer in community. **Love is the most important of the spiritual virtues. It is the apex of**

godly character. Everything the believer may cultivate with respect to his virtuous character must find its ultimate expression within the life of the community.

In his first epistle Peter summarizes what is most important for the believer who is living with a view to Christ's return: *The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms* (1 Peter 4. 7 – 10). **This is not autonomous living.**

Indeed, nowhere in Scripture is the believer encouraged to live in isolation from other Christians. The "lone Christian" is an utterly foreign concept to the Bible. Peter requires that the believer be sensitive to the needs of others. Every Christian is obligated to minister to others according to their needs (cp. Ephesians 4.29).

Paul writes about this kind of brotherly love in Philippians 2.6, *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves* (cp. Romans 12.3). **Motivation for brotherly affection is derived from the indwelling Christ who prompts the believer to give deference to the needs of others.** Paul writes in Romans 12.10, *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.* It is characteristic of the believer to consider the needs of others over his own personal needs. Sacrificial love for others is the Biblical norm, not the exception.

There is not a better definition of love than that found in 1 Corinthians 13.4 – 8 where we discover that the character of love is defined not by the emotions but by a Spirit-directed will. *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* Such is the nature of brotherly kindness. **These fifteen traits of love are all produced by acts of the will.** None may be attributed to emotional behavior. All of these traits are activities that must take place within a context of the community. Consider Paul's very practical advice to the Roman church:

Romans 12. 9-21

Love others sincerely	Bless those who persecute you
Hate evil	Rejoice with those who rejoice
Cling to what is good	Mourn with those who mourn
Be devoted to one another	Live in harmony with one another
Honor one another	Don't be proud or conceited
Serve the Lord with zeal	Relate with people of low position
Be joyful in hope	Don't repay evil for evil
Be patient in affliction	Do what is right

Be faithful in prayer Don't take revenge
Share with God's people in need Overcome evil with good
Practice hospitality

Unfortunately, we live a culture that promotes personal autonomy and self-promotion. The idea of an autonomous Christian is foreign to Scripture. There is too much of a smorgasbord mentality within the Christian subculture. The church markets itself as a full-service religious establishment and far too many are shopping for services rather than seeking to encounter the living God in a life-changing way. This is not in keeping with Jesus' prayer for the community of faith in John 17. *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that **all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so **that the world may believe** that you have sent me* (17. 20 – 21). This is an instruction to live together in covenant faithfulness so that the world may come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as savior.

Because the Christian came to faith despite his sinful character, he has no self-righteous presumption that he is now better than the worst of sinners. Indeed, he may well echo the words of Paul, *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief* (1 Timothy 1.12 - 13). Such an attitude of humility fosters feelings of the well-being of others. Consider the following sample of the New Testament's teaching on this subject.

Serve one another in love (Galatians 5.13b). *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently* (Galatians 6.1). *Speak the truth but speak it in love* (Ephesians 4.15). *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen* (Ephesians 4.29). *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* (4.32). *As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity* (Colossians 3.12 – 14; cf. 1 Peter 4.8). **John sums it up well in his letter, *if anyone says, 'I love God' yet hates his brother he is a liar*** (1 John 4.20). Does not this very small sampling of the New Testament suggest that there is a vitality to the community of faith whereby one Christian's life is enriched by another?

Certainly, **we are a tapestry tightly woven together which displays the wonderful work of God's saving and transforming grace.** We are given, as children of God, the dignity of effecting change in the lives of others around us. The community of faith is at work perfecting the saints through the interactive work of Spirit-filled believers. Developing the spiritual virtues is a primary activity of the faith community; it is cultivated through the practice of brotherly affection.

ADDING TO BROTHERLY AFFECTION LOVE

There is no theme more powerful, nor more predominate in Scripture than that of the love of God. John 3.16 is called the greatest verse in the Bible because it expresses the supernatural love of God. Jesus, when asked to identify the greatest commandment, replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22.37-40). Of course, you are familiar with His last instructions to the disciples when He says: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another* (John 13.34-35). The spiritual virtue of love is the culminating attribute for the believer. **And while Peter does not develop the theme of love, it is nonetheless clear that he means for the reader to understand that something more is meant than simply loving the brothers** (cp. 1 Peter 2.17; 1 Peter 4.8). It is incumbent upon the Christian to love those he calls brothers (e.g. 1 John 2.10-11). However, Jesus gives His disciples an even greater command: *You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?* (Matthew 5.43-46; cf. Luke 6.27-36).

