

Is Your Faith Growing?

2 Peter 1:5-11

Pastor John Miller

If you have a Bible this morning, I'd like you to open it with me to the New Testament book of 2 Peter, chapter 1, and we're going to look at verses 5 to 11. The title of my message this morning is quite simple: "Is Your Faith Growing?" Last Sunday, the question was asked, "Is Your Faith Real?" This Sunday, the question is asked, "Is Your Faith Growing?" 2 Peter 1:5-11. I'll read. You follow with me.

Peter says in verse 5, "Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge..."—verse 6—"...temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if these things be in you..."—verse 8—"...and abound, they will make you that you should neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things..."—verse 9—"...is blind and cannot see afar off and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The Christian life is a life of faith. The Bible says it like this: "The just shall live by..."—what?—"...faith." The Christian life begins with faith, the Christian life continues in faith and, by faith, one day we will be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and we will forever be with the Lord."

Last Sunday we saw in verses 1-4 of chapter 1 that we have a "like precious faith," verse 1. We have a faith that is centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ, verses 1 and 2, "our God and Savior Jesus Christ." And then, thirdly, in verse 3, we saw that we have a faith that relies on divine power, that He's given to us His "dunamis," His dynamic power. And then we see, fourthly, in verse 4, that we have a faith that rests on the promises of God. Peter says our faith is given to us with "exceeding great and precious promises." And then, fifthly and lastly, we have a faith that makes us "partakers of the divine nature," and then through that, verse 4, we've "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

So we all have faith as believers, or we wouldn't be saved. But now we want to have a faith that is growing. So verses 1 to 4 is a real faith, and verses 5 to 11 is a growing faith. Peter not only wants us to have a real, genuine faith, but he wants us to have a growing faith. And I believe real faith should lead to growing faith that demands diligence and effort on our part.

Now to summarize this entire text, in Philippians 2, Paul said these words, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Now that verse has caused a lot of people concern. What does he mean by that? "I thought we were saved by grace through faith—'grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone' plus nothing." That's true. Well, what's he mean by "work out your salvation"? A little observation there. Notice it's not "work for" your salvation. It's "work out"

your salvation. You can't work out what hasn't been worked in; amen? Until you've received salvation, you cannot live out salvation. So what Paul is saying and what Peter is saying in this passage is that once you've been saved, live it out. Those words "work out your salvation" were used for mathematical equations that were brought to their conclusion.

Now when I was in school, math was my most dreaded subject. As a matter of fact, everything was my most dreaded subject. I still have nightmares that I'm back in high school. Horrible, horrible nightmares. I had a math teacher who loved math. And he would do equations on the board, and chalk would be flying, and his face would start to glow and he's working on this problem, and I thought he was a sad, sick man. And he'd come to this conclusion, and I thought I could never do that. But that's the idea. You start with a problem, and you work it out to its completion. The same phrase is used now: to "work out your salvation."

So what God has worked in, we have an obligation to be eager to now live out in our daily life. It's the idea of a growing, fruitful and vital faith. I think a growing faith will demand, as I said, a diligence and effort on our part. We need to work out what God has worked in. And then Paul went on to say, "For it is God that works within you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

So in our passage this morning, Peter tells us how we are to have a growing faith. And how are we to have a growing faith? He gives us a recipe for faith in verses 5 to 7. That's my first point. Now this is a real note-taking sermon. And I say that because it really is. We're going to have seven things that we need to put into our faith if it's going to grow. I'm calling them "recipes for a growing faith." That's my first point. A recipe for a growing faith.

But I want you to notice in verse 5. "And beside this..."—beside what? Beside verses 1 to 4, a "like precious faith," a faith in the person of Jesus Christ, a faith that makes us "partakers of the divine nature," a faith that is based on "the promises of God." Beside all this real, genuine faith, notice in verse 5, "giving all diligence." What does he mean by "giving all diligence"? It means to "bring every effort to a task." It implies haste and earnestness and a determination.

Now just hearing those words makes me a little tired, to be honest with you. Determination. Earnestness. Haste. It's like the guy who said, "Every time I hear the word 'exercise,' I sit down until the thought goes away." I just want to sit down and rest for a minute, you know. But the idea is that we have to put effort in. We're not saved by works, but a genuine salvation will produce, as its fruit, works. Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone; it produces works. But we have to put some elbow grease into it. We have to put some work and some investment into it.

