

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Virtue and Assurance, Part 1**

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5-7

Code: 61-11

Now, I want you to turn in your Bible to 2 Peter 1:5 to 11. I'm quite confident it will take me a few more messages to complete our study of this text. I have been, frankly, quite amazed, after being here over 20 years at Grace Church and for the first time preaching a series on assurance, to find that after every message that I have preached on this subject, at least one person, sometimes five or six people, have come to me and said, "Up until tonight, I never experienced the assurance of my salvation." They have thanked me for speaking on this issue. They have thanked God for the clarity of His Word with regard to assurance.

And it's sad to think about the fact that if that's true here in our church, it must be true all over Christendom; that there are many, many Christians who do not enjoy the assurance of their salvation. It's particularly sad because God wants us to have full assurance; so it says in Hebrews 6:11 and 10:22. He wants us, according to 1 John 3:19, to have our hearts assured. He wants us, according to Colossians 2:2, to have the full riches of assurance. Every true Christian should enjoy the reality of his or her salvation. Not to have that assurance is to live in doubt, to live in fear, to live in a certain form of spiritual depression, and a certain kind of misery.

Certainly, not to have assurance means you're unable to delight in God, which is inherent in the Christian experience, and you're unable to enjoy the anticipation of all of His promises; you're unable to relish the reality of faith, and the exhilaration of hope. You see, the promise of eternal life, the promise of abundant life, presupposes assurance. If I'm going to enjoy all that is mine in Christ, I have to know I'm in Christ. I'll live in fear, misery, doubt. Peter is very concerned that his readers enjoy assurance, so it is a main theme in this very brief epistle. Now, let me remind you briefly of sort of how it fits.

This is a very short book, just three chapters. The dominant theme of this book is chapter 2, and chapter 2 is about false teachers, false prophets, and they are described in very clear, graphic terms in the second chapter. Now chapter 2, which focuses on false prophets and false teachers, is surrounded by other teaching directed at successfully countering their attacks. In other words, chapter 1 and chapter 3 are related to the theme, in that chapter 1 and chapter 3 tell the believer how to be equipped to deal with the false teachers. To fight off the encroaching, deluding deception of false teachers, the believer must know some things. The believer must have some accurate, true knowledge. And the question comes, what must we know – what must we know?

Well, in chapter 1, verse 12 through verse 21, we must know Scripture – we must know our Scripture, and he deals with that. In chapter 3, we must know our sanctification – we must know our sanctification. And in chapter 1, verses 3 to 11, we must know our salvation. If you know the Scripture, and if you know you're sanctified and set apart unto God from sin, and if you know your salvation is real, then the attacks of false teachers are thwarted; if you don't know the Scripture, and if you do not know and are not experiencing a continued state of sanctification, and if you are not sure of your salvation, you become a ready victim.

Now, we're looking at that section on salvation, knowing your salvation. That is a very essential defense against false teachers. If you have on the helmet of the hope of salvation, then the blows of Satan that come against you to make you doubt your salvation and doubt the work of God are thwarted. You are protected from false teachers, demon spirits, and Satan himself. So the first line of defense is you must know your salvation. And actually, the whole chapter up to now has been focused on that. In verse 1, he said you must know the source of your salvation. It is yours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. In verse 2, he said you must know the substance of your salvation. It is predicated on grace and peace multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

In verses 3 and 4, you must know the sufficiency of your salvation, that you have everything pertaining to life and godliness. And now, in verses 5 to 11, you must know the certainty of your salvation. You must be sure. And so in verses 5 through 11, he speaks to the issue of certainty – of certainty. And this, beloved, is crucial if we are going to withstand the onslaughts of false teachers. You say, "Why?" Because false teachers will always try to tell you another way of – what? Salvation – always. But if I know where I stand in terms of salvation and there is no question, then there is no attraction from false teaching.

