

The Development of Character

by Paris Reidhead

Christian character requires diligence, energy, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity to develop.

Duration: 38:34

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Character"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prioritizing our time and energy in matters that are truly important. He encourages listeners to establish a schedule of responsibilities and make wise decisions about what to accept and reject. The speaker also highlights the need for discipline and self-control in our lives, and the importance of adding energy and wisdom to our faith. He concludes by reminding listeners that while God has provided everything necessary for our growth and development, becoming a mature Christian requires our active participation and cooperation with God's grace.

Transcript

Will you turn please to 1st Peter chapter 1, pardon me 2nd Peter chapter 1 verses 5 through 9. 2nd Peter chapter 1 and verses 5 through 9. We shall consider quite closely verses 5 through 7 and make reference to verse 8 but probably we'll have to conclude at that point. I read these verses and beside this giving all diligence add to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge and to knowledge temperance and to temperance patience and to patience godliness and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will stop there in the previous verse the one which I began reading verse 4 we find that we are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises whereby we should have all that pertains to life and to godliness. God knew us he knew our need he knew what we have and don't have what we can do and can't and so he's provided absolutely everything necessary for us to be to become that which he's intended for us. But as complete as the provision is in Christ as satisfaction satisfactory as is the supply of his grace let's have it clear you don't automatically become a mature christian character doesn't flow as water does downhill and blessings of God are not forced upon us.

God does not coerce us to become what we can become he makes it possible. If the christian care of christian character and christian development were automatic then God would have done at the last what

he refused to do at the beginning and man would be an automaton just a machine and so he hasn't done that at all. He's given us a heart inclining us to want to be what we ought to be and then he's given us full provision promises instructions but we must be workers together with God.

Again I say that just because we've been so many years in the christian life and have attended church so regularly and frequently and have fulfilled the responsibilities and duties that keep us in good standing does not mean that we're more mature now than we were when we began. It doesn't mean that we have grown in the grace and the likeness of Christ. It requires on your part diligence to understand his word and to appropriate what he's provided.

So the text is very important extremely important because it concludes with the statement if these be things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice then the effect that these things will have. What does it mean these things? The meaning of the graces that we are to possess and to practice will engage us.

I would have you take note of the fact that he says add to your faith. He assumes that we possess faith. If we do not we be not believers.

Consequently there is a prerequisite here to an understanding of what is stated. Anyone that would pick this up and say my isn't this a splendid ladder on which I can climb to heaven quite misunderstands what the word is declared. He's not telling us how to be saved.

He's speaking to those that have already exercised faith saving faith uniting them to Christ. Add to your faith. How can you do that if you do not possess faith? Obviously we've got to distinguish again the different kinds of faith that one can have.

I remind you of something that was much before us some years ago that there are a variety of faiths different kinds. There's a head faith which is an intellectual ascent to what is written. There is a dead faith an appropriation of doctrines and of ritual.

There is a devil's faith an emotional response to the fact of hell and the prospect of heaven. All of these things are are substitute when they substitute for that which is now before us. Heart faith, real faith, genuine faith are dangerous indeed.

Now they're part of the heart of the real faith or there is an intellectual quality to faith or a foundation for it. There is an appropriation of doctrine and of life requirements. There will be emotional responses and feelings.

Where the danger comes is when they become a substitute for reality and so we speak now of that faith which is savingly united us to Christ. Faith which can only be exercised when it's been preceded by repentance. We understand there for the ones to whom Peter writes those that have been truly born of God and so he declares add to your faith virtue.

Now the origin of this word would indicate that it means excellence of any kind so it was used long before Peter used it would have reference to bravery or rank or nobility and they would use this word virtue the the Greek word from which we have been translated with this English word to describe a quality of bravery or nobility but it not only was used in this sense it was also used to describe lands and fields or animals or even things and it had the idea of excellence. Here however and perhaps generally at the time Peter used the word it had acquired this meaning of of manly decided determined conduct and excellent now had

become synonymous with that quality of life that made one noble or brave and manliness and strength of character energetic pursuit of a goal and energetic resistance to evil is synonymous with the word virtue. Now the energy that we're to exhibit here we will take this as the meaning energy is his energy imparted to us and active upon us by the spirit of God and what God does in you you are to energetically do in full expression of that life.