We're all about investing for our retirement. And we put money away, and a lot of times it pays off in very little dividends. Sometimes we even lose money. But how about investing in your spiritual life? How about investing some energy and effort? It will pay off not only in this world but in all of eternity. So he says that besides this faith, this foundation, bring every effort to a task. Bring along a speedy earnestness.

And then he makes this exhortation, verse 5, “Add to your faith.” So “Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith.” Now the word “add” there was used of an individual who underwrote the expenses of the choruses in Greek plays. So the word came to mean a generous and costly cooperation. If you were going to pay for or sponsor a symphony orchestra, you would have to give some money and put some effort in to making it happen. In the Greek culture, they had these dramas and these plays, and they had music and actors. Well someone had to pay for it. So a citizen who was wealthy would take their money, and they would underwrite or they would support the Greek theater. So the phrase became known “to put effort into.” It’s very costly, to make a commitment.

I wonder how many of you today are making a costly commitment to diligently add to your faith in order that it might grow. Are you just content? “I’ve got fire insurance. I’m not going to go to hell when I die. I just kind of endure a sermon once a week on Sunday morning. Leave me alone; I’m gonna live however I want.” And you’re not daily seeking the Lord and investing in your growth and walking with the Lord. I believe that our faith must be a growing faith.

This is how I would paraphrase verse 5. And that would be, “Now that you have a real faith, make every effort to lavishly add to your faith.” But here’s the question: “What do I add to my faith?” What is the supply, or what do I need to add to my faith? So here’s the recipe of seven ingredients. You’ll want to write them down. They’re taken from the text.

The first one is virtue. So ingredient number one in a growing faith is “add...”—verse 5—“...to your faith, virtue.” Now the word “virtue” means “moral excellence,” and some translations render it that way. It means the courage to do what is right, the courage and commitment to live a holy life in an unholy and hostile world.

Let me tell you something, Christian, whether you are young, middle aged or old, married or single. The time to be committed to purity is before the temptations come. If I’m speaking to young people today, and you’re not married and you’re dating and you’re being tempted sexually to get involved with other people, make a commitment before you go on the date. Make a commitment before you go anywhere with another guy or girl. “I’m going to be committed to God. And though everyone go this way, I’m gonna go the opposite way, God’s way.” So it’s moral courage to take a stand for what is right, even when everyone else is opposing you.

It’s the kind of moral courage that Daniel and the three Hebrews had when they were taken away captive to Babylon. And they were asked to eat this food that was considered by them against their Jewish law. So they asked the messenger of the king, “Could we just eat some vegetables and abstain from these foods, because we have to obey God?” And they gave them that permission, and Daniel and his three friends flourished and prospered, because they purposed in their hearts—the Bible says it like this—“that they would not be defiled with the king’s meat.”

Purpose in your heart that you won’t be defiled with the philosophies of the world or the ideas

of the world or the pattern of the world or the things of this world. But you have to do that before the temptation comes. When the temptation comes, it's too late to think, "What shall I do here? I don't know. Let me think about it." No. You've already decided and you've already committed. So what you do is add to your faith moral courage. Though none go with me, still I will follow. Even though my husband or my wife or my kids or my family or my parents or my friends—even though they all may oppose me, I'm going to take a stand for what is right, and I'm going to follow Jesus Christ. That's virtue or moral excellence. You need to add that to your faith.

Here's the second ingredient, verse 5. And that is knowledge. And it says, Add "to virtue, knowledge." Now you see it starts with faith, and then on top of faith you add virtue, and on top of virtue you add knowledge. Now the word "knowledge" is the Greek word "gnosis." And it's a practical knowledge where we learn by observation and experience. And we also learn by reading God's Word. Number one, it's a personal relationship with God. So you experience God in your life. And that gives you that knowledge; "I know God." Christians actually know God. Not know about God, but know God. Now I know that phrase freaks people out. "Yah, I know God. I spent some time talking to God this morning." It's like, "Really?" "Yah. He and I are great friends. He actually calls me His friend, and we walk together and talk together and hang out together, and He actually rides shotgun with me in the car. I hang out with God. I know God." You have an experience with God. This brings you wisdom for life.

And then it's also known by a "fear" or "reverence for God." The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of..."—what?—"...wisdom." Far more important than having a knowledge of the world is having a knowledge of God experientially and having a reverential fear of God.