We have in verses 3 and 4 indicated that we have everything we need in Christ. And yet in verses 5 to 11, Peter says we have to do everything that we possibly can to add to what Christ has done, that we might experience certainty. That's quite a paradox. Verses 3 and 4 says, "You have everything in Christ." Verses 5 to 11 says, "Now add to it." How can you add to everything? That, again, is that marvelous paradox of being complete in Christ, and yet having to do everything within our strength to follow Him. And so we find, then, verses 5 through 11 give us the path to assurance. Verse 5, let's look at it: "Now for this very reason also" – now, I want to stop you right there. What reason?

Because we have everything in Christ – because by His divine power – verse 3 – "He's granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." Let me go back over that, just in summary. Because you have divine

power, granting to you everything necessary for life and godliness, because this comes to you through the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, through Him you have precious magnificent promises.

You have become partakers of the divine nature. You have escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now, for this reason – in other words, because of all that is yours in Christ – “do this.” And here again is the mystery of spiritual life. We are given everything in Christ, and yet it takes everything we have to follow up on that. Because we have all in Christ, all the gracious resources for spiritual sufficiency, we are called upon to give maximum effort. Well, now false teachers will successfully prey on those who doubt their salvation. False teachers will have ways of making them miserable, sinful, doubtful, weak, fainting, in their worship, their prayer, making them joyless, impotent in service, confused about what they believe.

But to those who are confident in their salvation, confident in the riches Christ has given to them, secure and assured in the true knowledge of the Savior, the false teachers have nothing to offer. So for this reason, because of all we have in Christ, let's add to it, in order that we might enjoy its benefit, namely assurance – assurance. Verse 5, then, calls for a diligent effort: “Now for this very reason, applying all diligence.” Now, that gets us into the text, and what I'd like to do is take this concept of assurance and break it down into four sections for you. And we'll just kind of work through these sections one at a time.

First is the effort prescribed, second the virtues pursued, the options presented, and the benefits promised. Let's start with the effort prescribed, we've just read it. And I need to say as a footnote here, you would think after verse 3 and 4, you have everything pertaining to life and godliness, God has poured His divine power into you, you have all of this, that the next statement might be, “So let go and let God,” right? That the next statement might be, “Hey, relax – just lay back and let God do it.” Just the opposite. The effort prescribed – verse 5 again. “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith.”

Now, there's the effort prescribed. Because of God's saving work in us, and because of its complete sufficiency, it's like Philippians 2:12 and 13, work out your what – your salvation. God put it in, work it out – work it out – “applying all diligence, in your faith” – and then the next word, “supply.” That's interesting. That's an interesting statement. Let me take you into it a little deeper. “Applying all diligence, in your faith” – what does the word applying mean? Well, just that; making maximum effort. It's the idea of bringing in every effort alongside of what God has done. God has done all of this, you bring alongside every effort. That's the word applying.

All diligence, *spoud* means eagerness, hastiness; it's used of someone who is in a hurry. It means zeal. Very strong word, and so he is saying alongside of what God has done bring in every zealous, eager, hasty, hurried effort. Pretty direct. And then the word supply – the word supply. What does that really mean? It means to give lavishly. It means to give generously. It's a very interesting word, by the

way, kind of a different word. It's a word that means a choir master, and then there's a preposition on the front of it. You say, "Well, how could you translate a word that means choir master by the word supply?" Simply, because choir master had the responsibility to supply everything that was needed for his choir. And so the word came to mean a supplier; a choir master just was synonymous with a supplier.

William Barclay says this, "Perhaps the greatest gift that Greece, and especially Athens, gave to men was the great plays and dramas of men like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, works of literature and art which are still among the most cherished possessions of the world. All these plays needed large choruses, for the choruses were integral parts of them. It was, therefore, very expensive to produce such plays. In the great days of Athens, there were public spirited citizens who voluntarily and willingly took on the duty at their own expense of collecting, maintaining, training, and equipping such choruses. It was at the great religious festivals that these plays were produced.