The love that the Father has for the Son is the love that the Son has for the world. The disciples, likewise, are to have such a love for the lost. Such unrestricted and unexpected love is not foreign to the Old Testament. Though Israel was not faithful to God after being delivered from their bondage in Egypt, the Lord was nevertheless faithful to give them an inheritance in the land promised to their father Abraham. Certainly the book of Hosea resounds with God's faithful covenant love for Judah. In short, throughout the Old Testament we find a record of those whom God has called to be his own nation in spite of being unfaithful. Yet, God is faithful to love them despite their sin (cp. Hosea 2.19-20). **However, it is in the New Testament that we read of the greatest expression of the love of God. It is the love the Father has for the Son, and the Son has for the Father.** And it is this very love that has been lavished upon us that we too should be called the children of God. John writes: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure* (1 John 3.1-3). There is no greater love than that of Christ loving helpless sinners. Paul writes: *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5.6-8).

It is out of the context of this kind of love that we should love one another, not in a discriminating way, but indiscriminately. We know that Jesus loved us because He laid down his

life for us. The apostle John says you ought to be willing to do the same for your brothers (1 John 3.16).

BIBLICAL FACTS ABOUT LOVE:

1. We cannot love God unless He first loves us (Romans 5.8).
2. We cannot love God unless we first accept His love for us (1 John 4.10).
3. We cannot do anything for God to make Him love us more than He does right now.
4. Loving God is the wholesome basis for all spiritual love, which is a self-forgetting love.
5. God is to be loved for who He is not for what He can do on your behalf, though what He does on your behalf may encourage you to love Him.
6. You become truly loving when you lose yourself to Christ, caring more about what He thinks of you than what others think of you (John 12.43; cp. 2 Corinthians 10.18).

Life is so short that we are no more than a step out of the cradle before we have to step into the grave. In that very brief span of time you have very few opportunities to express your love for God and man. The great measure of life is how well you love others. Though faith takes your soul to heaven; love makes your soul fit for heaven. "Faith has priority but love has preeminence" (George Sweeting, *Love is the Greatest*). **It is the great irony of life that people need to be loved, more than any other single thing, but until they are untransformed by love they are unlovable.** It is the ability to love that gives life its deepest meaning. God loves us as we are so we can love others as they are.

There are more people in this world who wish to be loved than there are people who are willing to love. As a society we are confused about what love is. In order to be loved women are taught to have sex appeal (whatever that is), and men are instructed to be machismo (although the latest fad seems to be getting in touch with your feminine self). But, of course, these things do not result in love. **As a culture we have confused eros for phileo and there is no general understanding whatever of agape.** Eros is, as you know, self-centered and destructive. T.S. Eliot epitomized this in the play *The Cocktail Party*: a man under the influence was whispering into the ear of his psychiatrist with a plaintive whine, "Please make me feel important." Many individuals feel they are adrift in a sea of people without any means of permanently connecting to another person. C.S. Lewis writes of those pathetic people: "they simply want friends and can never make any. The very condition of having friends is that you should want something else besides friends." **Frankly, the church often misses the boat in its witness to the unbelieving world because its members fail to understand that the world cares nothing about doctrine, or church politics. Indeed, the unbelievers don't care much about truth, but they care more than anything else about love.** "The churches would soon be filled if outsiders could find that people in them loved them when they came. This love draws sinners! We must win them to us first, then we can win them to

Christ. We must get the people to love us and then we turn them to Christ" (Sweeting, *Greatest Thing in the World*)

We know that if the bud of a flower is injured by hostile forces, like an unseasonable frost, it will not open. So too, a person who is without the warm encouragement of love, who must endure the chilling absence of praise and affection, will remain closed in on themselves. The dynamics of their personality will be jammed. And if the dynamics of the the personality is seriously impeded; the result will be what psychologists call neurosis. **Although there are many valid descriptions of neurosis, neuroses are commonly recognized in the form of a crippling inability to relate well to others - to go out to them and to accept them as they are without fear of rejection.** Think of this in the context of the greatest commandment. Is not love for God and love of man the solution to man's greatest need?

