

Surefooted Calling and Election

SERMON

By

Everett C. DeVelde

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TEXT: 2 Peter 1:5-11

PROP: Because it comports with a calling and election that is surefooted we are to supplement our faith with The Christian qualities listed by Peter.

2 Peter 1:5-11

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We will consider a text this morning that is the watershed of much theological disagreement. Many understand verse ten to say that God starts us off in our Christian life by calling and electing us but we make it sure by adding to our faith the Christian qualities Peter lists. And when it comes to faith, we cooperate with the grace of God in coming to faith in Christ. However, our text follows from what goes before and what goes before is the fact that those whom God causes to be born again to a living hope become partakers of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Because we have been converted by God and by his saving grace have therefore escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire, we are unified with Christ. As Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus, so we are said to be in Jesus and Jesus is said to be in us. In this manner we are made to be partakers of the divine nature. Faith and righteousness are therefore inseparable but true saving faith requires the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Faith in the Lord Jesus is to no avail if he is not righteous God. Furthermore, faith in Christ apart from personal holiness is no faith at all. If we are not pursuing holiness it means that the Spirit of God is not at work in us because holiness is the mark and goal of sanctification. If we have obtained a faith of equal standing with the apostles and if all things that pertain to life and godliness have been granted to us and if we have been granted the precious and very great promises of Christ, it follows that we become partakers of the divine nature. It follows that we will progress in regaining the knowledge,

righteousness and holiness implicit in the image of God lost as the result of Adam's first transgression.

For this very reason, says Peter, we are to supplement our faith with the Christian qualities he goes on to list; virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. Apart from conversion and our union with Christ it is impossible to put off the corruption that is in us. True faith, or as our Confession puts it, saving faith, can never be devoid of the fruit of the Spirit. We will consider these marks of the Christian in some detail later on but right now we need to understand the force of what Peter is telling us.

That Peter should address himself to the matter of holiness implies that we are not where we should be as the people of God. Why should he urge us to pursue the increase of these Christian qualities if we already have them? If we abound in these things why do we continue to have need of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us? On the other hand because we do not abound in these Christian qualities the constant exhortation by the apostles to pursue holiness implies that it is very difficult to obtain. Everything that is in us resists the pursuit of holiness so that it is only with great difficulty and immense labor that we put off the corruption that is in us. Growth in grace is in everyone a slow process because we have been in such bondage to sin. We are to "make every effort to supplement our faith" with the Christian qualities he speaks of because we are by nature slow to do it. When it comes to the pursuit of godliness we often are like the animal known as the Sloth. They spend their entire existence hanging suspended from the boughs of trees, with the legs and face turned upward and the back downward. The animal moves by advancing one limb at a time in a slow, deliberate fashion. When placed on the ground they lie on their backs or crawl with the greatest difficulty. Sloths move about so slowly and their activity so inhibited that a green alga forms in the hair of some species and makes them indistinguishable from the surrounding foliage and moss.

What a remarkable description of some who claim to be Christians. They advance so slowly in their pursuit of godliness that the corruption of sin with which they are incrustated makes them indistinguishable from the pagan world around them. Of course none of you fit this description do you? I certainly hope not but none-the-less the apostle urges us all to get about the labors of putting off the corruption that is in us. We ought not to be slothful in this matter. Not slowly or carelessly, but with great zeal we ought to obey God's calling us. The Greek word Peter uses here in verse five means that we are to make every effort to pursue the Christian qualities he lists for us so that it is readily apparent that we partake in the divine nature of Christ.

We are to supplement our faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. Peter is not saying that there is some sort of order

to these qualities as if to say that one follows from the other. All of these qualities together are to be added to our faith. Saving faith ought not to be devoid of any of these qualities but they must all accompany faith or it is not real or true.

