

Studies in James

Lesson 2

The Character Traits of a True Disciple

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When the church was still in its infancy, there were three men who became significant leaders among the saints in Jerusalem – James (the Lord's brother), Peter (believed to be the oldest of the apostles), and John (the beloved apostle and close friend of Jesus, and the one to whom Jesus gave the responsibility of caring for Mary, the mother of the Lord).
 - A. If you remember from our introduction to this series on James, the apostle Paul said these three men were regarded as "*pillars*" in the Jerusalem church – meaning they were men of great influence and authority. **(cf. Galatians 2:9)**
 1. That also suggests these three men probably worked closely together in ministering to the spiritual needs of saints during the early years of the church.
 2. And the fact that Paul mentions them in the order of James first, then Peter, and then John, suggests that, among these three so-called "*pillars*" of the church, James was PROBABLY held in the

highest esteem by virtually everyone – after all, he IS the Lord's own brother.

3. But from the humble way James describes himself in the first verse of his letter – "*a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*" – we know James NEVER sought this notoriety, NOR would he have considered himself above ANYONE.
 - a. This will become even MORE apparent as we go through our study of James.
 4. Regardless of how James thought of himself, others obviously held him in high esteem – including Peter.
 - a. In **Galatians chapter two**, the apostle Paul describes how Peter's high esteem of James apparently contributed to Peter playing the role of a hypocrite by avoiding close association with Gentile Christians when certain men from James came to visit Peter at Antioch – which was probably the largest church among Gentile Christians at the time.
- II. Toward the end of Peter's life (somewhere around 66 or 67 A.D.), the apostle wrote his last letter to New Testament saints – a letter that reflected his deep concern over the spiritual maturity of Christians everywhere.

- A. Peter knew he was approaching the end of his own life, and warned his brothers and sisters in Christ of the need to maintain their own faithfulness to the end.
1. Peter knew these saints would not only face increased persecution, but would have to contend with false teachers who were leading many into error.
 2. In fact, the final words of Second Peter reflected this deep concern.
 - a. **2 Peter 3:17-18** – *"You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
- B. A careful examination of First and Second Peter reveals that Peter's whole theme concerned the Christian's walk WITH God – the same theme as the book of James.
1. Therefore, Peter urged those saints reading his second and last letter to, *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (**2 Peter 3:18**)

2. But, what does it really MEAN to grow in the "*grace and knowledge*" of Jesus Christ? And perhaps more important, how can WE be sure WE'RE growing in this "*grace and knowledge*"?
- C. Fortunately, we're not left to wonder what Peter meant, because he addressed this very issue in his OPENING comments of his second letter.
1. **2 Peter 1:5-11** – "*But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"
 2. If you remember the last lesson in our series on prayer, we said it was Paul's prayer for God to "*fulfill [or "accomplish"]*. . . *the work of*

faith with power" among the brethren at Thessalonica (**2 Thessalonians 1:11**)

- a. And the way God helps us acquire a faith with power is found in **2 Peter 1:5-11** – when we add to our faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and brotherly kindness and love.
3. Furthermore, Peter told these New Testament saints, *"For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (**2 Peter 1:8**)
 - a. And acquiring this *"knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* is our goal – a goal that will allow us to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (**2 Peter 3:18**)
 - b. And THAT will help us maintain our walk WITH God.
4. So, let's take some time to learn from Peter's perspective the same things about Christian growth that we will learn from our study of James.

BODY:

- I. What does it really mean to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"*?

- A. Peter provides us with a simple list of eight characteristics that we might call the character traits of a true disciple of Christ.
1. Let's begin by giving a brief definition to each of these eight character traits:
 - a. Faith is, "conviction, strong assurance."
 - b. Virtue is, "moral excellence, goodness."
 - c. Knowledge can be defined as, "correct insight."
 - d. Self-control is simply, "self-discipline."
 - e. Perseverance speaks of our need to, "bear up under trials."
 - f. Godliness is defined as, "godly character out of devotion to God."
 - g. Brotherly kindness is simply, "love toward brethren."
 - h. And love is best described as, "active goodwill toward others."
 2. But in **2 Peter 1:8**, the apostle told his readers that they must "*abound*" in these eight characteristic marks of a true disciple of Christ.
 - a. Only then can it be said that we are "*growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*"
- B. But the word, "*knowledge*" can be defined a number of ways. So, what kind of "*knowledge*" does Peter describe here?

1. It's certainly more than simply increasing our "intellectual" knowledge of Jesus!
 - a. While developing a greater understanding of the things Jesus did and said during His lifetime, and how those teachings apply to us, is important, it's not the kind of knowledge Peter is speaking about here.
 - b. There is a big difference between knowing ABOUT someone, and KNOWING them in a close and intimate way.
2. And so, Peter is talking about our need to develop a fuller, deeper and more personal knowledge of Jesus Christ!
 - a. And this kind of knowledge can only come by developing the Christ-like characteristic marks, or character traits, Peter lists for us in **2 Peter 1:5-7**
 - b. The more we "GROW" in these character traits, the more we really "KNOW" Jesus – because He is the perfect personification of these character traits.
3. In fact, the word "*knowledge*" used by Peter is from the Greek *epignosis* (e-PIG'-no-sis), which means: "to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know thoroughly, to know accurately, know well." (Thayer)

4. And so, the ONLY way we can truly claim to KNOW Jesus Christ in this way is when we ALSO have these same character traits in our OWN lives – that TRULY makes us a disciple (a true follower) of Jesus Christ.

