Lesson 11

How to be Fruitful & Effectual

Introduction

2 Peter 1.5-7 contains a wonderful list of virtues that should be a growing part of every Christian life. We might define these as identification marks of sanctification. Each virtue provides us with visible, tangible evidence of the Spirit’s work in our life. More and more, every single day, these qualities should be worked out and becoming a greater part of the way we live. The theological term for this is sanctification, which is the continual progression of growing in Christlikeness. Sanctification is where God, by the work of the Spirit, makes a person increasingly holy, transforming him into the image of Christ. It is the process by which the power of sin is diminished in one’s life so that the fruit of obedience can be readily seen.37

Understanding the process of sanctification is essential for our assurance of salvation. Misunderstandings of it have led to division and false teaching, especially in North American evangelicalism. Almost two hundred years ago, methodism began to promote the idea that entire sanctification takes place after salvation, instantaneously in a crisis experience.38 This is commonly referred to as a “second work of grace,” that transforms the Christian’s inner life. It is said that the Christian virtues of self-control, godliness, love, etc., are received instantly in response to earnest seeking or pleading (a moment of crisis) … and then are attested immediately by displays of the acts of the Holy Spirit. When excitement for this teaching fell out of favor inside the Methodist church, over the course of the late 19th century, division took place and gave rise to the Nazarene church and later the Pentecostal movement.

The New Testament is very clear on how sanctification is a lifelong process. Our text, in 2 Peter 1.8, makes it clear that in this life, we will never possess these qualities in their totality. Other passages that align with this principle are:

- 2 Corinthians 3.18: We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.
- Romans 8.29: For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

38 Wesleyan teaching (Methodism) was modified by emphasizing revivalistic techniques of invitation, decision, and testimony, and by an increasing insistence on visible evidence. Holiness groups were among the first to admit women to ministry. By the late 19th cent. physical healing was commonly expected and the experience of sanctification was frequently called “baptism with (or sometimes of) the Holy Spirit’. Greater emphasis came to be placed on external observance, esp. avoidance of all behavior seen as worldly. See Cross, F. L., and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 783.
• 2 Thessalonians 1.3: We ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, since your faith is flourishing and the love each one of you has for one another is increasing.
• 1 Thessalonians 4.1: Additionally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received instruction from us on how you should live and please God—as you are doing—do this even more.
• Philippians 1.9: And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment.
• Colossians 2.6-7: So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude.

Again, as we consider our main text today, it is clear that Peter’s point is growth in virtue, i.e., “process instead of crisis.”

In this lesson we will discuss 2 Peter 1.8 in detail. We’ll see how we already possess each one of the qualities listed in v. 5-7 and need to be yielding to the Spirit so that they are continually increasing. We’ll also talk about what it means to be useless and unfruitful. Finally, we’ll end the lesson on a positive … talking about very practical admonitions on how to be fruitful and effective in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What You Possess That Should be Increasing

2 Peter 1.8 begins with the reading: For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure… Don’t let the if confuse you. Every Christian already possesses these qualities … as they were planted inside us by the Spirit at the moment of our salvation. The meaning of possess in this verse is “to exist, be present, or be at one’s disposal.” It also describes “what belongs to someone, someone’s property or possession.” We are called upon by God to work out these things, making them more manifest day by day. This is the point behind Paul’s writing to the Philippians:

Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.

– Philippians 2.12-13

The “working out” in v. 12 is our cooperation with the work that God is doing by His Spirit on the inside. Fear and trembling denote our attitude of reverence and sobriety concerning the fact that God is at work in us, v.13, and highlights our personal sense of responsibility to follow through on God’s expectations. All of it is for the purpose of accomplishing God’s purposes. You are in the midst of being prepared to be an instrument of God’s service, the importance of which cannot be underestimated.

40 BDAG, p. 1029.
Galatians 5.22-24 also gives us a glimpse of the process we’re involved in. We have been given the Spirit, Acts 5.32, and the evidence of His working in our life reflects itself in our obedience whereby we demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, 5.22-23. The visible presence of these things in our life demonstrates that we have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, 5.24.

Now, back to 2 Peter 1.8. We need to be possessing the qualities of v. 5-7 in an increasing measure. We need to be moving with every effort, v. 5, to make sure these things are growing to the point of abundance or overflow. The LSJ describes increasing measure as “to be more than enough, superfluous, or in excess.” BDAG adds the word “multiply.”

This type of growth characterizes the entirety of life. We could think of aged men like Noah, Abraham, and Moses who at advanced age were called by God into deeper obedience. Noah, in his 540’s or 550’s, commenced to building an ark as a safe passage from the flood. Abraham, well past 100 years old, was called to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and Moses, at the age of 80, was called to lead his people out of Egyptian bondage. Each of these heroes of faith exemplify what it means to add to the fullness of virtues as they sojourned in this life.

To what is God calling you? No matter your age or how long you have been a Christian, God is calling on you to grow in your dependence on Him and further surrender so that you will come to display these virtues (reflect His image) in a greater way. This is how you keep yourself from becoming useless or unfruitful.

