

**Text: 2 Pt 1.5-7**

This week we turn to the list of virtues in 2 Peter 1. I'm going to spring another big word on you, something I just discovered this week. I'll use a quote from Tom Schreiner...

"Peter used a literary form here that is called *sorites*, in which we have a step-by-step chain that culminates in a climax."<sup>1</sup>

*sorites*: "an argument consisting of propositions so arranged that the predicate of any one forms the subject of the next and the conclusion unites the subject of the first proposition with the predicate of the last."<sup>2</sup>

There are some other lists in the New Testament that follow this model (Rm 8:29–30; 10:14–15; Jas 1:15) but we won't take the time to look at them.

Read 2 Pt 1.5-7

The question about this is, does Peter intend for his list to describe a step-by-step process or not? Some commentators have argued for this, I've heard sermons loosely on this line. I'm going to give some quotes from Schreiner that I think debunk this idea quite well. We'll read his quotes, spend some time talking about them, then get into the text.

Responding to J. Daryl Charles who is an advocate:

"He explains the order as follows: Faith is the root of all moral virtue, and such virtue is linked with what we do with our knowledge of God. If we use this knowledge well, we will exercise self-control. Such self-control will give us ability to endure difficulties. Endurance will then lead to godliness in our relationships, and these relationships will be governed by brotherly affection and Christian love."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 297.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Schreiner, 297.

Now for Schreiner's counter of Charles' approach:

"Even in Charles's analysis he seems to intertwine virtue and knowledge by implying that the former is somehow dependent on the latter. It is difficult to see how goodness literally precedes knowledge. ... Neither is it evident that one will only have self-control when one has knowledge. And, is it clear that self-control must precede endurance? The ethical chain of virtues, therefore, is more likely a literary device, and it would be a mistake to read anything into the order in which the virtues are listed."<sup>4</sup>

1. Virtue and knowledge intertwined, virtue depending at least somewhat on knowledge, but it precedes knowledge in the list.
2. Self-control follows on knowledge: does knowledge produce self-control?
3. Is self-control necessary for endurance?

These questions, and others like it, tend to make the view that this list describes spiritual *progression*, very hard to hold.

What is Peter's intent?

1. Every believer starts with faith
2. Each believer needs to build on his faith (or build into his faith) further spiritual virtues, to make his faith stronger.

<sup>2 Pt 1.8</sup> For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Proposition:** Spiritual growth involves growing stronger in your faith in various ways, for this lifetime.

## I. The power of "in"

A. The connecting word is "in" not "to"

1. KJV: "add to your faith..."
2. NAU: "in your faith supply..."

Not an "add-on" but an "add-in"

<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, 297–98.

## B. Faith is essential to the Christian life

1. You begin Christian life through faith in Christ
2. You pursue Christian life through faith in the Word, the promises, the value of spiritual matters
3. Virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc., are features that make faith stronger

These virtues *enhance* or *strengthen* faith.

## II. The enhancements described

### A. Moral excellence (KJV: virtue)

1. One of the qualities of God that empower his call of believers to faith (1.3)

“At the time of the NT the word ἀρετή had so many meanings that it gave rise to misunderstandings.”<sup>5</sup>

2. Basic meaning: “eminence, excellence, mastery, perfection”
  - a. From this came to mean in some cases
    - 1) Manliness
    - 2) Merit (that qualifies for honour)
  - b. Gk. philosophers made it parallel with “virtue” (Jews with “righteousness” – conformity to the standard that God sets)
3. Moral excellence not achieved by human effort, but by imitating God

Not working to a standard, but by faith following God’s standard or displaying God’s excellence.

### B. Knowledge

“Peter probably referred to the knowledge of God’s will and ways that are necessary for every Christian. Indeed, the letter concludes with an exhortation to grow in the grace and

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<sup>5</sup> Otto Bauernfeind, “Ἀρετή,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 457.