It was a brief encounter, but I'll never forget it. I was a student pastor visiting one of my parishioners at a hospital in downtown Philadelphia. The wife of the man on whom I was calling mentioned that there was an elderly black pastor who was a patient in a room at the end of the hall. She suggested I might want to visit him before I left the hospital. So on my way out I turned into his room. His name was **Nehemiah Gore**. What a fitting name it turned out to be. He too, had come to that very hospital to visit one of his parishioners. As he was walking along the sidewalk that cold winter evening a car screeched to a stop next to him and several young men jumped out of the car. They wanted his money, but they severely beat him without a word. They took his wallet that contained only a few dollars and left him lying mortally wounded on the curb with two broken arms, a broken leg, and gaping wounds from the knife they had repeatedly plunged into his chest. After hearing his story I attempted to minister a few words of comfort to lift his spirits. But, before I could say anything, he went on to explain that his heart was filled with love and compassion for his assailants, and he was praying earnestly for their salvation. His spirit did not need lifting, he was already living on the outskirts of heaven. But my heart was encouraged that day as I witnessed true Christian love in action. I do not know if a prophet named him, but Nehemiah certainly lived up to the meaning of his name – *the Compassion of Yahweh*.

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou wedding guest
He prayeth well, who loveth well,
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth ALL.

The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner – Samuel Coleridge

CHRIST WITHOUT AND CHRIST WITHIN

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. 2 Peter 1.8

A Christian's life has been described as being akin to riding a bicycle: if you quit moving forward you fall off. Being Christian is not a static activity. It is not as though a young believer may aspire to attain a proficiency in Scripture and a measure of godliness and then settle into some prosaic routine for the rest of his life. We have considered eight spiritual virtues that characterize the Christian life. These virtues are signposts of spiritual maturity. **We know that the gift of faith, which we received from God justifies us in His sight, is not accompanied by perfected works of righteousness. Nevertheless, the believer is constrained by the Holy Spirit to please God in everything** (Colossians 3.17). Moreover, he also has this assurance; namely, that God will complete whatever work he has begun in his child (Psalm 16.9-11; 1 Corinthians 1.8; Philippians 1.6; cf. Hebrews 12.2). These presence and growth of these virtues are evidence that Christ being formed in you.

There is, of course, some degree of subjectivity in measuring any progress of spiritual growth in these things. Although knowledge may be somewhat quantifiable, how does one accurately assess goodness, godliness, brotherly kindness, and the like? **Peter tells us that knowledge is important, but that is not all there is to Christlikeness.** If you want your knowledge to have some useful effect, then you must be increasing in these other spiritual virtues. So how can you know that you are growing in these virtues? What standard is to be used to measure these qualities? Is there a self-test, or is someone else evaluating your progress? How often ought you to expect a review: quarterly, semi-annually, yearly? Certainly, the Christian is desirous of becoming a better person, not through works alone, but by building upon the foundation of his faith. He is motivated by his reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7.1; Psalm 139.21-24).

Our text in 2 Peter has at its heart a tension between the outward evidence of Christ's redemptive work and the inward work of the Holy Spirit. God's call upon the believer's life, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of faith are objective works of God in the life of the Christian. **The objective efficacy of redemption, which is God's work of reckoning the sinner righteous, is the foundation upon which the Christian may find an assurance of his right standing with God. However, without evidence of an internal presence of the Holy Spirit and a sanctifying work of grace, one's hope for eternal life may be no more than wishful thinking.** Peter lists several spiritual attributes characteristic of the Christian. Evidence of these traits in the believer's life is reason enough to be assured not only of his salvation but that his life contributes positively to the health and stability of the community of faith.

