

One of the constant ‘conundrums/errors/heresies’ with the church, has been how we understand the relationship between faith and works.

You see, many people view Christianity as a means of teaching morals. e.g.:

- the parent, who even though they don’t believe, still like to send their kids to RE or Sunday School, to teach them a few morals;
- the philosopher who likes to read the teachings of Jesus for moral guidance; and
- for many people, their view of Jesus, is that He was a really nice bloke; a great teacher who if we study his sayings, and live by them, the world would be a much better place.

But as disciples of Jesus Christ, we know that our Lord is far more than a moral teacher. The opening verses of this letter highlight this fact...

He’s the Saviour. He’s called us to His own glory and excellence. He’s paved the way to eternal life. He’s God... And the message of the Gospel is that we can have an intimate relationship with God.

Even though, because of our great sinfulness, we are unworthy to come into God’s presence, Jesus died on the cross, to pay the penalty of our sins. And by faith, we repent of Sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we’re made pure and holy, and righteous in His sight.

But the thing is, as good protestants, sometimes we get so focused on being “saved by faith – not by works”, that we **reject** the doing of good works as ‘legalism’... And if a preacher teaches us that we should be ‘doing good things’ – “Legalism!!!”...

Alright, so some folk get so caught up in being “saved by faith alone”, they have the attitude that if we try to add to this, any good works, this is undoing all the good work that Christ is doing in me...

And this sort of attitude keeps cropping up throughout history. It's pretty obvious that there's some false teachers in the church that Peter's writing to in this very letter. And (reading between the lines) it's pretty obvious that they were teaching ‘licentiousness’ – *“I'm saved by faith in Christ, therefore it doesn't matter what I do now – I'm saved, and saved I will continue to be.”*

It's become quite a common attitude in many western churches today – We sometimes call it “easy-believism”. It's the attitude where:

- just believe in Jesus, and you're saved
- You don't have to repent of wrong-doing;
- you don't have to confess sin;
- you don't have to try and do the right thing...

But something that I've noticed, is that in the Bible, those who knew Jesus best, – they're the ones who had the most to say

about how important it is, for disciples of Jesus to live righteously, and about how faith and works **must go together**.

- John (the disciple whom Jesus loved), is always teaching us about love, and he has a lot to say about “walking in the light”;
- James, (written by Jesus' own brother), is a letter reminding us of ‘how we should live’, and in it, he says, “faith without works, is dead”.
- And Peter,,, in today’s reading, unashamedly leaves us with absolutely no doubt, that our faith, and ‘living by faith’, is a life of all virtue, love and godliness...

And I’m going to be really blunt – if anyone’s theology – if what they believe about salvation and works and faith, differs from what Peter says today, Guess whose theology is wrong – to use Peter’s words that we’ll find later in the letter, guess whose theology is “twisted”...

Faith and works must go together... But let me be very clear here – I’m not saying “We are saved by works”... We can never be saved by doing good things... But because we **are** saved, we have to understand that we are saved from our old, sinful, selfish way of life, and we are saved to a new life in Christ,,, Which is what Peter’s telling us here:

Our reading this morning started off with “For this very reason”

For what reason? Well, we need to remember back a few weeks, to what we learned in Vs1-4:

- Jesus Christ has given us everything we need for a Godly life;
- By His divine power, He’s granted it to us;
- We’re bound for immortality;
- We’ve escaped the corruption of this world that comes with sinful desire...

<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Do you get this? There’s some moral effort required here: (make every effort), because Christ has already granted us (given to us, by His grace), eternal life.

When people start arguing over being “saved by grace” vs “saved by works”, for Peter it’s a moot point, because both go together.

Virtue (good works) doesn't 'replace' faith or 'supplant' faith  
– Virtue:

- supplements faith;
- goes with faith;
- works with faith;
- springs from faith...

You see, what is faith? Faith is to know Christ, and to be known by Christ... And if I truly know Christ, I will follow Christ.... That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus... We call this church "Bush Disciples" – we're not just "Bush Believers" – the mission of our church, is not just to believe about Jesus, but to know Him and to follow Him...

Jesus isn't merely seeking 'converts' – He's looking for "Disciples" – a people who will follow Him to the ends of the Earth... And to be a disciple of Jesus, begins with Salvation by faith, and continues as we live by the Spirit – learning from Him, and following the way He teaches us to live.