Perhaps we could say that it is the courage and determination that's essential to the Christian life and God has wrought in your heart a desire to be like Christ well then you're not to be passive about it you're to add to your faith this manly courageous determination to be like Christ. Thus is the word virtue made stronger than we would commonly associate it he's not talking particularly about morals he assumes this and deals with it elsewhere he's talking now about a response to the prospects that are before us as Christians and to the the privileges that are ours and so if you have decided to be a Christian and you have committed yourself to Christ then he is saying that there should be this quality of a manly decided determined action that's going to carry you through the discouragements which will inevitably overtake you. To think that you can begin in the Christian life and not be assaulted by ways of discouragement is folly because of your own nature because of the world in which you are to live this life and not the least because of the enemy who becomes vigorously and viciously opposed to you when you commit yourself to Christ and so he said that they're required on your part this virtue how many times Christians have been dissuaded from the way because the ungodly have sneered at them and how many there have been that are hindered from receiving Christ because they're afraid of what their parents will say or their friends will say and what and how many there are that have made shipwreck along the way because they couldn't stand the pressure of being different and Peter is dealing with this vacillating weakness in character and he's saying that to our faith there must be added this matter of energetic determination.

Now to this we are to add knowledge for you can well understand that energy improperly directed can hurt the cause we seek to promote and only reason that a railroad locomotive can pull the train is because it's on a track but get it off in the quagmire at the side and it's simply a monument to its own folly and powerlessness because it may spin its wheels but it won't pull a load. How true this is that of Christians that to their faith have added energy but they haven't had the tracks of knowledge upon which the wheels could run and the consequence was futility and so it is that wisdom and prudence are to be added to this matter of determination and purpose. It's extremely important that we should recognize that knowledge here is not just in general information it isn't that it is that but it's far more than that it is the insight that's given to us the wisdom that's given to us by God himself and through the word and we should recognize this is to be a great need in the 20th century.

I think that the commendation that is given in the word concerning the children of Issachar could be profitable for us. There were men that there were men that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do and how wonderful it is to have in the tribe someone that has understanding of the tribe of the times and knows what the people of God ought to do well this is exactly what's meant by adding to your faith energy and to your energy wisdom. Now notice we are to not stop at this point but we are to add to wisdom temperance.

Now obviously this word self-control includes or excludes gluttony and drunkenness and we would associate this with the fact that we're believers that we've been born of God. So putting it in this development of character it doesn't seem to have its primary reference to these sins of abuse of body and appetite but rather it is a matter of discipline of self-control that will direct the expenditure of energy. So here we have faith and energy and manly determination and wisdom but how are you going to measure

the amount of power that the amount of effort the amount of activity for any given cause.

Satan's strategy you see is to get Christians doing the wrong thing first and if he can't get them to do the right thing he wants them to do the the wrong thing he wants them to do the right thing in the wrong way. He wants them to get so tired at the inconsequential that when the test comes along they haven't entered any energy for the thing that's terribly important. Now how are you going to know what requires first place how are you going to establish your schedule of responsibilities how are you going to know what to accept and what to reject what to do and how much to do in this.

I suppose one of the problems that you face as you begin in the ministry as a young man is the fact that you can spend all week trying to get a title for a message if you're an utter perfectionist and then you haven't any message to go with a superb title and thus this characterizes much of the Christian life. The inability to decide how much time to spend and energy to spend and effort to spend in matters and so we've got to have this discipline this self-control in your life. It's terribly important that to your faith should be added energy and to your energy should be added wisdom and to your wisdom should be added a throttle, a governor, a control to know how to direct your energy in your time and this is that which he says we are to do.

Now of course we aren't through at this point and he says to the temperance we are to also add patience. Literally the word means remaining behind or stopping. I think that Beryl, one of the writers in the Puritan period had something very profitable to say concerning Christ's exhibition of patience.