"For instance, at the city Dionysia there were produced three tragedies, five comedies, and five what they called dithyrambs. Men had to be found to find and equip and train the choruses for them all. It could cost such a man a great amount of money, and it was the pride of such men to train and equip their choruses as nobly and splendidly as they could. The men who undertook these duties, voluntarily, out of their own pocket and out of love for their city, were called *choregoi*" – that's the word here – "and the verb *chorgein* is the verb for undertaking such a duty to supply a chorus. The word, therefore, has a certain lavishness in it.

"It never means to equip in a sparing way or a miserly way; it means lavishly and willingly to pour out everything that is necessary for a noble performance. The word *epichorgein* went out in to a larger world, and it grew to mean not only to equip a chorus, but to be responsible for any kind of equipping. It can mean to equip an army with all necessary provisions and supplies. It can mean to equip the soul with all the necessary and lovely virtues for life. But always at the back of it there was the idea of a willing and lavish generosity in the equipping. And so it is that word that the Spirit of God chooses."

And back again in verse 5, "For this reason" – because of all that Christ has done for you – "applying all diligence, supply" – lavishly, generously, not in a miserly, or shallow way; and then that little phrase – "in your faith." Faith is assumed here. Faith is the ground in which the flowers of sanctification grow. So, in your faith, your initial believing in Christ, you need to lavishly apply all zeal, to come alongside what Christ has done, and do everything you can possibly do. That's what he's saying. Now, somebody might say, "Well, isn't there assurance in faith?" Yes, there is assurance in faith, and the one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we have noted on other occasions, has every reason to be assured.

If you know you believe then the God of hope can fill you with all joy and peace in believing, says Romans 15:13. There can be joy and peace just in believing. In 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 13,

“We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” In other words, these Thessalonians, who were relatively new Christians, could know they were saved and be filled with hope because of faith in the truth. Faith carries with it assurance. Hebrews, chapter 6, also notes the same truth, and 1 John 5, a very familiar text, verse 13.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” Believing can be knowing. Having faith can impart assurance. I can know I believe, you can know you believe, and believing brings salvation. And you can have a measure of assurance. But I don’t believe that that faith, that initial saving faith, will continue to yield the fruit of assurance unless the effort is made to be obedient to what this text says. You may enjoy that assurance initially, but if no zealous effort to lavishly supply what is required alongside what Christ has done is made, then I believe there will be the forfeiture of the joy of assurance.

And so there is a prescription given here, and that prescription is diligently pursue the full supply of all these things. The fullness of assurance – listen carefully – is the product of zealous effort to tap the full supply of spiritual virtue, and lay it alongside the full supply of God’s gracious provision. So, in a very real sense, assurance comes to a believer who follows this prescription. Now, that is the attitude. Let’s look at the action. We’ve seen that which was prescribed, the effort prescribed, a consummate effort requiring lavish zealousness. But what is it that we’re doing? I understand that attitude, but what’s the action? What am I supposed to do?

Let’s look at point two then, the virtues pursued – the effort prescribed, the virtues pursued. What does a believer need to pursue in his or her life to bring about the experience of assurance? Verse 5: “Supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance,” or endurance, “and in your endurance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.” Seven virtues to be pursued, and these virtues each are embodied somehow in the previous one. Out of faith comes moral excellence, out of moral excellence comes knowledge, and so forth.

Now, I want you to look at these. We don’t need to spend a lot of time, but you’ll be very refreshed as you see what Peter means. First one is moral excellence, *aretē*; it’s the word virtue – virtue. In classical times, the word meant the God-given ability to perform heroic deeds. And it came to mean the quality of someone’s life which makes them stand out as excellent. It is very rare, by the way, in Scripture, but not in secular Greek. It is a noble term. It is a term of heroism. It is a term of moral heroism, moral excellence, quality. It was usually used to refer to the proper and excellent fulfillment of something.

For example, a knife was said to be *aretē* if it cut well. A horse was *aretē* if it ran strong and fast. A singer was *aretē* if he or she sang well. Sometimes the word came to mean courage. Sometimes it meant efficient excellence or operative virtue. It never meant cloistered virtue or virtue in a vacuum,

as if it were an attitude, but virtue which is demonstrated in a life. So he says in your faith, with all your heart, and all your mind, apply with great effort, eagerness, zeal, and haste the lavish supplying of moral excellence to your life. Let me ask you a simple question. Where do you find the model of that excellence? Christ.