The Greek word translated *virtue* refers to moral excellence. A virtuous person is a morally excellent person. That is to say such a person loves the law of God for the law of God defines what it means to be morally excellent or good. Do you keep the commandments of God? If so you are a virtuous person. The same Greek word translated *virtue* is used in verse three where we read, "*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,*" (2 Peter 1:3, ESV) Here, the glory of Christ and his moral excellence define the person that we are called to be. The life and godliness of one who is called by God to be a Christian is to be patterned after the glory and moral excellence or virtue of The Lord Jesus. Solomon tells us, "*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.*" (Proverbs 12:4, ESV) A wife who is morally excellent or virtuous contributes so much to the good reputation of her husband that it is as if he were a great king. To the contrary, a wife who despises the law of God brings him such shame as to render him a miserable, tottering beggar. Just so you husbands don't feel left out I think I am entirely justified in paraphrasing the reading of the proverb; A morally excellent husband brings strength and honor to his wife, but he who brings shame is like cancer in her bones." Again, so you children and young people don't feel left out let me paraphrase the proverb like this; Godly obedient children bring great honor to their parents, but those who are disobedient and rebellious, disgrace their parents like ugly sores on person with bubonic plague. Therefore supplement your faith with virtue.

We are also to supplement our faith with knowledge. Does this mean (perish the thought) that we are to learn to read and write or to study algebra or history or geography? It wouldn't hurt you one bit to study and do well in school to prepare yourselves for useful service God and to your community and to make your living but I don't think Peter has this in mind when he tells us to add knowledge to our faith. Many people live successful and productive lives without the benefit of education although it becomes increasingly difficult in the technological society in which we live. But without the knowledge of which Peter speaks it is impossible live as a Christian should. Peter wants us to know about God; what he tells us in the Bible about himself and what he expects us to do. When I begin to teach a new college class in Biblical Hebrew I always ask my students to define God. I usually get the tentative answer, "God is love?" Yes, of course, God is love and everybody seems to know that much about God. Who would ever think that God is hate. He is the "bridge over troubled waters" as the popular song informs us. Or as we will soon hear again and again, "Christ is the reason for the season." However, the public knowledge of God is very superficial. Much of Contemporary Christian music which most young people (and older people too) seem to prefer, falls far short of the knowledge of God Peter urges us to have.

Hardly any of the college students I have had the privilege to teach were able to say much more than "God is love," or "God is a Spirit." How about you? What would be your answer to that question? Have you supplemented your faith with the knowledge of God? As many of you know the Bible teaches that God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, goodness, holiness, justice and truth.

We are also to supplement our faith with self-control. My O my, is that ever hard to do! It seems that most people resort to some sort of meditation or Yoga exercises to gain control of themselves. Many lose their tempers and fulminate and thunder and have a hissy fit. They may think that by venting their rage with cursing and obscene language they will gain control of their anger. But it is like the priests of Israel. They keep dying and new priests take their place. Our rages just go on and on. But Peter urges us to add self-control to our faith that comports with conversion and the divine nature of Christ. We read of Jesus, *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth."* (Isaiah 53:7, ESV) Paul writes, *"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,"* (Philippians 2:3-5, ESV)

How do we obtain to such self-control? Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit the self-control Peter urges us to have is impossible. This self-control is based in the reasonable, rational law of God and only the Holy Spirit of God can open our hearts to it. Use the means of grace to quiet your unruly soul. Paul writes, *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, ESV)

We are to supplement our faith with steadfastness. Like the athlete who disciplines his body to receive a prize that perishes, steadfast faith in Christ brings to us an imperishable prize in heaven. Consider the goal of our faith and its immense importance to us. That Moses might see the glory of God, *"The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped." (Exodus 34:6-8, ESV) This is the steadfastness of which Peter speaks. "Impossible," you

say? Of course it is, apart from the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, but we who are born again by God's grace are to labor for this supplement to our faith.

Godliness is to be added to our faith and we have considered at some length that faith without works or godliness is dead. Godliness is God likeness, again impossible to us apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Everything in us resists godliness. The corruption of our old nature enslaves us to sin and the work of the Holy Spirit alone can free us from it. We have considered that faith and righteousness are inseparable and that progress toward righteousness or godliness is the inevitable result of conversion.