And then last, but not least, it's by understanding God's Word. God's will is found in God's Word. And you know how you get to know God better? In the Bible. The B-i-b-l-e. Yes, that's the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-i-b-l-e. We're gonna have to get Gabe and the worship team to lead us in that song. That's not just for kids; that's for us. Right? In our marriage, in our occupation and all our relationships—what we do with our time and our talent and our treasure—we learn about God.

This knowledge that we are adding to our virtue on top of our faith is a knowledge of God found in His Word. The wisdom and discernment we need for life is found in the Bible, God's Word. And I believe with all my heart that you cannot grow apart from the Bible. If you're a Christian and you're not growing in the grace and knowledge of God found in His Word, you're not growing. You're not growing by coming to church. You grow by feeding every day on God's Word. One of the reasons I preach the Word is because I believe it's the only way for God's people to grow. But it's more than just hearing a sermon and reading the Word on Sunday. It's a daily feeding on the Word of God. How do we grow? By feeding on God's Word. So we add to our virtue, knowledge.

And then the third ingredient in a growing faith is temperance, in my King James Translation, verse 6. "And to knowledge, temperance." Now "temperance" is sometimes rightly rendered

“self-control” or “self-restraint.” But it does not convey by those definitions that we look to our own strength. When it says “self-control,” it doesn’t mean I’m controlling myself, but rather we’re depending on God’s Spirit to take control of our minds, of our emotions, of our bodies and of our wills. It’s to be demonstrated in every aspect of our lives. Charles Swindoll said it means, “Say ‘No’ to the second helping or to the second glance.” That’s the gamut that it covers.

When I’m driving by a donut store, just seeing the word “Donuts” I have to start saying, “I rebuke you, devil. I bind you, Satan. I command you to leave me, in the name of Jesus.” I’m doing pretty good; the Lord’s given me victory over donuts. But every once in a while I yield to the flesh and eat a donut.” But it’s saying no to donuts, and it’s saying no to the second look, a lustful look. Some guys say, “I don’t take a second look. I just take one long, first look. Is that okay?” “No.” Jesus said, “If you commit adultery in your heart, you’ve already committed adultery.” If you lustfully long for someone, you’ve already committed adultery in your heart.

So self-control comes—Ephesians 5:18—by the “filling of the Holy Spirit.” You want to gain self-control? Then yield your mind, your emotion, your will and your body to the Holy Spirit; amen? “Be not drunk with wine wherein is debauchery, but be being filled by the Holy Spirit.” Let the Holy Spirit fill you or take control of you. Temperance. Self-control.

And then the fourth ingredient or character we need to add to grow our faith is patience, verse 6. “And to temperance, patience.” Now temperance has to do with pleasures of life, while patience relates to the pressures and the problems of life. Some render this “perseverance” or “steadfast endurance.” It’s looking to God to keep going in hard times. How do you keep putting one foot in front of the other? You have patience. You have endurance. Our English translation of that Greek word “patience” isn’t the best. It would be much better if it were translated “steadfast endurance.” So you have to add that to your faith.

Now one of the problems is we worry about tomorrow when tomorrow hasn’t come yet. How many of you worry about tomorrow when tomorrow isn’t here? Now let me give you a little tip: Tomorrow is not here yet, so wait until it gets here before you worry; okay? And then take it one day at a time. And the Bible has promised you that “As your day is, so shall your strength be.” You got that? Today’s Sunday; it’s the Lord’s day, so just enjoy the day. Don’t be all bummed out about Monday. I forgot; I’m sorry I had to mention that. Back to work you go. “Oh, no. I gotta go back to work tomorrow. I gotta talk to my boss. My boss wants to see me. I don’t know what he’s going to say.” And you’re freaking out. Wait until you get there.

Do you ever notice that we worry about something that’s coming up, and then when it comes up, it actually evaporates. It never even happens. You go, “I lost my whole week worrying, and it never happened! At least it could have still been a problem. I invested all that worry, all that concern, all of that stress, and it just evaporated.” And we need to remember that. “As your day is, so shall your strength be.”

God told the children of Israel to gather just enough manna for the day. Just told us to pray. He said, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We want to pray, “Lord, give me this year my yearly

supply. Lord, I just pray You'll back up the truck, and You'll fill the barns. I want a 10-year supply. Give me my 10-year supply of bread. And then at the end of 10 years, I'll come back and ask for more." No. God wants you every day to depend upon Him to keep you going.