That is why in Philippians, chapter 3, you have that monumental statement by Paul that lays down the pattern for all believers' behavior. He said it more magnificently than any other place in Scripture. And what he said was, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." What he was saying was "I pursue Christlikeness." He admitted, "I haven't attained, but I pursue it." The goal to be like Christ, the reward to be like Christ, the goal is the reward – you remember from our study of Philippians. Pursue Christlikeness. Pursue excellence.

Remember what we saw last Sunday morning, where Paul said to the Thessalonians, "Excel still more?" And some have even suggested that it might mean moral energy. People who are speaking about this word seem to be afraid – lexicographers, people who give definitions, seem to be afraid that somebody will think the word has a static meaning when it doesn't, and so some have translated it moral energy; the power that performs deeds of excellence. So, "add then to your faith moral excellence," quality of life, spiritual virtue, a sort of holy heroism.

Now, that leads us to the second of these virtues. Verse 5 says in your moral excellence, knowledge. Moral excellence couldn't happen unless at its heart was knowledge, right? Discernment, spiritual insight. The word knowledge means correct insight, understanding, truth properly comprehended, properly understood, properly applied. And so we want to pursue moral excellence, understanding that in our moral excellence there must be spiritual knowledge, discernment. We must know before we can live. We must understand how we are to conduct ourselves before we can conduct ourselves in that way. Moral excellence is dependent on *gnosis*, knowledge of a high character and a high quality. To borrow another theological term, illumination – having your mind illuminated or enlightened about truth. This, of course, involves a diligent study and pursuit of the truth in the Word of God.

Now, inherent in your knowledge is another virtue; look at verse 6: in your knowledge, self-control. All bound up with a true knowledge and true discernment is self-control. The word literally means in the Greek, holding oneself in, and in Peter's day it was used in athletics. Athletes were self-controlled, self-restrained, self-disciplined. They beat their body into submission, 1 Corinthians 9:27. They abstain from unhealthy food, and wine, and sexual indulgence, to keep themselves holy; to disciplined exercises for the sake of athletic achievement. Controlling the flesh, the passions, the bodily desires, rather than allowing yourself to be controlled by them.

And so he says pursue moral excellence, realizing that at the heart of moral excellence is spiritual discernment, realizing that at the heart of spiritual discernment is self-control. What does it matter if I discern if I don't control? How can I be morally excellent? By the way, just as a footnote, false

teachers typically claim that their true and secret knowledge had freed them from the need for self-control. Remember, we discussed that. They preached license to indulge. They were greedy. They were exploiters. They followed their own lusts. Peter will say all of that in chapters 2 and 3. And they restrain nothing. But Peter reverses that. And he says any theology that divorces faith from conduct is heresy.

Faith, and in that faith moral excellence, and in that moral excellence, spiritual discernment, and in that spiritual discernment, self-control; this is essential to Christian living – controlling fleshly desires consistent with what I know about truth for the sake of producing moral excellence. Virtue, then, guided by knowledge, disciplines desire, and makes it the servant, not the master, of one's life. That is self-control. Self-control has to be one of the greatest of all Christian virtues.

And there's more, a fourth. Verse 6: "And in your self-control, endurance" would be the best translation; *hupomon*, patience or endurance in doing what is right, never giving up to temptation, never giving up to trial, never giving up to difficulty, never giving up to sin. Michael Green said, "The Christianity of such a man is like the steady burning of a star rather than the ephemeral brilliance and speedy eclipse of a meteor." This is a magnificent portrait of what we are to pursue. We pursue moral excellence, based upon spiritual discernment, which produces self-control, which produces endurance under temptation without succumbing.