Don’t be Useless or Unfruitful

Note how Peter expresses himself in the negative. We could restate it positively: when these virtues exist and abound in you, you will be effective and fruitful in your knowledge of Christ. So why go negative? Most likely it is to arouse his readers to attention … growth and assimilation inside the kingdom of Christ does not happen haphazardly. The spiritual life is to be pursued fulltime. If we are just sitting on the resources we’ve been given we will be useless and unfruitful.

Useless means “without performance,” “idle,” “lazy,” or “worthless.” The ESV translates the word here as “ineffective.” The imagery of these words can move us to picture idle workers who are wasting precious time and resources. Jesus illustrated this in Matthew 20 with the parable of the landowner. James describes faith without works as being “idle” or “useless,” James 2.20. Are you using what God has provided you with?

Unfruitful means “unproductive” whereby a person does not produce the desired or intended results. In Matthew 13 Jesus spoke of those who hear the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of

---

42 BDAG, p. 824.
43 BDAG, p. 128.
44 BDAG, p. 35.
wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful, Matthew 13.22. It is proper, at this place, to connect what Peter says with something Paul wrote to the Colossians:

so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God,

– Colossians 1.10

Honorable actions honor Jesus Christ. If we are unfruitful, we fail to acknowledge His authority and role as Judge. Fruitlessness also tends to lead to bad deeds, Ephesians 5.11, and failure to bring forth fruit brings judgment, Matthew 3.8, 10.45

**How to be Fruitful and Effective**

While we consider this, it is important to allow Peter to finish the sentence. We want to become effective and fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Before getting into the practical considerations we need to remember that living according to Christian character is for the purpose of being like Jesus. The things we do in Christ are not just to be viewed by the number of our accomplishments, but rather by the degrees of Christlikeness we are being transformed into.46 Let’s connect these virtues back to the earlier part of our study where in v. 3 we learned that life and godliness come through the knowledge of him, and in v.4 where we see his very great and precious promises enable us to share in the divine nature. Now, taking v. 8 into consideration, may we see that the productiveness God desires for our lives is our increasing ability to think and act like Christ. Check out these similar passages that demonstrate the goal of our actions:

- Ephesians 4.32 – we forgive like Christ.
- Philippians 2.5 – we are humble like Christ.
- 1 John 4.17 – we love like Christ.

The last part of 1 John 4.17 summarizes it this way: *as he is, so also are we in this world.*

What exactly does fruitfulness and effectiveness look like?

**Good Works**

God gives us salvation. We don’t work for it, we work from it. Our good works are a reflection of what has and is taking place on the inside. As James said, works demonstrate our faith. If there are no works, there is no faith, James 2.20-26.

**Godly Mindset**

This is the result of our having set our affection on things above, Colossians 3.1-2. The process of sanctification in our life should be shaping and impacting our attitudes and disposition toward ourselves

---


and others. As time progresses, are you seeing yourself begin to think more and more from a spiritual, eternal perspective, rather than the world?

**Lips that glorify God**

The words we speak reveal the heart. Jesus said, *the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart*, Matthew 12.34. Paul teaches us that foul language should become a thing in our past, with it being replaced by good words that edify and bring grace, Ephesians 4.29. It has been said that the average person speaks around 7,000 words every day (about 50,000 words per week), which is the length of a short book. We are authors, all of us, publishing 52 books each year from the printing press called the mouth.

- Proverbs 12.18 – do we wound others or heal them?
- Proverbs 15.2 – do we commend the fear of the Lord or pour out folly?
- Proverbs 15.4 – Do we refresh the spirits of others or break them?
- Proverbs 18.21 – Do we think of the power of our words and how they have the power of life or death?

**People we reach with the gospel**

How many people are you in the process of leading to Christ? Who are you sharing the gospel with? Every Christian has been so richly blessed. How can we not share our wealth of blessings with those around? Those who are fruitful and effective in the kingdom use their talents to bring others to Christ. Will we follow in the example of the Thessalonian church who *sounded forth* the word of the Lord *everywhere* (1 Thessalonians 1.8)?

**Conclusion**

Never forget that you, by the power you’ve been given, have unlimited potential to accomplish the purposes God has determined for your life. Think about how a more effective practice of the Christian virtues in v. 5-7 will impact every relationship you have. God has designed it so that your faith will produce real, visible change in your daily life. Peter calls us to move with zeal in applying these things. It is the essence of what he means in calling us to *prepare our minds for action* in 1 Peter 1.13.

Are you taking your responsibilities seriously?

**For Thought and Reflection**

1. What is *sanctification*?

2. Is sanctification a one-time event or a process over time? Explain.
3. When did you receive the qualities listed in v. 5-7? Who gave them to you?

4. According to Galatians 5.22-24, what is the effect of having the Spirit in your life? What is the evidence that you have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires?

5. What does increasing measure mean in 2 Peter 1.8?

6. What does it mean to be useless?

7. What does it mean to be unfruitful?

8. In what are we to become fruitful and effective?

9. What is to be the proper aim or motive behind every action in the kingdom?

10. What do good works do?

11. Why is it so important to give consideration to the words we speak?