

“Every Effort”

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“Glorify Christ every way.” (J. I. Packer)

2 Peter 1:5-15

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Chicken without biscuits

Lately my wife Linda and I have been making every effort to reduce (not necessarily eliminate) our intake of carbohydrates. In our previous life we’ve occasionally enjoyed Bojangles after church on Sunday (especially since Chick-Fil-A is not open). Last Sunday being Linda’s first opportunity to worship in person since March 15, I asked her after church whether she wanted us to celebrate with Bo’s. After a brief hesitation, we decided to go with it but reduce the carbs.

“May I take your order?” the voice crackled through the drive-thru speaker. I answered, “Is it possible to order chicken Supremes without any biscuits?” You would have thought I just asked, “Can we go swimming without getting wet?” The response on the other end was rather incredulous: “You don’t want any biscuits?”

I defaulted to our usual order of a Chicken Supremes snack box, deciding we would share an order of fries and the other side would be green beans. The silver box wanted to confirm: “And no biscuits?” “That’s correct, ma’am. No biscuits.”

When I added the drink order, she gave me the total price and summarized the order: “Two chicken Supremes, one with fries and one with green beans....” and then with a sigh like that sounded like she had just lost the Super Bowl, “...and no biscuits.”

The list of Christian virtues in 2 Peter 1 may sound at first like Bo’s chicken with no biscuits. Something is missing – something so common its absence is mystifying.

I'll tell you why in a moment. First let's dig into the text. You may recall from last week that I attempted to diagram Peter's run-on sentence in verses 3-4. A Middle School teacher gave me about a C- on my diagram, but at least I got the main clause right: "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life."

You might then be tempted to think that living a godly life is essentially passive. It's like winning the lottery. You didn't earn it; it was given to you. You don't have to do anything but pick up the check and start spending. Instead, what he says in verses 5ff. sounds more like a closing speech to a course of training in firefighting. The instructor says, "I've given you all the tools you need to succeed. Now...."

What? "...sit back and enjoy it?" No. It's what Peter says beginning in verse 5. "For this very reason..." (because his divine power has given you everything you need) "make every effort...."

You may have noticed in the *New International Version* of today's reading that this phrase, "make every effort," occurs three times. Its form is a little different in Greek, but the root word is the same all three times.

The noun is *spoude*, a word employed by classical Greek writers like Homer, Aristotle, and the Stoics. It implies not only effort but speed and zeal. This is a matter of urgency and priority. Focus on this. In this moment nothing else matters more. Do it, do it well, do it now. Give it all you've got – undivided, wholehearted attention.

Peter wants his readers apply *spoude* in three different areas.

Make every effort to transform faith into love (vv. 5-7)

We come to the list of virtues to which I alluded earlier. It's worth a few moments to look at the virtues individually.

Faith. Peter assumes the starting point is faith. He began this letter telling his readers they have "received a faith as precious as ours" (1:1, emphasis added). Never forget that faith itself is not something you generated on your own. Faith is "the gift of God, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:9) as the Apostle Paul says. You received the capacity to believe.

Goodness. Add to your faith goodness. In English that word is too weak for what Peter has in mind. Peter has already referred to God's "goodness" (3), which raises the bar. This word can be translated "virtue" or "excellence." It's being the best you can be. It's fulfilling the purpose for which you were made. In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell says, "God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure." That's the idea behind "goodness" – it's pursuing the highest purpose for your life.

Knowledge. One of Peter's purposes in writing this letter is to combat an early form of Gnosticism, which is the pursuit of a secret knowledge for the sake of

knowledge. Knowledge is an important goal, but it's no mystery reserved for the enlightened inner circle of a cult. Knowledge is the pursuit of truth. Never be afraid of truth, even when it challenges your previous assumptions.

Self-control. This one's rather obvious, I suppose. It means to get a grip on yourself. Don't let your inner passions and desires control you. You control them.