II. But notice that Peter says we need to "add" to our faith. **(2 Peter 1:5)**

A. In fact, the word "add" is implied all through **verses 5-7**. In other words, we are to "add" each of the characteristic traits mentioned here.

1. The word in Greek is *epichoregeo* (epi-cor-AH-gee-o), and originally meant, "to found and support a chorus, to lead a choir, to keep in tune," but eventually came to mean, "to supply or provide."
 - a. This word suggests the idea of each of these individual character traits working in harmony with the others to produce an overall effect.
2. Also notice the use of the preposition "to" in all these verses. **(2 Peter 1:5-7)**
 - a. This implies that each of these traits must be added to the one before it in order to perfect or complete that previous trait.
 - b. In other words, before we can perfect or make our "faith" complete (our "conviction, strong assurance"), we need to add to our faith "virtue" ("moral excellence, goodness").

- c. In other words, if we lack "moral excellence, and goodness" ("*virtue*"), then our "conviction, and strong assurance" ("*faith*") is incomplete.
3. This is the very thing James teaches!
 - a. **James 2:18-24** – *But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*
 - b. James told HIS readers that our faith is VALIDATED or AUTHENTICATED by our works.

- c. In other words, we can't claim to BELIEVE in Jesus Christ (to be a true BELIEVER) and FAIL to live a life that is in keeping with the morally pure life Jesus lived.
 - d. Therefore, "moral excellence, and goodness" ("*virtue*"), is needed to make our "conviction, and strong assurance" ("*faith*") a genuine LIVING faith.
4. And so, Peter says:
- a. To make our "conviction, and strong assurance" real and living, we need to add "moral excellence, and goodness."
 - b. And to make our "moral excellence, and goodness" complete, we need to add "correct insight."
 - d. And to have "correct insight," we need to ensure we can exercise "self-discipline."
 - e. But to be able to exercise "self-discipline," we need to be able to "bear up under trials."
 - f. And to be able to "bear up under trials," we must develop a "godly character out of a deep devotion to God."
 - g. But before we can develop a "godly character out of a deep devotion to God," we need to learn to truly "love our brethren."

- h. And the only way we can truly "love our brethren," is to demonstrate "active goodwill toward others."
 - 5. Every single character trait listed here is absolutely essential to develop the trait that precedes it – we can't leave ANY of them out if we want to truly become a disciple (a follower) of Jesus Christ!
 - a. We can't selective pick out the ones we want or feel are more easily achieved and leave the others out of our lives.
- III. But also notice that Peter says these traits not only need to be ADDED, but that they need to be added with "*all diligence.*" (**2 Peter 1:5**)
 - A. In fact, Peter uses the word "*diligence*" or "*diligent*" twice in these verses. (**2 Peter 1:5,10**)
 - 1. The word means, "earnestness, zeal, sometimes with haste."
 - a. In other words, the only way we can "grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ" requires work on OUR part.
 - b. Growing is certainly NOT something we develop "naturally" develop over time!
 - 2. Unfortunately, many Christians feel the longer they've been a member of the Body of Christ, the more they've naturally become Christ-like.
 - a. Nothing could be further from the truth!

3. **James 1:22-26** – James describes these kinds of people in this way: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.*
 - a. James is describing someone who is simply along for the ride – someone who is interested in HEARING the truth, and may even BELIEVE the truth, but doesn't PRACTICE the truth.
 - b. Worse yet, this kind of person is deceiving his own heart, and his religion is completely useless.
4. Simply because you've been a Christian for YEARS, DOESN'T mean you've been DILIGENT, or put forth an effort, to add ANYTHING to your faith.
 - a. And that's why both Peter AND James warn against that kind of mindset – thinking that way will not only make it impossible

for you to faithfully serve the Lord, but will eventually cause you to lose your soul.

IV. So, what are the benefits to all this DILIGENT effort in adding to our faith?

What do WE get out of doing all this? The apostle Peter gives us FIVE reasons for giving "all diligence" to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A. Grace and peace are multiplied.

1. **2 Peter 1:2** – *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*
 - a. Peter used this phrase to describe two wonderful blessings we derive from the knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us, and peace is the benefit of God's unmerited favor.
2. But Peter says these two blessings are "*multiplied*" in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. (cf. 2 Peter 1:2)
 - a. It's certainly true that we ALL experience God's unmerited favor to some degree – in that the sun rises on the good and the evil, and the rain falls on the just and the unjust. (cf. Matt 5:45)

- b. The "fullness" of God's favor and peace can only be found in Christ.
 - (1). **Eph 1:3** – *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."*
 - (2). **Phil 4:6-7** – *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*
- 3. So, if we want God's grace and peace to be *"multiplied"* in our life, we need to gain the KNOWLEDGE (epignosis) of Jesus Christ – and we do THAT by becoming more like HIM!
- B. The second benefit is that we receive all things that pertain to live and godliness
 - 1. **2 Peter 1:3** – *"as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue."*
 - 2. The *"life"* Peter speaks about in this context refers to our spiritual life and well-being, and *"godliness"* refers to our conduct.