Alright, so because we're saved by faith in Jesus Christ – because we've escaped the corruption that's in the world because of sinful desire <sup>5</sup> **For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue**

The easiest way for me to describe what "virtue" is, it's excellence of character...

During the week, as I read and prepared for today's message, I found myself remembering a few Christian slogans that some of us use (I've used), that aren't biblical, but we use them as smart-alec answers to quiet our critics...

One of those slogans is "*Christians aren't perfect – just forgiven*".... You've all heard it; Many of you have probably said it; I know I've said it... And there is a truth to it, but not entirely. Christians aren't perfect, but we are being perfected... We're not "just forgiven", you see – We are much more than "just forgiven" – God has given us everything we need for a Godly life...

But the **worst** part of that bumper-sticker slogan, is the way we use it – we use it as an excuse – we use it as a cop-out...

*When I used to work at the Ag College, my boss (who isn't a Christian), was very critical of Christians who did the wrong thing. Did he judge Christians more harshly than non-Christians? Absolutely...*

*You see, even as a non-Christian, the thing he understood very well, is the vileness of hypocrisy... Isn't hypocrisy the thing that Jesus hated most, in the religious leaders of His day???*

And yet, when a non-Christian points out sin in a Christian/whole church, we muster all of our theological learnedness to express some bumper-sticker theology:

- Christians aren't perfect – just forgiven...

as if that justifies all our wrongdoing...

- “The church is full of hypocrites”

Well, come along, there’s room for one more...

We use it as an excuse – we use it as a cop-out... Peter will have none of that... He says, to **make every effort** to supplement your faith (not replace your faith) – but with the faith we have, to supplement our faith with virtue – excellence of character...

*You know, I’ve come across a few Christians in my time who have told me how they ‘deliberately’ try not to be ‘too holy’ (swear, drink too much) because they want to be seen as ‘one of the boys’ so they can be more relevant and connected with sinners etc, etc....*

What a load of non-sense... Peter (who walked with Jesus) knows what being a disciple of Jesus is about... Making every effort for excellence of character...

## Supplement virtue with knowledge

There’s 2 words that Peter uses in this chapter for “knowledge”, and they mean 2 different things.... In V2 and again in V8, the sort of knowledge he’s talking about, is “knowing/being known by God” – it’s about the intimate relationship we have with God... But here in V5, he’s talking about “knowing stuff”...

He's talking about the wisdom and discernment we need, to live a Godly life... And we do need these, don't we? Sometimes it's easy to know the right thing to do, but at other times, it's a bit tricky to know what the right thing to do is... And we need wisdom/discernment/knowledge.

And a lot of the time, the world's idea of right & wrong, is very different to what God's idea is.... How do we gain this sort of knowledge? How do we know from God's perspective what is Good/evil?

Well, this letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, is an example of this knowledge. Peter has written this letter, because he wants to remind us of what the Apostles teach. The Scriptures record truth (unblemished/undistorted) – this is where we find knowledge. Following Jesus isn't about “what I think/feel is best” – There is a very definite and objective truth. God has revealed Himself and His ways in the Scriptures (Old Testament & New Testament)... And keeping in step with the Spirit will mean that I will continue to be seeking to know God...

Something that I've noticed, is that **always** – without exception, when someone's going good with God, not only will they enjoy reading God's word, but they will love to study His word. This is where we gain knowledge.

## Supplement knowledge with self-control

We often think of 'self-control' as being able to keep our anger in check, but biblically it's much more than that. It's to have control over one's sensual desires...

- It's control to not click on the link, to see the bikini bird;
- It's control to not have the extra drink that's going to make me tipsy;
- It's control, to not say those hurtful words to my wife;
- It's control to not buy the thing that's going to satisfy (for a moment) my craving for the latest cool gadget;
- It's control to not want to know the latest goss in your favourite women's magazine.

Self-control, is about having control over our own sensual desires...

We learned this in our last series in Galatians, with the fruit of the Spirit... To keep in step with the Spirit, means we exercise self-control.

## Supplement self-control with steadfastness

Steadfastness, is patience; endurance. Jesus said to His disciples,

**Matthew 10:22 (ESV) 22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**

This is the sort of steadfastness that Peter is talking about.