Some of you want to give up on your marriage right now. "As your day is, so shall your strength be." You want to give up on your Christian life right now. "As your day is, so shall your strength be." Some of you are being overwhelmed with temptation right now. The Lord will give you strength, if you'll trust Him and look to Him and depend upon Him. God will give you strength. It's called self-control or temperance. God will strengthen you. So then patience. "Add to temperance, patience." Perseverance. Steadfastness. Steadfast endurance. Looking to God to keep going.

Number five to add is in verse 6. Godliness. "And to patience, godliness." That's the next ingredient. What is godliness? It is true piety. What do we mean by true piety? We mean a devotion to God. Now I love this; listen carefully. "A godly person is a person who lives their life in a practical awareness of God in every aspect of their life. It brings the sanctifying presence of God into every area of life." What do I mean by that? I mean, when you're at work, you're thinking about God. You're talking to God. You're glorifying God. When you're home cleaning around the house, you're talking to God, thinking about God. When you're working in the yard, you're talking about God, you're thinking about God. When you're having lunch or dinner or breakfast with your friends, what are you talking about? You're talking about God. You're focused on God. God is a part of every aspect of your life. That's what true piety or godliness—the phrase "godly" literally means "god like." So you're a person who is like God, because you're a person who in every area of your life—even in what we call the insignificant or the mundane—is focusing on God.

Do you know that one of the most godly persons—apart from Jesus Christ—is Joseph in the Old Testament? Joseph prefigures Christ in so many ways. He's one of the few characters in the Bible about whom there is nothing bad said and no record of him doing anything wrong, unless it was telling his brothers and his dad and mom about his dreams. But let me tell you something about Joseph. When I studied his life, I made this observation. Every time Joseph speaks on the pages of Scripture, guess what there is a reference to? God. Every time Joseph opens his mouth—read the life of Joseph. And every time he talks in the Bible, there's a reference to God. God this and God that. And that's why from the pit to the prison, Joseph focused on God, and God blessed his life. He was a godly individual.

When Mrs. Potiphar tried to seduce him into sexual sin, what did Joseph say? He said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Do you know what gave Joseph the ability to say no to that sexual temptation? Godliness. Moral virtue or courage. He'd already purposed in his heart that he wouldn't sin against God. When his brothers were kneeling before him and he had the power to take revenge on them, Joseph said, "I forgive you." And he said these words, "You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good."

Do you bring God into every area of your life? Is God a part of everything you do and think and

see? Is God brought into your life? That's what it means to be truly godly.

Now there's a sixth element to growing faith. And that is brotherly kindness. Notice it in verse 7. "And to godliness, brotherly kindness." So we add to our faith, virtue; we add to our virtue, knowledge; we add to our knowledge, temperance; we add to our temperance, patience; we add to our patience, godliness; and, verse 7 to godliness, brotherly kindness. Now this is the Greek word "philadelphia." And the word "philadelphia" means "brotherly love." It's treating others as your brothers and sisters.

Godliness does not exist in a vacuum. In Romans 12:10 it says, "Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love." If you love God, you should love His family, and you should love your brothers and sisters in Christ and forgive them. Do you know the Christian life can't be lived in a void or a vacuum? You ever read all the "one anothers" in the Bible? It says that we're to "love one another," "forgive one another," "pray for one another," that we're to "wash one another's feet," that we're to "bear one another's burdens." You know, if you're not part of a church, there's no "one anothers." There's just you.

Have you ever thought that if you could live on an island all by yourself and there weren't other people, you'd be happy? I have. No one to honk at you. One of my major pet peeves is "Honk!" I want to remove horns from cars. It's like, "Why are you honking?! I see you!" I want to put it in park, get out and ask them if something is wrong with their horn. I don't do that, because I'm afraid they'll go, "Pastor Miller!" But this week I got honked at about three times. Maybe they saw me and wanted to say "Hi," but I don't know. You almost cause me a heart attack—whoever that guy was. It's like, "Why are you honking at me?" It's learning to be patient and treat one another in the body of Christ as brothers, being kind, being affectioned one to another with brotherly love. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we should forgive each other, we should love each other with a brotherly love.