By the way, this word *hupomon* really does resist one-word definition, and there is no English equivalent. In classical Greek, it isn't a common word, but it used in the Scripture frequently of toil, trouble that comes against a person, against his will, making life extremely difficult, painful, grieving, shocking. It even brings along the thought of death. It is used in classical Greek of those same things. It is used in reference to the Maccabees, spiritual staying power enabling men to die for their faith in God, as they did in the Maccabean revolution. It's that spiritual staying power that will die before it gives in; that strong, that resistant.

Again, I quote from William Barclay in his *New Testament Words*, "And now we can see the essence and the characteristic of this great virtue *hupomon*. It is not the patience which can sit down and bow its head, and let things descend upon it, and passively endure until the storm is passed. It is not, in the Scots word, merely tholing things; it is the spirit that can bear things not simply with resignation but with blazing hope. It is not the spirit which sits statically enduring in the one place, but the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory. It is not the patience which grimly waits for the end, but the patience which radiantly hopes for the dawn.

"It has been called a masculine consistency under trial. It has been said that always it has the background of *andreia*, which is courage. Chrysostom calls *hupomon* a root of all the goods, mother of piety, fruit that never withers, a fortress that can never be taken, a harbor that knows no storms. He calls it the queen of virtues, the foundation of right actions, peace in war, calm in tempest, security in

plots, and neither the violence of man nor the powers of the evil one can injure it. It is the quality which keeps a man on his feet with his face to the wind. It is the virtue which can transmute the hardest trial into glory, because beyond the pain it sees the goal,” end quote. Courageous, steadfast, joyful, self-control under pressure, resisting temptation, built on spiritual wisdom, pursuing moral excellence.

And at the heart of this persevering endurance is number five: “and in your perseverance,” or your endurance, “godliness – godliness.” What a magnificent word that is. Used back in verse 3 also, *eusebeia*. It really means reverence. Now, listen carefully as I describe this word. It means reverence. It means a practical awareness of God in every area of life. It used to be translated true religion. It could be translated true worship. It has the idea of worshiping God. It has the idea of God-consciousness. The Greeks used to say that a man was *eusebeia*, a lover of the gods. It’s a word to describe someone who worships, who has reverence, who adores God.

In fact, Josephus, the Jewish historian, contrasts this word with *eidololatreia*, idolatry. *Eusebeia*, reverence, gives God His rightful place, worship God as He ought to be worshiped. Idolatry does the opposite. And so we are to pursue lavishly, zealously, eagerly, with great zeal, with passion, moral excellence. And in the heart of that moral excellence is a focus on God. To sum up all that the Greek said about this God-consciousness, they said the word included all the rituals connected to worship. They said the word included loyalty to God. They said the word included respect toward everything that belonged to God. And that it included the spirit of devotion to the will of God.

Whatever the Greeks said about the word *eusebeia*, the Christians made it greater – the Christians made it greater. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:8, “Godliness is profitable in all things.” The believer is to worship God, and love God, and adore God, not with stained glass and organ music, but with a life of reference for God and devotion to His holy will. He is to do what David did in Psalm 16, set the Lord always before him. This is to be our commitment. False teachers are irreverent, irreligious, ungodly. True Christians pursue practical awareness of God in every detail of life. They are characterized by deep reverence for God, which leads to courageous, steadfast, joyful, self-control under temptation, built on spiritual discernment in the pursuit of moral excellence. It’s a marvelous fabric woven here.

And then a sixth virtue: “and in your godliness,” verse 7 says, “brotherly kindness” – *philadelphia*, brotherly affection and friendship, mutual sacrifice for each other. We don’t need to spend a lot of time on this. We have done that often. At the heart of godliness, the heart of reverencing God, is loving each other. In fact, 1 John 4:20 puts it that way, that if you love God, you’ll love each other. First John says that if you say you love God and don’t love your brother, you’re a liar, because if you really love God you’d love your brother. So if you are a true worshiper, if you are really *eusebeia*, godly and reverent, you will show affection toward others.