When Jesus told the parable of the Sower, some of the seed fell on ground that was stony. And when the seed sprouted, it grew great-guns, but it had no root. And after a while, the sun beat down, and it withered away.

And Jesus said, “Some people, when they hear the Gospel, they receive it with great joy, and they believe for a while, but in a time of testing, they fall away...”

What do we need, so that we don't become one of the ones who fall away??? Steadfastness; Endurance... This is one of the key attributes of being a disciple of Jesus... *We all know people who have come forward at an altar-call and 'made a decision for Jesus', but now they have nothing to do with Him...* Why? They didn't have steadfastness – A faith that cannot be shaken.

Have you ever heard of a 'fair-weather-Christian'? A fair-weather-Christian is a Christian of convenience. When:

- that's the cool thing – to be part of 'the in crowd';
- it's beneficial for my standing in the community;
- good for my political ambitions;
- it promises me blessings & miraculous healings;
- makes things go good in this life;

And let me tell ya, the whole prosperity gospel and easy-believism that's common in many of the growing churches of the western world today, are breeding a whole generation of fair-weather Christians, who probably aren't Christians at all, because they've followed a false gospel.

No salvation message is complete unless that message includes a message of steadfastness... If I start out following Jesus and then fall away, there is no benefit.

Jesus made it very clear:

- Who starts building a tower without considering the cost?;

- What king goes to war without considering he has the means to win it?;
- Just like that, consider the cost of being a disciple of Jesus...
- to be hated by the world
- to perhaps lose your own family
- to perhaps die...

This is why our faith needs to be accompanied with **steadfastness**.

## Supplement **steadfastness** with **godliness**

This is an interesting one. The Greek word Peter uses here for “godliness” is εὐσέβειαν, (eusebeian). It’s about “devoutness; piety; religious reverence; fear of God”. It actually originates from a word “seb” which means to step back...

And this is another one that got me thinking about ‘bumper-sticker theology slogans’ that seem to be so popular today...

Today, “religion” is the whipping boy... Anything bad that happens in Christianity, it’s all because of religion.

“Religion” gets a bad rap, and so now the slogans are: *“I’m not into religion – I’m into God”*... And I get that... And once again, I’ve said that... Because, what I’m not into, is empty religion – being religious for the sake of religion...

But the more I get to know Jesus, and the closer I get to God, the more I am filled with the religious reverence of the fear of God...

Some of the worship songs around today, is what some folk called “Jesus, my boyfriend songs”... No reverence; no awe-struck fear or wonder...

In Australia, we like to think of Jesus as a mate... I’ve heard some well-known Christian leaders say, “It’s OK – you can get angry at God”... No, that’s not OK...

If my view of God is devoid of devoutness; of a religious reverence; of a fear of God,, my faith is missing something that Peter says is necessary...

Remember, this is the Peter, who encountered the glory of God on the mount of transfiguration, and he fell on his face, and he was terrified... And it was only by the grace of Jesus, that He could lift him to his feet, and say “Don’t be afraid”...

As disciples of Jesus, we are to have a healthy respect and fear of God... We take a step back “You are great and I am not”; “You are glorious – I am not”; “You are mighty and I am weak”... Any teaching that tells us that we are equal with Jesus – rubbish...

To be filled with ‘godliness’, is to be devout – it is to have a religious reverence of our Lord.

Supplement **godliness** with **brotherly affection**

Look around you. These are your brothers and sisters in Christ. These are your family. Love them as family. Love them deeper than your own family.

Supplement brotherly affection with love

Jesus said, **John 13:35 (ESV) 35** **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Love. It's what we're about... We love each other, with the same love that Jesus gave to us...

I've heard numerous people say "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian"... And some believe that they're a better Christian because they don't go to church... Hmm... How are they loving their brothers and sisters in Christ? If they don't like being with their brothers and sisters in Christ, how are they loving them? Where's the brotherly affection? Where's the oneness with Christ and oneness with His Body???

And so faith isn't meant to be empty, or left alone. We are to supplement faith with these things.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

Did you know it's possible to know Jesus, but to be ineffective or unfruitful for Him... Actually, it's easy to be ineffective or unfruitful... But what does that mean???