Last, but not least, here's the seventh ingredient. Number seven is in verse 7. Love. It's the Greek word "agapeo," or "agape." "And to brotherly kindness..."—or "to philadelphia"—"...add agape." It would read like this. "And to philadelphia add agapeo or add agape love." "Agape" is God's love "shed abroad in our hearts" for others. The Bible says, "God so agaped the world that He gave His only begotten Son." So we, as Christians, are to love the world. So philadelphia is love for the brothers and sisters in the family of God. Agape is God's love for the unlovely. When did God first love us? When we were enemies. When we were at war with Him. When we were unlovely. So we are to love even our enemies. Our love is to extend beyond the bounds of Christian fellowship. So to even our enemies and those who persecute us, we're to demonstrate agape love. And the Bible says in Romans 13:8—we get it this Wednesday night—"Owe no man anything but to love one another, for he that loveth one another hath fulfilled the law."

You know, all you need to do is love God with "all your heart, your soul, your strength and your mind." And then "love your neighbor as you love yourself." And then everything will be fine with you. If you "love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind," then

you'll "love your neighbor as yourself." You're not going to commit adultery. You're not going to steal. You're not going to lie. You're not going to murder. You're not going to covet. Because you're "loving your neighbor as you love yourself." So love is the fulfilling of the law; amen? And love, by the way, is the birthmark of a true Christian. So it starts with genuine faith and it ends with love.

And isn't that what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13? "The greatest of these is love," is agape love. And Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples." Not only that you have love for one another, but that you love even the unlovely.

Now, you say, "Well, John, that's quite a list. Seven ingredients for a growing faith. And I've got a lot of work to do." I want you to take this recipe home with you today in your Bible. I want you to highlight or write down these words. And then make some notes by them and ask, "What do I want to pray about? What do I need to get working on? What do I need to roll up my sleeves and bring a speedy earnestness to? A diligent effort to? What do I need to work on in my life?"

Is it moral courage? You've been falling prey to temptation? Right now you're yielding to sin, and you know you should be courageous and strong and say no? Is it the knowledge? You're neglecting your Bible, and you're not reading the Word? You're not studying the Word of God? You're not growing, because you're not hiding God's Word in your heart? What does the psalmist say? "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee." Where can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto unto God's Word. It's "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Maybe it's patient endurance. Maybe you've thrown in the towel. Maybe you've given up. Maybe you're just about to leave your marriage or leave your children. So common even in Christian marriages. I've seen husbands and wives walk away from their marriage. "I don't want to try anymore. I give up." And they turn their back, and they don't persevere and they don't endure and they don't trust God and look to God.

How about loving your brethren here in this fellowship? Do you really love others? Do you serve others? Do you forgive others? Do you bear others burdens? What about others who are outside the church, your enemies? Do you "love those who persecute you," and do you "pray for those who spitefully use you"?

So I'm so glad, in verse 3, that Peter reminds us that we have God's power, and, in verse 4, he told us that we have God's promises. So we have God's power, verse 3, and we have God's promises, verse 4, to be able to activate these seven virtues in our life.

Now I'm going to give you my second main point from this text. It's in verses 8 and 9. And that is, that we see the recipe for a growing faith. But, secondly, I want to point out the reasons for a growing faith. There are three of them in this text. Look at verses 8 and 9. He says, "For if these things be in you, and if they abound, they make you that you should neither be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if you lack these things..."—verse 9

—“...you are blind and cannot see far off, and you’ve forgotten that you were purged from your old sins.”

So here’s three reasons why we should grow our faith. First of all, we “won’t be barren or unfruitful,” verse 8. Now Peter is using what’s called a “figure of speech,” in which you say the negative in order to communicate the positive. When he says there in verse 8 that “you shall be neither barren or unfruitful,” you know what he’s wanting to say? He’s saying, “If you have a growing faith, you will not be barren or unfruitful. In other words, you will bear fruit. Your life will flourish. This is the ingredient for a fruitful and victorious Christian life. He’s telling us that if we do this, our life will bear fruit. Psalm 1 says, “Blessed is the man...”—or woman—“...who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...”—moral courage—“...doesn’t stand in the way of sinners, doesn’t sit in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord.” He adds to that courage, knowledge. And when he does that, he’ll be like “a tree planted by the rivers of water, and everything he does shall prosper and his leaf will never wither.” You want to be a fruitful Christian? You want to bear fruit for the glory of God? Then you need to add these virtues to your faith. James tells us, “Faith without works is dead.” We’re not saved by works, but we’re saved unto good works. Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.

