

Growing in Excellence

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When we carefully consider Jesus and the example he left us on how to live and then compare that with our own individual life, each of us can admit that we have some growing to do. None of us have reached the standard set by Jesus; we are constantly a work in progress. There are probably numerous ways we need to grow and characteristics that we need to develop in order to be like him.

Peter gives one such list of traits that is vital to our goal of growing into the Christian God designed us to be (2 Peter 1:5-7). With faith as the beginning point, he then says to add virtue. Some versions translate the Greek word *arête* in this verse as excellence, or moral excellence. For the Greeks, *arête* was an important characteristic for one to possess, and it encompassed the idea of doing all things well and living up to one's potential. It would be the opposite of just doing enough to get by. For one to pursue *arête* (excellence), "good enough" just isn't good enough.

While there are many practical reasons to pursue excellence in all you do in life, Peter obviously is interested in the spiritual reasons. How can we grow in excellence, and how does that manifest itself in our spiritual life?

First, there is an important principle we must consider that is the basis for Peter's call to grow in excellence, and that is that God himself is excellent. He possesses outstanding quality. He is extraordinary. He is superior. Everything he does is excellent and right and perfect. He never gives a half-hearted effort in anything he does. We see this at the very beginning with creation, for everything he created was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). When he decides to do something, he does so perfectly, and it always comes to pass. His "judgments are true and righteous" (Psalm 19:9). He doesn't make mistakes with his actions or decisions.

Not only is God intrinsically excellent, but he gave of his excellence to us. The excellent world that he created was for *us*. He is excellent in the manner in which he deals with *us*. He came to earth as a lowly servant and died for *us*. He has prepared a home with him in heaven for *us*.

If God is excellent, and everything he does is excellent, and he has given to us of his excellence, and since we are made in the image of God and are designed to "be partakers of the divine nature", doesn't it make sense that we would pursue excellence in our service to him? Doesn't it make sense that we would strive for excellence in all that we do so that we can glorify him?

For all of the above reasons, God deserves our best, and he demands our best. Show me a mediocre Christian, and I'll show you one who doesn't respect God and is in danger of having God say to him, "You wicked and lazy servant," as he then casts him into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:26, 30). The Jews during Malachi's time were severely rebuked by God for not being excellent in their service to him. They brought the lame, the blind, and the sick as sacrifices, offering him the "leftovers". They viewed the worship as wearisome and a bother – you know, sort of like some Christians today as evidenced by their attitude and demeanor in the assembly. God told them, "Who is there even among you who would shut the

doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you...nor will I accept an offering from your hands” (Mal. 1:10).

What about us? Are we offering up a mediocre worship? Are we just doing the minimum? Or are we really concerned about bringing excellent worship and service to our excellent God? Do you sing with excellence? I don't mean that you have to have a great voice and sing all the right notes, but do you sing with joy and a desire to praise God and encourage your fellow Christian? Do you make the effort to become more knowledgeable of God's word? Do you read and study the topic or passage before class so that you'll be better prepared and able to contribute to the class?

In your personal life, are you trying to be an excellent husband, wife, father, mother? Are you striving to be the most excellent employee you can be at your job? The most excellent student in school? Do you make a concentrated effort to resist the devil and draw near to God (James 4:7-8)? Are you meditating on excellent, honorable, praiseworthy things (Phil. 4:8), or are you filling your eyes, ears, and mind with all sorts of wickedness and unrighteousness?

There is no room for mediocrity in the life of a Christian. That doesn't bring honor and glory to God, and it stymies our growth, keeping us from being what God called us to be – excellent. Strive for excellence. Don't be satisfied with “just enough”. If God didn't put forth a mediocre effort in his works and dealings with us, then neither should we be mediocre in our service to him.