

BEARING FRUIT

A Study of Christian Growth





BEARING FRUIT

A Study of Christian Growth

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; And to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ.”
II Peter 1:5-8

Have you ever worried that your life might have been purposeless and had a real fear that your living had made no difference in the World?

Nowhere is that concern better expressed than in the movie It's a Wonderful Life starring Jimmy Stewart. As “George Bailey” did, I too, wondered if I had really accomplished anything with my life because someone I love greatly had thrown away all that was good in her life.

Just last month, though, I had an opportunity to sit and talk, over the period of several days, with the man I admire most in this life, my father. He reminisced about his experiences as an early Christian soul winner and later as he gained more God given wisdom. It struck me for the first time just how old my father was before he met Christ and had his life changed by that experience. And it also struck me afresh, that we should never give up hope and that God, as the Apostle Paul said, is the One who gives the increase.

It has been with a feeling of joy (and relief) that I have realized that I don't need to worry about the results. God is the one who gives the increase, not me. And God said not, that we may bear fruit, but that if we will “add” into our lives the things Peter listed in II Peter 1:5-8, we will bear fruit.

The great tennis star, Martina Navratilova, once said that if you live just for the victories in life, you will lose out on most of your life. There are some who are addicted to the next thrill or the next “high” in order to feel alive when it's the journey, the “adding to” that holds the excitement! Living out ways to Be alive as Peter shows, is infinitely more thrilling and exciting and gives us what the other doesn't: satisfaction.

#1. Faith (πιστει)

A. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” (Heb 11:6)

B. Discussion:

Paul, in Galatians 3:16, bases an entire argument on the fact that one word in a passage he quotes from in the Old Testament is singular instead of plural. And I don't believe that the God who said we will give an account of every idle word placed faith at the top of the list by accident.

Why is our faith so important? And what does Peter mean when he uses the word faith?

C. More than just belief

A famous tight-rope walker once pushed a wheelbarrow on a cable stretched over the span of Niagara Falls. When he reached the other side he asked the crowd if they believed he could push the wheelbarrow back to the other side with someone in it. They enthusiastically yelled “yes!” “Then who will volunteer to ride in the wheelbarrow?” he asked. His question was followed by the sheepish silence of the crowd.

Faith is more than knowing God is there and can keep His promises. Faith is abandoning all that seems secure in life and launching out on a great adventure to trust God. Even though, often, you are unable to see where God is taking you. We can know the reality of God, but it is another thing to trust Him. It is one thing to know that someone is standing at the base of a high wall ready to catch you; It is another thing to have faith that he will. As Hebrews 11:8 tells us of Abraham: “By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

#2. Virtue (αρετην)

A. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any *virtue*, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

B. Discussion:

Paul uses this same word, *areta*, that Peter uses in II Peter 1:5, to sum up an entire list of “good things” on which Christians should focus their attention. What does our Christian character say about our faith? Why?

C. Evidence of a commitment to God

Our faith, far from being apart from works, produces character because we want to be like the God who loves us. James, in James 2:15-24, shows that our character is the proof that we do have faith and that we cannot have true faith without changed lives. It will be our desire to be like God; like His son and we will desire to grow in Him. James 2:15-24 tells us: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

#3. Knowledge (γνωσει)

A. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hosea 4:6)

B. At the same period in time that Hosea penned his words about Israel’s lack of knowledge, Isaiah criticized Israel about their reliance on keeping all of the outward rituals of service to God. Is there more than just one kind of knowledge? Why is knowledge so important as to be listed by Peter only after Faith and virtue?

C. Getting to know God and learning His ways, “His lifestyle,” better

Matthew 1:24-25 relates that Joseph... “knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called His name Jesus.”

As this passage illustrates, there are different kinds of knowledge. The Bible often uses the term in referring to sexual intimacy between a husband and wife. It can mean knowing a collection of facts and it can also mean having an understanding of those facts. I may know the space program, for example. Astronaut Chuck Yeager, on the other hand, *knows* the space program. It is the same with relationships. We usually think we know a person before we marry them, but it is only in the day to day living with that person that we truly come to know them. We learn their idiosyncrasies; their likes and dislikes; what will please them and what won’t. It is a head knowledge and at the same time, so much more. The knowledge we are to have as Christians is more than just the kind of knowledge of those Paul mentioned in II Timothy 3:7 who were “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” God wants us to not only know His word more and more in order to be able to do more good in the world, but also because He want us to come to know Him personally and to develop an intimate relationship with Him.

#4. Temperance (εγκρατειαν)

A. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

B. The word, temperance, used in II Peter 1:6 is found in two other places in the New Testament. Once in Galatians 5:23 and then in Acts 24:25 where Paul reasoned with Felix about “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” causing Felix to visibly tremble.

According to Arndt and Gingrich’s lexicon, it means to exercise self-control; especially in the area of sex, but not limited to it.

We often hear people say “I couldn’t help myself.” Do some people have more self-control than others? Are we born with a certain amount of *unchangeable* self-control?

C. Self-control - rewarding both our body and our spirit

The theologian, John Brown, said that “The Christian does not consider the wealth, the honours, and the privileges of the world, as things altogether destitute of value; but he sees that that value is by no means as great as the deluded worshippers of (the world’s riches) suppose it to be.”