The Westminster Confession of Faith indicates that there are hypocrites and unregenerate men who deceive themselves with false hopes, presuming to be in a state of grace without any justification for such assumptions. On the other hand, there are others who truly believe in the

Lord Jesus and love him in all sincerity, endeavoring to walk in good conscience before him. **These may have an assurance that they are in a state of grace and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Their hope is not based on conjecture, but is grounded on an infallible assurance of faith, rooted in the scriptural promises of salvation (Hebrews 6.17), and the inward evidences of that grace.** That they are truly the children of God (Romans 8.15) is further validated by the witness of their spirits. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is given as a pledge of their inheritance; they are therefore sealed as God's possession until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1.13-14).

Although it is often difficult to gain a completely accurate self-appraisal of one's spiritual vitality, most people, when they are being honest with themselves, have a general idea of how they are doing. Minimally, they know whether they are improving or declining in spiritual graces. Certainly they know whether they are faithful in their daily habits of prayer and Bible reading. **Those attitudinal graces such as goodness, brotherly kindness, and love, which form the foundation of relationships with others, are more difficult to assess.** Still, these too may be determined to be growing or diminishing if one will take the time to ask a few probing questions.

Among the seventy resolutions that Jonathan Edwards used to govern the development of his spiritual life are a number that may prove helpful in cultivating these spiritual virtues.

1. Resolved, To act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings, as others; I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.
2. Resolved, To be generous and charitable to all those in true need.
3. **Resolved, To examine, consistently & carefully, whatever is in me which causes me to doubt of the love of God and then direct all my forces against it.**
4. Resolved, To cease from all things which diminish the assurance of my salvation.
5. Resolved, To strive every week to be brought higher in religion, and to be higher in the exercise of grace, than I was the week before.
6. Resolved, To reflect every night, as I am going to bed, whether I have been negligent in any matter, on what sin I committed.
7. Resolved, To ask myself, at the end of every day, week, month, and year, what I might have done which would have been better.
8. Resolved, Frequently to renew my dedication to God, which was made at my baptism.
9. Resolved, Constantly, with the ...strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have a true interest in Christ; that when I come to die, I may not have been found negligent with respect to repenting of my sins.

10. Resolved, Whenever I hear anything spoken favorably of any person, if it is fitting, I will endeavor to echo it.
11. Resolved, Never to do anything out of revenge.
12. **Resolved, Not only to refrain from feelings of disdain or anger in conversation, but to exhibit love, cheerfulness, and kindness.**
13. Resolved, Whenever my feelings begin to appear in the least out of order I will then subject myself to the strictest self-examination.
14. **Resolved, To confess frankly to myself all that which I find in myself, whether character failings or sin; and, if it concerns religion, to confess the whole matter to God, and implore His gracious favor.**
15. Resolved, That I will endeavor always to be gracious in behavior and speech, in all places, and in all company, except is should so happen that duty requires otherwise.
16. Resolved, after adversity to inquire, in what way I am the better for it; what I have learned through them.
17. Resolved, Let there be something of loving kindness in all that I say.
18. Resolved, To study the Scriptures steadily & constantly, so that I find myself to be growing in the knowledge of the Word of God.
19. Resolved, Never to count as a prayer, or to let pass as a prayer, or petition, that which is so constituted, that I cannot hope that God will answer it; nor to offer a confession which I cannot hope God will accept.

Such disciplines may give the Christian an assurance of Christ working within them. Joel Beeke's study on the assurance of faith among the Puritans led to the following comments:

The Puritans did not look askance at authentic piety but coveted a life that evidenced Christ's internal presence. Nevertheless, "*Christ within*" became their *seat of assurance* (note: not seat of faith) only on the basis of "*Christ without*." They eschewed two kinds of religion, one that separated subjective experience from the objective Word (both living and written) in an unbiblical form of mysticism (see the WCF 1.6), and one that presumed salvation on the fallacious grounds of historical or temporary faith. The possibility of falling into these errors lent earnestness to their call to procure subjective verification of the objective gospel: What certainty can there be of election, remission of sin, justification, or glorification, if there be not a certainty of your sanctification and renovation? If that persuasion that is in you about your grace or sanctification be false, then that persuasion that is in you concerning remission of sin, predestination, justification, and eternal salvation is false. This highly concerns all of them to consider, that would not be miserable in both worlds (WTJ 55:1 Spring 1993 p. 16).