3. There are some wonderful benefits we receive as we grow in this knowledge by God's divine power – all three are mentioned in verse 4!
 - a. We receive, "*exceedingly great and precious promises.*" (**2 Peter 1:4a**)
 - b. We become "*partakers of the divine nature.*" (**2 Peter 1:4b**)
 - c. And we become free from the "*corruption that is in the world through lust*" (**2 Peter 1:4c**)
 4. Developing a Christ-like character by truly KNOWING Him gives us all that pertains to life and godliness! What MORE could we possibly want?
- C. A third benefit is that we avoid spiritual near-sightedness and spiritual forgetfulness.
1. **2 Peter 1:9** – Peter warns: *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.*
 2. Spiritual near-sightedness and forgetfulness is a very dangerous situation.
 - a. We lose sight of the REAL BENEFITS of being Christ-like.
 - b. And so, we soon forget the REAL BENEFITS of being redeemed by the blood of Christ.

3. **Heb 10:26-27** – *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*
 4. If the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood for us doesn't help motivate us to turn away from sin, what more can God DO? There's no greater sacrifice than the one Jesus made, and it THAT sacrifice doesn't mean anything to us, what will?
- D. And so, the fourth benefit should REALLY be important to us – Peter says we will never stumble.
1. **2 Peter 1:10** – *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.*
 - a. Meaning, if we are diligent to make our calling and election sure by adding to our faith, virtue and to virtue, patience, etc., then we will never stumble.
 2. This does not mean we will never sin. John tells us that if we say we have no sin, we're a liar and the truth is not in us. (cf. 1 John 1:8,10)
 - a. Thayer defines the word "*stumble*" as meaning, "to fall into misery, become wretched; cf. the loss of salvation" (Thayer)

3. This means we will never stumble to the extent that we can never recover and get back up again. We will never fall short of our ultimate salvation!
 4. But this promise is only if we're willing to give "*all diligence*" to grow in the knowledge of Christ. That's the ONLY way we can make "*our calling and election sure.*"
- E. And finally, when we've made "*our calling and election sure,*" we will receive an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.
1. **2 Peter 1:11** – *for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*
 2. The apostle Paul put it this way: **2 Tim 4:6-8** – *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
 3. The "abundant entrance" that Peter describes is simply the ability to enter heaven with all the glory and honor a conquering hero returning home!

CONCLUSION:

- I. And so, Peter tells us we MUST *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
 - A. And we do THAT by developing the traits of a true disciple of Christ.
 1. We begin by adding to our faith, to our "conviction, strong assurance," the trait of virtue, or "moral excellence, goodness."
 2. But to make our virtue beneficial, we must add knowledge, or "correct insight."
 3. But our knowledge won't truly be effective until we add self-control, or "self-discipline."
 4. But to truly be self-disciplined we must learn perseverance, the ability to, "bear up under trials."
 5. But before we can learn to endure and persevere, we must add the ingredient of godliness, or "godly character out of devotion to God."
 6. But we can't be godly until we have learned to exhibit genuine brotherly kindness, or real and genuine "love toward brethren."
 7. And there is simply no way we can exhibit brotherly kindness, until we first learn love, or how to truly demonstrate "active goodwill toward others."

8. In other words, it all begins with learning how to truly demonstrate love and goodwill toward others.
 9. That's why we need to first KNOW Jesus Christ, so we can then GROW in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- B. And when we have grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we will receive wonderful benefits.
1. Grace and peace will be multiplied.
 2. We will be given all things pertaining to life and godliness.
 3. We won't have to worry about becoming spiritually nearsighted or forgetful.
 4. We will never stumble to the extent that we won't be able to get back up and continue on.
 5. And best of all, an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom will be ours!
- II. These are the character traits of a genuine disciple of Christ.
- A. And that's why we're launching into a series of lesson from the book of James.
1. In one way or another, James will deal with each and every character trait Peter mentioned here – those traits we typically call the "Christian graces."

2. James will address faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love – but not necessarily in that order.
 - a. James will challenge us to examine ourselves to see whether or not we have all these qualities or traits.
 - b. And he will tell us in no uncertain terms why we need them, and what kind of person we will be without them.
- B. In the end, James and Peter have the same goal for us – to give us direction so we can go to heaven when this life is over.
 1. These letters were written to help us maintain our walk WITH God.
 2. Are you doing that – are you walking **WITH** God? We need to always be CERTAIN that our walk is **WITH** God.
 3. Or do I need to ask you if you're **WALKING** with God? Perhaps you've never even started your walk with God.
 - a. If you've never STARTED your walk with God, why not BEGIN this very moment.
 - b. And if for some reason you've simply STOPPED your walk with God, why not RESUME that walk right now?