See, those two are inseparably linked. What is the great commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second is what? Love your neighbor as yourself. Inseparable – inseparable. The first half of the Ten Commandments are how to love God, the second half of the Ten Commandments are how to love your neighbor. So the crowning element flows to the next point, the seventh, “And in your brotherly kindness, love” - love – *agap* – sacrificial, selfless love. This is the love of the will. This is the love of choice. This is the love of volition, not the love of emotion. This is the highest virtue. This is the *summum bonum* of Christian living. This is what Paul called the greatest thing, love.

At the heart of my worship toward God is that concomitant kindness toward my brother. At the heart of that kindness toward my brother is the love of God shed abroad in my heart. There is the pursuit. And much more could be said about all of that, but I think you get the flow. We pursue moral excellence. Moral excellence means being like Christ; diligently, zealously, with all of our energy and power, we apply ourselves to the lavish degree to lay alongside what Christ has done for us the maximum effort in the pursuit of these things.

And the first thing is we pursue moral excellence, virtue, quality, spiritual heroism. Which mean that we really are pursuing love, the highest and purest and noblest love, which will then be reflected in kindness to other Christians, rising out of a deep reverence for our beloved God, leading to a courageous, steadfast, joyful, self-control under temptation, built on spiritual discernment and the consuming compelling pursuit to be like Christ. It’s just a big circle. And faith is the foundation for the whole thing, and love is the culmination.

If I had time, I could take you through all those passages that talks about faith that works by love. What a pursuit. What a pursuit. We have everything in Christ, he says, and yet we are to add to what we have in Christ, with maximum effort, moral virtue, practical wisdom, internal self-control, endurance in all temptations, God-conscious reverence, brotherly kindness, and all-pervasive, pure love, to God and everyone else. I think there is enough here to keep us occupied, don’t you? And then he says in verse 8, “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.”

What’s he saying? He’s saying if these things are in your life and increasing, you’re going to be fruitful, and you’re not going to forget whether you’ve been saved or not. In other words, you’re going to enjoy assurance. God doesn’t want to take your assurance. God wants you to enjoy it. God doesn’t want to make you miserable and doubting. God wants to make you joyful and confident. God doesn’t want you to question whether you’ll make it to heaven. God wants you to know beyond a shadow of a doubt and live by hope. But the way to experience that is not to let go and let God, but to follow the effort prescribed and the virtues to be pursued. Doesn’t this in a great measure sum up what we learned in 1 John?

Where these things are realities in your life, there is the confidence of salvation. And when the false teachers come along, they have nothing to offer you. For knowledge, they want to give you blindness. For self-control, they want to give you license. For enduring in temptation, they want to give you succumbing to temptation. For a reverence for God, they want to give you irreverence. For the love of God's children, they want to give you resentment toward God's children. For true love, they want to give you lust. But they're not going to be a problem to you if you experience these things in increasing measure, because you have diligently applied yourself to supply them in your life.

There's two more points. We're going to have to wait for them; powerful, powerful conclusion to this text. Well, let's pray. Father, it seems like the time flies by so fast. We just begin to be able to breathe at the depth, and it's time to surface again. We just start to get acclimated to being divorced from the stuff of the world to think deeply about You, and time is gone. Lord, help us not to come up too fast, but to stay down long enough to experience everything You have for us to understand. Help us to know that You long that Your children have life and have it more abundantly, and abundant life must mean assurance, that You want us to have assurance. And You've given us the means, if we will but dedicate ourselves to this pursuit of the resources that are already there.

The moral excellence, it's there in the Spirit, the knowledge, it's there in the Word, the endurance, it's there in the promise that no temptation has taken you but such is as common to man, but God is faithful, who will never allow you to be tempted but always make a way of escape that You may be able to bear it. It's all there. The brotherly kindness and love is there, for we have been taught of God to love one another. Love is there because You shed it abroad in our hearts. You've lavishly given it to us. Help us to eagerly pursue it. We don't understand the mystery of how everything is ours in Christ, and yet we have to pursue it all with every ounce of energy we have, but that's the way You've designed it.

Make us faithful that we might enjoy assurance, that greatest of all Christian experiences, to know we belong to You now and forever. And out of it flows all our joy. Thank You for giving us the means to that full joy. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

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