He says Christ was patient not out of a stupid insensibility or a stubborn resolution. This isn't why he behaved himself as he did for he had a vigorous sense of the grievance and a strong aversion to both stupidity and stubbornness but his patience grew out of a perfect submission to the divine will, an entire command of his passions and an excessive love for mankind. So did his patient and meek conduct have its fountainhead and so it will be with you not just out of stubbornness or stupidity that you are patient but because you've committed yourself to the will of the father and you've committed yourself to the mind of the father and you have a love for the lost and a love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

These things being in you and having their right and proper place are going to cause you to stand. The missionary that goes to the field that's been enamored by the letters of revival or a great increase and they've said well someone writes back and said well I went into a village and preached and 50 were saved. He goes into a village and preached and they tail him with rotten eggs and stone and he said well I guess I'm not called to be a missionary and he goes home.

Let the ones that can get 50 converts when they preach do the work. I'm going home but they forget that the one that finally had the 50 converts also had previously the hail of rotten eggs and the stones but with patience he stood with energy he witnessed with self-control and discipline he measured his strength with a long pull and it wasn't just one grand burst of extravagance. So patience we understand to be that which enables us to embrace to endure yes if necessary and all often to enjoy all the conditions into which the Lord brings us.

So to your self-control is to be added patience. How often it is that people run well begin well you have a visitation campaign and you put a big thermometer on the wall and the red indicator there how many calls were made how many tracks were left and and you promise to suffer after the first month. Well they'll go fine up until the time they eat but after they've eaten the thermometer the fire goes out and the red drops down and disappears.

This type of compulsive Christian activity is completely contrary to what the word of God indicates. We had up at the evangelism conference a case in point in one of our own alliance men from out in Ohio Akron, Ohio insurance man that years ago saw that his ministry for the Lord was in teaching a bible class of young couples and he completely gave himself to this ministry. He and his wife ministered there and I've talked with a pastor that aided him in the beginning of this and the ones that have known him and served as his pastor since and they've said that the most distinguishing characteristic of both Byrne and Irv Sir Lewis is their patience, their persistence.

They'll call on a young couple not once not twice but 10 and 15 and 20 times just as we're told that the average insurance sale is made after the 16th call and so it is that we should understand that there is thought to be in the Christian life a patient that is a determination that isn't going to be deflected. Now everything that I mentioned so far the heathen could perform and profit from the performance. They could have energy, they could have no end of wisdom gained by common experience, they would profit from discipline and self-control and they also could have patience to wit folk in some countries that at great sacrifice give their bodies to cruel tortures in the hope of peace.

This I say doesn't necessarily have to characterize Christians and unfortunately does characterize us too seldom. Here is the quality however which marks it off as peculiarly wonder wonderfully Christian. So we add to patience godliness.

This word is never used of God. God isn't godly. God is God but men are godly in this respect that the word means a devout earnest regard for God's will and God's purpose.

So you are godly to the degree to which your concern is to do God's will and your concern is to know God's mind. As I said the pagans could profit from all of these things. The one thing they cannot do is to give to God.

Well you say well they can't in their devotion in their idolatry and they're yes that's true and too and so often the idols will secure a measure of sacrificial service and devotion that we refuse to render to the living God. How sad should it be that we would have to even intimate such a thing. Such is the case.

Now the godliness to which Peter refers is the fact that he expects us to see God's hand in everything. All the circumstances even the snares and the fact that the call has to be 16 times instead of one. We have to persist.

This then he said is that in all of these experiences God's hand is there being viewed by us. Nothing happens apart from him. This means we must receive absolutely everything as being from God.

That's very hard. We must do everything as for him not to be rewarded not to be honored not to be appreciated not to be thanked not to be recognized but to do it as unto the Lord. That's the godly.

The other is a manly a humanly rendered service. If you have to be applauded and you have to be honored for every service and recognized then it isn't godly. A godly service is that which has an eye singled to his glory and it can be rendered in the dark of night and no one knows about it.

No one gives credit for it. No one honors for it. It's just something that's done for God.

It's a godliness a concern for him. Then of course with this we find that the Christian is going to not only give the service in this fashion but he's going to find delight as he does it because in addition to his

obedience and his faith he's going to have fellowship with God. So in the loneliness of not being known or recognized there's the fellowship with God.

We walk with him we enjoy him and this is what we find the word says the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him and there is that enjoyment. So godliness includes not only an eye singled to his glory but a heart filled with his presence. Not a godliness must be added brotherly kindness.