Brotherly affection translates the Greek word *Philadelphia* and love translates the Greek word *agape* **therefore** brotherly affection and love are not quite the same. Using the word *agape* John writes, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*" (1 John 4:7-12, ESV) How is it possible to love one another with love like that expressed by God to us in Jesus Christ the propitiation for our sins? Again we note that all of the Christian qualities we are to add to our faith are gifts from God. In and of ourselves all of them including brotherly affection and God's love are quite impossible to us apart from the sovereign mercy of God. We are able to love in the *agape* sense because we have been born of God and we know God because he has opened our eyes to the Bible.

Furthermore, *agape* love as well as brotherly affection are rooted in the law of God which apart from grace we have no inclination to obey. We love God and fellow Christians by obeying the law of God as it applies severally to God and man. Indeed, John goes on to say, "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whomever has been born of him. **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.***" (1 John 5:1-3, ESV) Our love for God is expressed by obeying the first table of the law (the first four commandments) and our love for each other is expressed by obeying the second table of the law (commandments five through ten).

Peter provides two reasons for seeing to the increase of our faith by supplementing it with the Christian qualities we have just considered. The first is, it keeps us from being

ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the second is that without the addition of these qualities we are blind having forgotten that we are cleansed from our former sins. All of this leads to the inevitable conclusion,

2 Peter 1:10

10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

I have labored to show you that all the Christian qualities listed by Peter come from God including our faith which they supplement. They are all the work of the Holy Spirit of God therefore no part of our calling and election derives from our free will. Many concede that God begins to act or work in us but as Calvin notes, "They imagine that we at the same time co-operate, and that the performance of our Christian duty prevents the work of God from being void and without effect. But the entire Bible is opposed to this delirious notion: for it plainly testifies, that right feelings are formed in us by God, and are rendered by him effective. It testifies also that all our progress and perseverance are from God. Besides, it explicitly states that virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love, are the gifts of God and the Spirit. When, therefore, the Apostle requires these things, he by no means tells us that they are in our power, but only shows what we ought to have, and what ought to be done. And as to the godly, when conscious of their own short-comings, find that they have not done what they should have done, nothing remains for them but to flee to God for aid and help."

Our calling and election are not in vain and they bring inevitable results in the life of those whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world to be in Christ. The inevitable result of conversion is the work of God's Spirit to sanctify us with progress toward a good conscience and integrity of life that comports with our profession of faith. These qualities instilled in us by the Spirit of God are found to increase, not at the same rate in all but increase they do and fruit is born some thirty, some sixty and some one hundred fold. Good ground is never fruitless.

Many question whether the stability of our calling and election depends on good works and if that is the case then it follows that the firmness of our calling and election depends to some extent on what we do. But the Bible clearly teaches that God's election is based in his eternal purpose and his calling likewise comes about through the work of his Holy Spirit. Therefore when we see evidence of sanctification in the life of the believer we are assured that the professed faith in Christ is genuine. God's calling and election are completely effective because he is infinitely powerful. The creator of the universe is able to save us to the uttermost and the sovereign work of his Holy Spirit brings about results that are certain and sure.

So the force of Peter's teaching in the text before us that God's people are distinguished from the pagan world around them by the godly and holy lives they live because this is the design and goal of election. We place our calling and election on a surefooted basis by supplementing our God given faith with God given qualities; virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. The certainty of our salvation in no way depends us or on anything that we do. Thus we are preserved by God for eternity in heaven with Christ our God and Savior. Given that our justification is an act of God and our sanctification is a work of God we will never be found ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This leads Peter to say,

2 Peter 1:11

11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A long journey remains to all of who are in Christ Jesus. To some of us like myself the journey has been somewhat shortened. It will not be long before I will return to the diapers and mess of my mewling and puking infancy as one famous writer has put it. But God will always supply abundantly for our needs until we enter into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So let us be encouraged. Let us obey the urging of Peter to supplement our faith with the Christian qualities he has given to us. God is able and we can be sure of this "*-- that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Philippians 1:6, ESV)