

Growing Your Spiritual Character

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When one becomes a Christian, they are “babes” in the sense that they’re brand new in the faith. They’ve been born again by the Spirit and water and begin a new life. And even for new Christians who were raised in godly homes, they have a lot to learn. Baptism is just the beginning of a Christian’s life, not the end goal.

It’s for this reason that Peter, writing to Christians, encourages his readers to continue adding necessary character traits to their faith (2 Pet. 1:6-11). Faith is the starting point, and obviously required, but he then lists 7 other qualities that are necessary for the Christian to develop and add to his faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

Why are these qualities necessary? Peter gives a couple of reasons. First, “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 8). First, growing our spiritual character allows us to be fruitful in the knowledge of Jesus and therefore fruitful in his kingdom. We’re called to be active, not passive. We’re called to influence the world, not allow the world to influence us. We’re called to teach the world the good news of salvation through Jesus thereby countering the false doctrines of those who know not our Lord. We’re called to serve others, not be served. We’re called to use our talents to grow his kingdom, not bury them in the ground. We must be busy and fruitful, and in order to do so, we have to grow our spiritual character. It’s crucial to be equipped for the job we’ve been given.

Secondly, Peter makes it clear that by growing our spiritual character, we are securing our eternal salvation. He writes, “if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (vs. 10-11). Can we be assured of our salvation? Absolutely! These verses along with several others teach that we can have confidence that we will receive what is being offered. But that comes through growing our character.

The key here is that if we’re adding these characteristics, we’re making ourselves stronger, we’ll be more resistant to the schemes of the devil, we’ll be working diligently for the Lord, we’ll be helping others grow, and we’ll be focused on things above rather than things on the earth (Col. 3:2). That’s a recipe for success! That’s why we will never stumble! And that’s why an entrance into the everlasting kingdom will be abundantly supplied. No squeaking by here. No exclamation of, “Whew! I just barely made it!”

The opposite is presented by Peter in vs. 9. If we’re not growing our spiritual character, Peter says we’re “shortsighted, even to blindness”. That’s because we’re viewing life from an earthly perspective instead of a spiritual perspective. If we set our mind on things of the earth, we will be more interested in worldly pursuits. That’s where our time will be spent. That’s where our efforts will be. As a result, we lose sight of our purpose and even lose sight of and remembrance of what Jesus has done for us! What a sad condition to be in!

We need our eyes opened to what God wants us to be. We need our eyes opened to the reality of sin and its consequences. We need our eyes opened to the blessings we have in Jesus Christ. Growing our spiritual character accomplishes these things.

Don't misunderstand this as a doctrine of works-salvation. Peter is not implying, and neither am I, that if you grow enough and do enough good deeds that God owes you salvation. Our salvation is accomplished through the work of Jesus Christ and God's grace. However, God has never expected his people to be satisfied with their current level of spiritual maturity and certainly not be stagnant in their growth. There are expectations and requirements in order to receive his grace. That doesn't make our salvation any less dependent on his grace, and it doesn't negate his grace, but while God freely gives grace, he does so only to those who show devotion to him and to his kingdom and a devotion to growth.

Take a close look at the qualities Peter lists. Are you lacking any of them? Can you grow your character even more? Keep adding and exercising these characteristics, and you'll not only be assured of your entrance into the kingdom – you'll help many others be a part of the kingdom, too.