

Sermon Series on 2Peter: 'A Perambulation through (2) Peter'.

Sermon No.4. Date: 2/10/16

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Readings : Colossians 4: 10-18 and 2 Peter 1: 3–11

Title: 'The Character of our Faith'

There is a saying that is very popular in some Christian circles - “Let go and let God”. In other words we have to get out the way and let God do it all. Surrender more and more to Him. It seems to be suggesting that once we become Christians, there is nothing for us to do. We just wait for God to do whatever is necessary in our lives; let Him take over supernaturally in our lives.

Now that sounds `very spiritual` doesn't it? “let go and let God” - but I want to say to you that is not what the New Testament teaches. It is certainly not what Peter teaches. Nowhere does he suggest we are to passively sit back and let God get on with it. The exact opposite is true.

He says such things as “*make every effort to add to your faith*” (chp 1 verse 5). “*Make your calling and election sure*” (chp 1 vs 10). “*Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, at peace with Him*” (chp 3 vs14).

There is no suggestion here that we are to sit back passively and let God do it all! “Make every effort”. In other words there are certain things that are expected of us...that are our responsibility. Remember though, as we considered in a previous sermon, we are never expected to do anything that God has not made possible for us to do. “*Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the Divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires*”(chp.1 vs4). We are not being exhorted here to do something in our own strength.

Peter goes on to say, “*For this very reason....*” In other words because of what God has done for you.....because as Christians we participate in the Divine nature....because we have a new nature.....because we have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.....”*Make every effort to add to your faith....* (chp.1vs5).

Then we are given a list of seven virtues that we are to make every effort to add to our faith. (Verses 5-7). Let us make sure we understand what is being asked of us here. How are we to view this list?

Well, it is not a “to do “list. It is not something we work our way through so that, at the end, we can have a kind of done that, been there, got the T shirt kind of approach, and then move on to something else in our spiritual life.

Nor is it to be viewed as kind of spiritual M.O.T. list....a list that we use to check our spiritual condition so that we look through the list and see where there is a cross

signifying a 'failure' and then determine to do better in that particular area of self control or perseverance or whatever.

No, this is to be regarded, not as a list of individual items, but as evidence of a full, well rounded, fruitful Christian life. It's a package; they come as a whole. A bit like the fruit of the Spirit Paul talks about in Galatians Chapter 5. It's not the *fruits* of the Spirit (plural) to be viewed separately. It's the *fruit* of the Spirit, a whole; it comes as a package. Peter and Paul are emphasising the same thing: Christian character produced by faith. Our faith is the gift of God; we are to add to our faith. Perhaps it might be helpful to view our faith as a kind of spiritual "muscle". As we exercise our 'spiritual muscle'.... our faith grows and matures and strengthens, then the seven virtues Peter talks about naturally develop.

So, let us now look at these seven virtues that make up this well rounded spiritual life. Peter starts off by looking at the "Character of our Faith".....the nature of our faith, goodness and knowledge.

Goodness: What does that mean exactly? The way we use the word, it can sound a bit weak....a bit 'bland', maybe conjuring up in our minds going around being 'good' or 'doing good', whenever, wherever we can. The Greek word is actually quite a strong word. It means "moral power", "moral energy". It is stressing that our faith is to be a manly faith. A living faith. An energetic faith. I think very often we make the mistake of thinking of faith in 'passive' terms. Believing, trusting, and waiting. Relaxing on our spiritual sun loungers. Waiting for God to do something. That is a million miles away from what Peter has in mind. Our faith is to be a living, active, dynamic faith. It is a faith that is energetic – vigorous. It is a living faith. A faith that stirs us up....keeps us active and alert.

Knowledge: This is not here the kind of knowledge that leads to faith. It has the meaning more of 'insight', of 'understanding' or 'enlightenment'. Peter has just exhorted us to be 'active'. The danger of that is that it can lead so easily lead to misguided activity, even a false zeal. So what he is saying is that our activity, our energy, our vigour, must be controlled, must be guided or directed.

Maybe Peter is talking from personal experience. He was a rather impulsive man, given to doing things and saying things he later regretted. He was full of uncontrolled energy. He came to see the importance of that energy being furnished with knowledge....with intelligent understanding....with insight.