We're all one family and every Christian is a member of every other Christian. Every believer is a member of every other believer. Doesn't make any difference what label he wears.

It doesn't make any differences to race. Doesn't make any differences to education. God has one door through which sinners enter and that's the low wicked gate where we can only come in and brokenness and repentance and faith.

And God has indicated that it's to one family just as there's one faith one baptism one cleansing fountain through which our sins are washed away. Therefore he says you're to add brotherly kindness. It is this that's Marcus's Christians our Lord Jesus said by this shall all men know that you are my disciples that you love one another.

What a wonderful thing it is when they say oh my behold how they love one another. This concern this compassion this yearning and longing for the best now you say what love do you mean? Just a sentiment? No no no I don't mean that at all. This great concern for the best the highest interest and happiness of others and so he said brotherly kindness.

He wants the family of God to have this character as theirs. Isn't it strange? Look at the next word to brotherly kindness you add charity love to love you add love. But he wants to emphasize the fact that there's to be love among believers for each other because of something they share with each other and they can't share with the world but lest this become provincial he adds love which must not be confined to the brethren or to the believers but it's a love which must be extended to all men just because they're people just because they're men even to our enemies.

I was in the little coffee shop on the corner one day and a very disreputable character came in and said something and I said as the party left I said my what a shame look how far he's gone and the little proprietor said well he's people ain't he and I went home and told my wife that this was probably one of the most profound observations that I'd made. Here this man had performed a service and his only reason for doing it was that he's people ain't he. Well this is what Peter's saying he isn't using the same grammar by this time his fisherman's grammar is given away to something a little better and he says we're to have love which doesn't isn't a fraternal that he's already mentioned but a love for people just because they're people and this love has got to pervade our whole spirit so that we'll be preserved all our words are going to be regulated and our temper is going to be disciplined and our actions are going to be controlled certifying that we're Christians.

Now notice as we press on the importance of this Christian character that we're called upon to develop. May I read it for you in what I would consider to be a valid paraphrase the constant exercise of these graces will prove us intelligent and consistent Christians while the lack of them will prove us ignorant and inconsistent for if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ and that marvelous to think that the spirit of God is concerned that we should not be unfruitful that we should not be barren that there should be in our life that which is going to

give joy to others give glory to Christ and bring blessing to us and so he's given you the secret the only way the only possible way that you can be kept from barrenness as a Christian and unfruitfulness is that you should have these characteristics developed in you.

I think this gives us a magnificent insight into the nature of true Christianity oh my there are so many there's so many counterfeits on every hand it's marvelous to see what the genuine is they say that people being employed by a bank for the first time are never shown counterfeit money they're just given the privilege of using a lot of genuine money and their familiarity with the genuine enables enables them to detect a counterfeit there's just something different about it and so Peter's desire is that we should become familiar with the the genuine notice how comprehensive our faith is in our relationship to Christ is this faith that we've into which we've been called and this life that we've been given this Christian life touches every circumstance in every situation there isn't

anything that can happen to you there isn't any place you can go no situation into which you can come for your faith this faith that you've embraced in Christ doesn't apply you can't go on a vacation you can't get in some place that's so involved that God didn't anticipate it it touches not only every situation in every circumstance but our faith touches every operation of the mind every disposition of the human spirit our souls are to be pervaded by and controlled by our faith we're to have our whole spirit soul and body preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ so the comprehensiveness of our faith is set forth in this text notice also that not only is our faith comprehensive but it's connected it's like a chain you can't have one you can't have faith in its pure form

without having these because if you stop at faith without the others you've testified that your faith is furious and not genuine there's both faith ought to and faith will in this text so like a chain it is that each join to the other and the development of character is fashioned in this way just as the Christian's armor is put on piece by piece a helmet a breastplate loins girt about with truth feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace the shield the sword why there it is it's complete so our character is developed in completeness and each link to the other and you can't pick and choose you aren't armored if you omit a piece and you aren't Christian in mature development if these things are not in you barrenness and unfruitfulness must of necessity come but notice how how