Perseverance. This word is sometimes translated "patience," but that sounds too passive. This virtue is best modelled by Jesus "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame" (Hebrews 12:2). He chose his suffering for our sakes and persevered through it, knowing on the other side was joy and victory.

Godliness. The Greek word used here is hard to translate. It's a compound word combining "good" and "homage" or "reverence." William Barclay says it's the nearest Greek word for "religion." It's the exercise of your faith toward God and others. When you love God and love your neighbor as yourself, that's godliness.

Mutual affection. The Greek here is *philadelphia*, which as I'm sure you know means "brotherly love." It's a word that means friendship and affection. Now that the coronavirus is limiting your social circle, you're hanging around the people with whom you have the most natural connection – family, close friends, neighbors, coworkers. You're safest when you're with them, as opposed to being in a bar or a mixed crowd. When you're with them, you experience "brotherly affection." They are *your* people.

Love. This is *agape*, which you may know is not a word common in secular Greek. The New Testament practically coined it, or at least gave it meaning. *Agape* in the Greek mindset made no sense. *Agape* is modeled for us in healthcare providers who risk their lives and families to care for COVID patients, in teachers who will do the same because they grasp the importance of in-person learning, in honorable law enforcement and members of the military who do their jobs without prejudice or thought to self-preservation or whether or not a camera is capturing the moment.

In a biblical context, *agape* is God loving us through the sacrifice of his Son when we didn't deserve it. It's God sending the rain on the just and the unjust. It's the highest, deepest form of Christian development – when we love whether or not we are loved back, or noticed, or appreciated.

That's quite a comprehensive list, isn't it? Seven virtues flow from faith. I don't think the exact order is the point, except that it starts with faith and ends with *agape*. If you're wanting to know what it looks like to live the Christian life, it starts with believing in God, believing God, believing Jesus is God's Son who died and rose again for your salvation, believing he can be trusted to take charge of your life as your Lord.

The other virtues are not a comprehensive list. Nor is the sequence critical – except that the winding path of Christian discipleship increasingly leads to *agape* love.

I passed over a significant and powerful word in Peter's sentence. It's the word "add" ("supplement" in the New Living Translation). But to "add" to your faith goodness, and *add* to your goodness knowledge, and so on, is Kindergarten arithmetic.

What Peter means to convey is advanced calculus. The Greek root is *choregos*, from which we derive "choreograph." The idea lying behind it is what we would call musical theater. In the Greek world, especially ancient Athens, plays required a large chorus, their equivalent of the Hickory Choral Society. These choirs required a great investment of time and money. Wealthy patrons rivaled each other to spend lavishly on the production. Often the *choregos* would himself direct the choir or the play. He took personal responsibility for every part of the show – benefactor, producer, director.

The closest parallel I could envision was Peter Corneliussen's 2019 opera, *Joan of Arc*. Peter would be the first to tell you there were so many others who made it happen, but he decided he was going to give this his all. It started with the story of a courageous young teenager with bold faith. Then there was a theater to rent, songs to write, singers and actors and instrumentalists to recruit. Peter determined that whatever it took he would make it happen. *Choregos* conveys that entire process.

What Peter (the Apostle) is not saying is that you start with faith and add a little knowledge or supplement some godliness as if you're seasoning a stew. He's saying you lavishly develop these virtues that reflect Christ. You don't add; you multiply and imagine you are trying to outrun Eric Liddell; out dunk Zion Williamson; outplay Serena Williams. You lavishly pursue these virtues because they look like Jesus.

Make every effort to confirm your calling (vv. 8-11)

What Peter says in the next few verses is that these qualities "in increasing measure" have multiple effects. "They will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (8). Again, he's setting us up for chapter 2 when he's going to vilify the false teachers for their faux knowledge that doesn't produce virtue. They are "nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins" (9).

The Gospel is designed to change you. As Tim Keller says, "God invites you to come as you are, not stay as you are." What changes you is that he has cleansed you by his blood, so you want to live clean.