So then, Christ's external work, His vicarious death and resurrection (the objective work of redemption) must have its internal complement (the Holy Spirit prompting the believer to live a

holy life). **That is, the one who purchased a heavenly kingdom for the elect also makes them fit to enjoy it.** It is for this reason that when a Christian fails to grow in the spiritual graces, it is because he has forgotten the external work of Christ and becomes inured to a graceless life.

THE ELECT

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1.10-11

It is now clear that the seemingly impossible task of being effective and productive as Christians is not only possible but normative for the elect. **Every believer ought to expect his life to have a positive impact for the kingdom of God.** Those who are not the elect of God will not have an interest in these things, but those who are called according to God's eternal purposes of grace are eager to ratify the Spirit's work in their lives. They live with an eye on heaven, their final destination.

Because many have struggled with understanding the relation between the doctrine of God's sovereignty in election and man's free will, it may be worthwhile to review briefly some of its main points according to two main theological systems.

According to Arminianism: Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (the initiator) and man (the responder). **It is man's response that is the determining factor in securing salvation, because God makes salvation available to everyone.** However, His provision is efficacious only for those who, of their own free will, "choose" to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and accept the offer of grace. Man's will play a decisive role in his salvation. Ultimately, then, it is man, not God, who finally determines who will be saved.

According to Calvinism: Salvation is accomplished solely by the power of God. **The Father chose those who would be saved before the world began and at the appointed time the Son died to make their election sure.** The Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to obey the gospel willingly. The entire process of salvation (election, effectual call, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification and glorification) is the work of God and is by grace alone. **Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.**

The Dutch Reformed church convened a council at Dort in 1618-1619 to respond to the position of the Remonstrants, the followers of the theological system of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). The five basic tenants of the Remonstrants were:

1. Predestination is based on the foreknowledge of God (that is, God knows what the sinner will decide before he decides it and so elects him accordingly).
2. Christ died for all men equally.

3. Man is able to respond and contribute to his salvation.
4. Man can refuse the grace of God if he wants to.
5. Once converted, the Christian may forfeit his salvation and be lost.

Calvin died in 1564 and Arminius died in 1609, so neither man was able to shed any illumination on the interpretation of their theological works. **Nevertheless, the following comparison of these two theological positions as they emerged from the council of Dort is, I believe, a fair summary of the general points of the two systems as they have been presented over the past three centuries.** The following information is taken from *The Five Points of Calvinism* by David Steele and Curtis Thomas.

1a. *Free will or Human Ability* (Arminianism)

Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. **God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man's freedom.** Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; **his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature.** The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. **The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth.** Faith is the sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.

1b. *Total Inability or Totally Depravity* (Calvinism)

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to believe the gospel in a saving manner. **The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free;** it is in bondage to his evil nature. Therefore, he will not - indeed he cannot - choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ - it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. **Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation - it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift God.**

2a. *Conditional Election* (Arminianism)

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which he based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. **It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation.** God chose those whom He knew would, of their own

free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

2b. *Unconditional Election* (Calvinism)

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. **His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected.** These acts are the result, not the cause, of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. **Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ.** Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

3a. *Universal Redemption or General Atonement* (Arminianism)

Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe in Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. **Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.**

3b. *Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement* (Calvinism)

Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners in addition to putting away the sins of His people. **Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him.** The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.

4a. *The Holy Spirit can be effectually Resisted* (Arminianism)

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation: He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. **Thus man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work.** The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

4b. *The Efficacious Call or Irresistible Grace* (Calvinism)

In addition to the outward general call to salvation, which is made to everyone who hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to

salvation. **The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is heard only by the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion.** By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. **The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ.** God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

5a. *Falling from Grace* (Arminianism)

Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminians have not agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ, that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

5b. *Perseverance of the Saints* (Calvinism)

All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. **They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.**