lovely is the influence of the Christian life we're one person one family we're just one church to have this to faith energy to energy wisdom to wisdom discipline and direction to this discipline patience to patience god-centeredness to god-centeredness brotherly love and to brotherly love love for all if i were to happen to your heart oh wouldn't tomorrow be a happier day than friday was and wouldn't your home be a happier place this week than it was last wouldn't this church in every church this is so terribly important because of its been its beneficial results its lovely results and god wants this for you and he wants it for me he wants it for us all right now we come to the matter how is it going to come is it going to come in a revival is it going to come when we have a great

invasion of the spirit of god in one moment and experience we arrive from where we are to where we ought to be is that how it's going to come no dear heart that is now it's going to come now revival may be necessary to get you in the place where god can begin the process there may have to be some cataclysmic dealing of god to shake you out of things that you're clinging to that'll stand in the way of this but there's no experience be at the fullness of the spirit of brokenness i care not there is no experience in the word of god that will produce maturity of character the experience will remove the barriers the experience will predispose you to progress but it won't bring you there god's word doesn't contradict itself

and you aren't going to arrive here by some experience that bypasses

the discipline of your own character development and so the scripture says giving all diligence that word give diligence means to bring in by the side of or literally adding adding one grace to another adding your faith adding your obedience adding your determined resolution to god's promises do you see you say well you're not emphasizing experience like you are oh yes i am but i'm finding that so many people thought that in an experience with god they bypass the process of becoming what they ought to be and the scripture has to be balanced and so he says god's given the promise god's given the provision now you bring give diligence you bring by the side of god's promise and god provision your obedience and your faith giving diligence and unfortunately that's about as poor a word as could

have been ever used to convey what god wants to convey and in this sense of put to this this no not so at all the word and actually comes from the greek word chorus and it refers to someone appointed by the city to provide a chorus for the mystery plays of ancient greece and he had the obligation to pay the bill and the city would say now you pay the bill for next play and you provide the chorus so the idea of paying the price or adding was there but in the scripture it doesn't have that it is literally this you develop one virtue by the exercise of another and so as you have faith then you develop energy and there was energy wisdom and they go together like this pieces of a machine synchronized and so it's the not the sense that today i have virtue and next week i'm going to have wisdom no

no all these things are in us in some measure but it's by the youth and the discipline and the thought and the attention that these increase and we increase by our exercise now for a moment don't for so much as a moment think that i'm not emphasizing experience you know me too well to know that and oh how marvelous it is that in the crisis of discovery that you aren't the christian you ought to be there is the there is that meeting god in brokenness in confession of sin of dealing with the things that have accumulated that hinder and if there's that in your life that hinders this you must do there'll be no process without the crisis and if it is that you discover that you've not enthroned him lord you do not know to the cleansing of your heart motive you do not know that purifying of your

heart through faith if it is that you do not know his spirit's presence enabling all the place for the crisis is there do not for so much as a moment feel that the crisis however rich and tall and central it is and less than that is not to be considered by us is going to transport you in a moment from here to there going to open the way and remove the underbrush and clear the road the sky and make it possible but it's giving diligence at bring alongside of god's promises your faith and by the exercise of one increase the other i think paul summarizes it so beautifully in his word i can do all things through christ who strengthens me he didn't say christ would do it he said i can do it through christ who strengthens me and if he doesn't strengthen me i can't do it but he isn't going to do

it without me i'm not going to do it without him he needs me in that sense to exhibit his grace in a world such as this he needs you but you need him i can do all things through christ may god enable us to become mature christians but first to become if this is not your state a christian know how important it is that today you should open your heart to him shall we bow in prayer how grateful we are our heavenly father for thy word this living book this word that is pure by which we can be converted and can brought to christ this word that will enable us to see ourselves when we view it as a mirror and to see the lord jesus in all his grace and mercy and then to see the provisions of thy love and see how we can become what we ought to be minister to us then this living book this living

word grant that we may grow in the grace and in the knowledge of christ to be all thou would status be to that end seal the truth to our hearts and us to the truth that in giving all diligence we may add until we awaken his likeness amen shall we stand for the benediction for as we do not prolong the invitation be it known to you that we're here for but one purpose and that is to help you and if conversation and prayer will be of aid to you please make known your desire shall we pray now may the god of peace that brought again from the dead our lord jesus that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant make us perfect in every good work to do his will working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight through jesus christ our lord to whom be the glory

now and forever amen

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