

GROWING UP IN CHRIST

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II Peter 5-8 “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self control, to self control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (NKJV)

When we become believers, it is an act of faith. Faith is something that challenges us. It is placing our belief in someone or something that we have no viable proof of in the physical realm. Yet...we cannot become the children of God without it. This passage exhorts us to give all of our diligence to our faith. In taking a look at what that may mean, I was struck that the word, “diligence”, means we take painstaking effort to participate with God in the development of His character within our spirits. It is faith coupled with diligence that is the foundation of our growth toward being like Him. It is our conscious choice to believe without seeing or knowing ahead of time what this unique partnership will lead us into.

The next addition to our faith is virtue. Adding virtue to our faith means that we add a kind of manliness, valor, strength, and excellence that propels us towards our goal of living for Jesus. The picture that comes to my mind is the conscious choices I make to do what is right and pure based on what I know in the present. It is done on my belief that I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength. It is not my own strength. This is a conscious decision that is made each day. The decision is a starting point and we all have to start somewhere.

We then begin to see some growth. That growth manifests itself in the increased awareness of who God is. Knowledge about Him and who he is comes as we live. We learn from being in relationship with the written Word, with people, with circumstances, with music, with creation, and with the presence of God. We are always gathering information and sorting through what that information means to us or to our life. The intimation is that we grow in awareness of who we are, our strengths and weaknesses, and how they line up with the character of our Savior. As we grow in awareness of who God is and how He is working via these avenues, this passage indicates a shift towards self-control.

Self-control carries with it a feeling of balance. It is an ability to see things from many different vantage points, experience varied emotional, intellectual responses yet use wisdom in deciding what is to be expressed and when. As this characteristic of the Holy Spirit develops it naturally leads to our next step in character development.

Perseverance here means patience or endurance. To persevere is to acquire the ability to remain steadfast in the face of persecution, misunderstandings, and confusing times. Patience does not necessarily mean we will understand everything that is happening

but that we will know our source. Our source is not within ourselves; it is in the unfailing love of Jesus Christ who has made this progression possible.

As we allow perseverance to gain access to our hearts and mind, godliness or having a resemblance to the nature of God becomes a part of who we are. First Corinthians 1:9 states, we have been “called into fellowship” with the Son of God. The Amplified Version states we have been “called into companionship and participation” with the Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 1:9) We are to participate in the very nature of God as we associate ourselves with Him and He with us as companions.

In doing so, we are much more able to exhibit brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness is something that is severely lacking at times in our ways with each other, our churches and in our world. There is something that begins to happen when we come in contact with our own weaknesses and begin to grow into God’s image. We are softer and more merciful with one another. It is doing “good” to one another out of the fact that they/we are also loved by God and He died for them as much as He died for us.

When these things take place we are at our final step in this progression. This is love. Agape love. This undying love that is in ever abundance is what any of us crave and need in this life. It is why Jesus came. It is what every person on earth longs for – how can we not pursue this progression.

Our reward is the promise of NEVER being barren or unfruitful (verse 8) in the knowledge of our Lord. That is a promise I cling to and a promise we can rely on.

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