Peter continues with his second "make every effort." This time "to confirm your calling and election" (10). God does the calling and choosing, but the way you know you have been called is by your *spoude* – your sense of zeal and urgency.

If it doesn't matter to you that you live in a way that reflects Christ, then you will find yourself wondering, "Am I truly a Christian?" It's not that your behavior makes you a Christian, but your desire to pursue these virtues validates your faith.

That's how you know for sure you will "receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (11).

Make every effort to remember these things (vv. 12-15)

I gave you a preview of this next paragraph last week. It's Peter's purpose as he comes to the end of his life to seal in the hearts of his readers what matters most. He's not giving them something new; he's reminding them of what they already know.

And here's the phrase: "And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things" (15). He's nearing the end of his life. Nero is the emperor, and he has aimed his mental instability and insecurity on the Christians in the first of what will become many and widening persecutions of Christians by the Roman empire.

Peter's working hard to leave a Jesus legacy. He's preaching and teaching. Mark is listening to Peter's account of Jesus' earthly life and writing down what will become the Gospel of Mark. For Peter's part he wants a broader group of Christians – including you and me 2000 years later – to grasp the practical implications of this gospel. He realizes you default every day to something else, and you have to be intentional about reminders. Make every effort!

What matters most

As I sat down yesterday morning to put this sermon on paper, among my emails was one that Tim Summers had written to the Committed Corinthians Sunday School class. That class has been studying a book called *Knowing God*, by J. I. Packer, an iconic legend to the Evangelical world. Tim had emailed the class to let them know that Packer died on Friday at age 93. An [obituary](#) in Christianity Today included the following paragraph –

Packer's writings show what mattered most to him, and what he also thought the church must value most. Part of Packer's legacy was thus helping Christians set the right agenda and concern themselves with the right things. Packer's list of priorities included the Bible, the church, correct theology, holiness in life, and vocation.

When asked for his final words to the church, Packer said, "Glorify Christ every way." I think Peter would be pleased that the essence of his message is still being captured and conveyed twenty centuries later. That's it! When your faith grows into love through practicing these other virtues, you glorify Christ every way.

So back to the Bojangles story. Chicken without biscuits? That doesn't seem right.

I think to most Americans, Peter's list of virtues feels incomplete. I looked online this week for a list of qualities Americans value. You may think in today's polarized world we don't value the same things, but we do. They just find their expression in different priorities. That shouldn't surprise us. [One list](#) of American values I found includes independence, privacy, directness, equality, competition, and consumerism.

We could summarize all that in one word: freedom. Americans deeply value our freedom of religion, of expression, of choices. It ticks us off royally if others express their freedom differently, but we never want anyone to take away our own. We've turned the pursuit of happiness into the ultimate virtue. Sayings like "I just want you to be happy" or "I need to find myself" or "I just want to be me" are rarely ever challenged.

Did you notice that none of Peter's virtues sound like that? If you found yourself wondering something along the line of "You don't want biscuits?" it may be because you are operating more out of an American value system than a biblical one.

Edmund Burke said, "But what is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint."

I don't mean to imply that American values are necessarily in conflict with biblical values. The beauty of the Gospel is that it can adapt to any culture or any time period, fitting in while at the same time challenging and transforming that society by changing individual lives and hearts. Values like privacy and equality and even consumerism are not essentially anti-Christian, but for the believer they need to take second place to the priority to "glorify Christ every way."

The truth is that God also wants you to "find yourself" and "be who you really are." He even wants you to be happy. It's just that this self-actualization is a byproduct of faith that grows into selfless love. Jesus said, "If you want to save your life, you'll lose it. But if you lose your life in me, you'll find it."

So give it your *spoude* – your zeal, your urgent priority – to seek those virtues that choreograph a life centered in Jesus. You find yourself when you lose yourself in the lavish pursuit of life in Jesus. Amen.