What is one of the greatest dangers in the Christian life? What is it the devil so easily talks us into? Business, frantic activity. We love the Lord who has called us to serve Him, but there is so much to do. There are so many needs to be met. Do this....do that. Do the other, so much to do, the pressure mounts. We can end up doing things just to meet the expectations of other people. The important things, like spending time in the Lord's presence.....spending time with Him in prayer....spending time on

His Word, these things get squeezed out. I know what I am talking about! I have been there....I have done all that.... I have been guilty of all that in my twenty five years or so in full time ministry. O, the need for knowledge, for insight, for understanding so that we do not fall in to the trap of the enemy - mistaken priorities, frantic activity, false zeal.....busy, busy, busy!

I was reading about this chap Archippus we had in our reading this morning. Paul says “*Tell Archippus , see to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord (Col chp 4 vs 17).*”

Now Archippus is also referred to in Philemon verse 2. “*To Philemon our dear friend, fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the Church that meets in your home.*”

So Paul speaks highly of him – as a ‘*fellow soldier*’ looking at what Paul says about him in Col. 4 v. 19 it appears that he may have had a weakness – that he was good at starting something, but not so good at finishing it off.

He was not like the comperes of Mastermind - (Magnus Magnusson and John Humphries). When their question is interrupted by the buzzer, they always say “I have started so I'll finish”. Not so Archippus – his saying might have been “I've started so many things, I don't have time to finish any of them!”

He seems to be the sort of man who got so wrapped up in the marginal....so absorbed by secondary issues that he didn't have the time or energy for the central issues, the primary concerns of his life. That can certainly be true for those of us in the ministry. Why are we called into the ministry? To minister to people...to teach.....to encourage people in the Christian faith. To build them up to maturity in Christ.

That's what Christian ministers are called to do, but so often end up doing everything but that! We get so wrapped up in secondary issues that we forget the primary, or allow them to be squeezed out. Archippus had been given a work to do by the Lord. He knew what that work was....he knew what he had to do, but he somehow never completed it. Contrast Paul with Archippus. Remember how he put it in Phillipians 3 vs 13 - “*But one thing I do*”. He had a focus - he knew his priority in Christian ministry and would not let anyone or anything crowd that out. As one commentator put it, “Paul said, 'One thing I do, not these forty things I dabble in', and he went on to say 'Those who focus on what they are supposed to be doing leave a mark, those who don't, leave a blur’”.

I don't want to leave a blur, do you? So how do we make sure we leave a mark? Firstly, we need the knowledge, the insight, the understanding that Peter is talking of here in his lette, to make sure we can then focus on what is primary.

Secondly we need to know “the work we have received in the Lord”. Everybody “In

the Lord” is in service for the Lord, if we are In Christ. So we have a work to do for Him. Now that is going to be different for each and every one of us. We are not all called into full time ministry for the Lord, but we are all called to serve Him in one way or another.

I think sometimes, we think of service in super-spiritual terms, like full time ministry.....perhaps ordination.....perhaps serving Him overseas with some missionary society.....perhaps, working with the poor or homeless or some up-front evangelistic work, or whatever. For most of us it will be more a “blossom where you're planted” kind of approach. We come to Christ, but we are married, we have children and we have dependant parents and perhaps we wonder how on earth we can serve the Lord in those circumstances.

I am reminded of the woman who wrote to a well-known evangelist saying that she felt the Lord calling her to preach the word. “The trouble is “ she said “I have twelve children”. The reply she received was: “I am so pleased that you are being called to preach and that you have been given a ready made congregation.” In other words “blossom where you're planted”.

Yes, you have a work you have received from the Lord. Make sure you know what it is – and complete it. Focus on it, be committed to it. As a husband or as a wife, as a father or a mother, or in your day to day business life, whatever it might be. Then knowing what it is, make sure you have the knowledge, the insight, the understanding to work at that with all the moral power and energy, the `goodness` that God makes possible.

I had intended to look at these seven virtues in one sermon. Hopeless task, I now realise! I will try and cover the other five next week.

This week we have looked at `goodness` and `knowledge` - the Character of our Faith. Next week, 'self-control' and 'perseverance' - The Temperament of our Faith, plus 'godliness', 'brotherly kindness' and finally 'love' - The Relational Dimension of our Faith.

The challenge will be to see if I can do all five in one sermon!