'knowledge' of Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). ... True knowledge is rooted in God's grace."<sup>6</sup>

"This knowledge stands over against the spurious 'knowledge' of the false teachers. The cure for false knowledge is not less knowledge but a knowledge characterized by moral insight."<sup>7</sup>

### Stopping point?

#### C. Self-control

1. Mastery of self, control of the impulses of the flesh
2. Notably, "early Christian heresies taught that, since the body was evil (some claimed) or unimportant (others claimed), it was not necessary to curb fleshly lusts but only to think correctly."<sup>8</sup>

See, for example, 2 Pt 2.2-3

There is a document among the papyri, apparently a decree from the emperor Julian, where he boasts about his administration of the Empire "with so much wisdom and prudence and temperance ... through the same temperance he has endured the ends of life unceasingly and without fanfare"<sup>9</sup> (In Gk., M&M, with translation by Logos and me.)

#### D. Perseverance

1. Endurance – keeping on despite adversity
2. In 1 Peter, Peter writes to believers facing persecution (and other adversity)

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<sup>6</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 299.

<sup>7</sup> Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, 2 Pt 1.6.

<sup>9</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 180.

### 3. In 2 Peter, Peter writes to believers pressured by the influence of false teachers

“Many folk have the wrong concept of what patience really is. They think it means sitting in a traffic jam on the freeway in the morning without worrying about getting to work. Well, that is not patience. It just gives you an excuse for being late to work. Patience is being able to endure when trials come.”<sup>10</sup>

#### E. Godliness

“Godliness (Gr. *eusebeia*) refers to behavior that reflects the character of God (cf. v. 3; 3:11; et al.). It presupposes a desire to please God in all the relationships of life.”<sup>11</sup>

#### F. Brotherly kindness (Gk. *philadelphia*)

“The term expresses the warm, brotherly affection between those who are spiritual relatives in the family of God. It is more than a passing disposition of fondness for fellow believers; it manifests itself in overt acts of kindness toward them (Gal. 6:10). It was this affectionate relationship in the early Church among Christian converts, in spite of their diverse status and varied backgrounds, that amazed the pagans around them. But such a brotherly affection toward other Christians must be cultivated, for it entails difficult duties, such as a willingness to bear one another’s burdens and to forgive shortcomings and failures.”<sup>12</sup>

#### G. Love

1. Love in its purest form is affectionate benevolence for others without respect to personal cost
2. Brotherly kindness is not the opposite, but emphasizes relationship

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<sup>10</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 723.

<sup>11</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, 2 Pt 1.6.

<sup>12</sup> Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, 54.

3. Love emphasizes our will: we make up our minds to act because we love

an interesting reference that uses both terms

<sup>1Th 4.9</sup> ¶ Now as to the **love** [φιλαδελφία] of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to **love** [ἀγαπάω] one another;

### III. Putting the whole package together

- A. The qualities parallel similar lists in the NT

1. Paul's "fruit of the Spirit" Gal 5
2. James' "wisdom from above" Jas 3

- B. The order of the qualities makes little difference

"The order in which he names these qualities is rhetorical; all are inherent in maturing Christian character. Not all may be equally developed in any one believer, but they cannot be compartmentalized and one quality selected to the disregard of the others."<sup>13</sup>

- C. The more you adorn your faith with these qualities, the more well-rounded your spiritual life will be

"Give a Christian much grace, and his spiritual life will be like the life of a man who is well clothed and nurtured; keep the spiritual life without abundant grace, and it becomes lean, faint, and ready to die; and though it cannot die, it will seem as though it gave up the ghost, unless fresh grace is bestowed. Peace, I say, is the element in which it flourishes most. Let a Christian be much disturbed in mind, let earthly cares get into his soul, let him have doubts and fears as to his eternal safety, let him lose a sense of reconciliation to God, let his adoption be but dimly before his eyes, and you will not see much of the divine life within him."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, *2 Peter*.

#### D. The way we energetically add qualities is enabled by God

“Ultimately, any progress in godliness that we make is due to God’s enabling grace. When I was a small boy, my parents gave me money to buy them Christmas presents. I was using ‘my money’ to buy them presents, but ‘my money’ had come from them. Likewise, all that we have, including the desire and the ability to please God, comes from Him. But we must choose to use what He has given us to pursue godliness.”<sup>15</sup>

#### Conclusion:

The growing Christian should *cultivate* all the virtues, all the time.

“Each virtue contributes to the total spiritual growth of the believer. Note that Peter placed responsibility for attaining them on the Christian.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Constable, *Expository Notes*, 2 Pt 1.7.

<sup>16</sup> Constable, 2 Pt 1.5.