Phillip Yancey talks of his life interviewing the rich and successful and of the time he interviewed a group of doctors who had decided to give up their “successful” lives and go to third world countries to help others. Those that most would think would be the happiest, who had wealth, “free” sex and power were the ones who were miserable; not the other way around. We are physical creatures with natural and good desires, but when we let those desires rule us, we damage the spiritual part of us that wants not only those desires satisfied, but wants to do it in such a way that they are blessings to others and ourselves. Is it any wonder that Paul tells us that one of the fruits of the Spirit is temperance? Temperance is not doing without the good things that God created for us to enjoy, but enjoying them in such a way that they do not hurt ourselves and others. Enjoying them in the way God intended.

#5. Patience (υπομονην)

A. “Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

B. The word translated patience in these passages means “steadfastness.” We would use the phrase “sticking to it” to mean the same thing. Paul said in I Corinthians 9:27 “But I keep my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” I have never seen anyone who was not thrilled, overjoyed and excited when they first put on Christ. Why do some not “hang in there” and fall away from their faith? Are they happier?

C. Going the distance because we’ve caught a glimpse of the prize

My father lost any faith in there being a God when he was a young man. His heavy drinking and other indulgences were an indication, not, of how much “fun” he was having, but of a search for something that could take away the emptiness that a life without God brings. But even a life lived for God on this Earth gives us only a taste of what is to come. Someday, if we only “stick to it,” if we only “hang in there,” we shall have all our heart’s desires. As C. S. Lewis said in The Weight of Glory: “At present we are on the outside of that world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.”

#6. Godliness (ευσεβειαν)

A. “But refuse profane and old wives fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth a little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.”

(II Timothy 4:7-9)

B. Paul uses the same word that Peter uses for godliness in II Timothy 3:5 when he talks of those having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. The Greek word, morophosin (μορφωσιν), which is translated “form” means literally an outward appearance. Paul was saying that some just have an outward appearance of having something that deals with an attitude of our hearts.

Can we sometimes “do all the right things” and it only be “skin deep?” How would you class this type of individual?

C. The heart - where “the rubber meets the road”

When Peter, speaking through the Spirit calls for godliness, he uses a Greek word, eusebeias, that is close to our word, Piety, because it deals more with the inward attitude rather than with what’s going on on the outside. But the word doesn’t carry with it the idea of a stiff pharisaical attitude, but rather an attitude of loyalty to and reverence for God. It is the place where we want to arrive with our lives because compassion and goodness have become the natural thing with us; because it’s who we are: people who bubble over with life, love and laughter.

#7. Brotherly kindness (φιλαδελφίαν)

A. “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with *brotherly love*; in honor preferring one another.”

B. Most of us are familiar with the Greek word used here by Peter and Paul - philadelphia. It is not actually, according to Arndt and Gingrich, gender specific and means all filial affection between brothers and sisters. We are to have that love for one another as Christians. Love for fellow Christians was something that was stressed very strongly by the early Church.

Jesus said in John 13:35 (Using an even stronger Greek word for love) “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Why then, has the Church in some places often gotten a reputation for fighting and for church splits? What can we do to have brotherly kindness; brotherly love for one another?

C. God’s “Open door policy”

We have become so familiar with the term “brotherly kindness” that we fail to fully appreciate the impact it had on the early Church. The word philadelphia is not found in Greek secular literature of the first century referring to anything other than family. Even Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, was so-named after two brothers and did not carry the idea to the inhabitant’s of the city that they were brothers and sisters. An individual in the first century picking up and reading the epistles would probably have encountered the concept with a slight sense of shock. This family feeling gave the early church a new-found appreciation for fellow Christians. Indeed, we are told in Acts 2:44 that they “had all things common.” This sense of unity and family feeling, when encountered in the Church is one of the greatest things a person can experience and helps us keep on the right path. No wonder Peter was led by the Spirit to instruct us, as God’s children, to have this filial affection for one another.

#8. Charity (Greek word Agape (love) αγαπη)

A. “And now abideth faith, hope, love (charity), these three; but the greatest of these is love (charity).”
I Corinthians 13:13

B. The Greek language had several different words for different types of love including sexual. Of all of the Greek words translated “love,” agape was the rarest in pagan literature. In fact, a source in pagan literature of the use of the word was lacking for a long time. It is a selfless love that asks for nothing in return. Why do you think the word is so rare in pagan literature? Why do you think it is the final quality mentioned in II Peter 1:7 and the culmination of the list of Christian virtues?

C. A perfect world

In John 15:13, Jesus uses two Greek words for love in the same sentence. He says greater love (agape) has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (philon). Giving your life for another is the most self-less act it is possible for one human being to do for another. It is what Christ did for us and it is His example that we follow. Christ promises us in Luke 9:24 that “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” Jesus, in Matthew 22:37-39 tells us that having agape for God and for our neighbors (all those we come in contact with!) is the basis for all of God’s law. If we have this love we will do no harm to our brother or anyone else around us, but will, instead, do all we can for them; not thinking of ourselves. What a world it would be (maybe the kind God intended?) if we would only do that! There would be no wars or terrorism or pornography or child abuse; no hate. I live for a world like that; and someday I’ll see it.