Often what we think of as being "fruitful" is being able to achieve a lot for God... But biblically, to be fruitful, is about the fruit of the Spirit growing in our lives:

**Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; .....**

What's the fruit of the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit changing my character, so I become more like Christ. And What Peter's telling us here, is exactly the same as what Paul taught us in Galatians – that faith alone doesn't develop the fruit of the Spirit... Paul told us that we have to keep in step with the Spirit. And Peter's spelling out what 'keeping in step with the Spirit' looks like.

It **begins** with faith, but with faith, and from faith, supplement faith with:

- **virtue** – excellence of character;
- **knowledge** – seeking the wisdom and divine guidance of the word of God;
- **self-control** – to control our sensual desires;
- **steadfastness** – to stand strong and unshakable in our faith (no matter what the cost);
- **godliness** – to have a religious reverence and fear of God;
- **brotherly affection**

- **Love** for one another

If we don't??? V9

<sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

That's pretty cutting, isn't it...

Last week as we had communion together, I talked about how sometimes we feel like we're starting to get a bit distant from God, and we feel like we need to have another 'spiritual hit'... But really, what we need to do is remember.

In Derek's message on Luke 7, he said "Much sin = Much repentance = much forgiveness = much love..."

And that's what we need to remember. If we're not putting every effort into walking with God and keeping in step with the Spirit, it's because we've forgotten... We're near-sighted, we're blind. We've forgotten what it means for us to be cleansed from our former sins.

Our Lord has cleansed us from our life of sin. And so we should make every effort (springing from the faith we have) to live righteously...

- virtue;
- knowledge;
- self-control;

- steadfastness;
- godliness;
- brotherly affection
- Love

V10

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

There's some big theological themes here, (and points of contention).

The Scriptures are very clear – God chooses us – He not only calls us, but in His Sovereign will, He elects us – He decides He is going to save us...

But the trouble with us humans is, we like to build theological systems around Biblical truths. And some theological systems say “Therefore we have no part to play in this”... Now, that might be what some theological systems say, but that's not what the Bible says. ... And I want to encourage you, don't put your faith in any system of theology – read the Scriptures. What do the Scriptures say????

**be all the more diligent – Be zealous for this – be really keen for this: to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.**

What's it mean to fall? Does that mean that my faith can be ineffective? – That if I'm not walking with the Spirit, that I mightn't be saved??? Well yeah, that's pretty much what Peter's saying.

You see, in V11 he says: <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And the word that's translated here as “entrance” is about a journey to enter, or a road of entry. And to fall, is to stumble or trip on that road and come to grief.

To confirm our calling and election, is to prove that it's true (like a firm foundation)...

*Over a decade ago, our family got on to some really cheap tickets and we visited the US and Canada. It was the first time I'd ever seen snow. Anyway, in the Rockies (Canada), we came to a frozen lake... Now, when you're from Queensland and you see a frozen lake, what do you want to do? You want to walk on it... But how would I know if it was safe to walk on?*

*Well I did the only responsible thing – I sent the kids out first...*

*And then I went out a little way, and jumped up and down on it. We tested it – we confirmed it to see that it was safe. How do we test/confirm/prove that our faith is a firm foundation??? Well, if I've been set free from sin, I'll want to walk in the*

ways of Jesus... I will want to make every effort, to walk in the ways of Jesus.

And if (in faith), we keep on following Jesus – if we keep in step with the Spirit, putting every effort into living by the fruit of the Spirit,,, we're not just going to scrape into glory by the skin-of-our-teeth, and we're certainly not going to fall...

there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Why wouldn't we put every effort into keeping in step with the Spirit, when that's on offer?

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father,

we thank You for the eternal blessing that You richly provide.

We thank You that You have granted all things needed for a Godly life.

Father, forgive us for when we haven't embraced this Godly life You've granted.

Forgive us for all too easily accepting sin and living in much the way of the unsaved.

Lord, by Your Holy Spirit,  
help us to make every effort

to supplement your faith with virtue,  
and virtue with knowledge,  
<sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control,  
and self-control with steadfastness,  
and steadfastness with godliness,  
<sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection,  
and brotherly affection with love.

Lord, we thank You for the calling and election You've  
given us;

What a privilege it is, to be chosen by You.

And now, help us to confirm this foundation,  
with our zeal to live as Your faithful children,

in Jesus' Name,

Amen.