Let me tell you the second reason why you should have a growing faith. It’s in the first part of verse 9. And that is, that you won’t be “blind” or “shortsighted.” Notice it in verse 9. “For he that lacks these things...”—what things? The things we read about in verses 5 to 7—“...is blind and cannot see far off.” Stop right there. You know that he’s talking about blind believers and shortsighted saints? This blew my mind when I discovered that. Peter is talking to Christians. And you know what he’s saying about Christians? They’re blind and they’re shortsighted. I guess if you’re blind, you’re pretty shortsighted; right? But the idea is that you don’t see spiritual things. You don’t see the Lord’s coming. You don’t see the eternal. You’re shortsighted. All you see is the mundane and temporal and material. There are too many blind believers.

You go, “Well, how can a believer be blind?” Easy; they forget God, they forget His Word, they forget that they’re sinful and proud and selfish and egotistical. They don’t see their own sin; they’re blind to their own faults and shortcomings and their own weaknesses. They become critical and fault-finding. They’re judging others with a critical, fault-finding attitude. They’re blind. And a lot of Christians are like blind people. They don’t see their own faults and their own sins. And they’re shortsighted saints. They don’t believe the Lord is coming. One day we’re going to go to heaven, and we need to live for the eternal. They’re blind to their sin and they can’t see heaven.

Now some feel this is an allusion to chapter 2 of 2 Peter when he talks about the false teachers. You know what the false teachers were saying? They were saying that the Lord delays His coming, so He’s not coming back. The false teachers were saying, “We don’t need to look for the Lord’s return, we don’t need to live in light of the Lord’s return. Jesus is not coming again.” That’s a popular movement in the church today. “Enough of this rapture stuff. Enough of this coming-again-of-Jesus-Christ stuff. The world’s just going to go on and on and

on and on, as it always has been. So get to living in life.” Not so. The Bible says we’re looking for that “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Let me tell you something you need to have for a growing, vibrant, fruitful faith. And that’s an eye focused on the coming again of Jesus Christ. Amen? And that’s an eye set on the eternal. If you want to bring God into your life and everything, then you need to think in an eternal sense. What am I doing with my time, my treasures, my talent? Am I investing them in the things of eternity?

So number one would be fruitful and growing. Number two, we won’t be blind and shortsighted. And number three, we won’t forget God’s forgiveness. Now I love this at the end of verse 9. He says not only are they “blind” believers and “shortsighted” saints, but they have “forgotten...”—verse 9—“...that they were purged from their old sins.”

We used to sing an old hymn—I’m always popping with the old hymns.

Jesus, keep me near the Cross;

There a precious fountain

Free to all, a healing stream,

Flows from Calvary’s mountain.

In the Cross, in the Cross,

be my glory ever,

Till my raptured soul shall find

rest beyond the river.

Let me tell you what Peter is saying here. These people are so blind and they’re so shortsighted that they forgot the sinful pit that God had saved them from. They’ve drifted away from the Cross. They came to the Cross to be forgiven, but they haven’t stayed at the Cross to learn to be forgiving. And they haven’t lived in the shadow of the Cross. I love the idea that the Christian life is to be constantly lived in the shadow of the Cross. What does that mean? It means what Paul said when he said, “I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I live, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave His life for me.” I never want to get away from the Cross of Jesus Christ. I want to live in the shadow of the Cross. I want to remember that my sins placed Him there. I want to remember that His precious blood is what’s cleansed me and forgiven me, and that it was my sins that placed Him on the Cross. So why would I willingly, deliberately go back to a sinful lifestyle when it was my sins that crucified Jesus on the Cross?

The next time you're contemplating a sinful thought or a sinful act, stop and remember that it was your sin—my sin—that placed Jesus Christ, the pure, holy, sinless Son of God on the Cross. And these people are so blind and shortsighted that they forgot the pit they were taken out of. I think it's good sometimes to remember the darkness that we used to live in before we found Christ. The loneliness and emptiness and the frustration and the pain and the grief and the weight of guilt that He bore. And remember that Jesus came to us, and He forgave us, and He washed us in His precious blood and took our burdens and He lifted us. He took me "from a pit of miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock," the psalmist says. And He "put a new song in my heart"; amen? Praise to my God! Let's stay near the Cross of Jesus Christ. Don't become blind and shortsighted. Don't forget that you've been purged from your old, sinful life.

But thirdly and lastly, I want you to notice, in closing, the results of a growing faith. The recipe, the reasons and the results of a growing faith. Verses 10 and 11. "Wherefore..."—here's the wrap-up; here's the conclusion—"...the rather, brethren, give diligence..."—same phrase he used in verse 5, "giving all diligence"—"...to make your calling and election sure..."—why?—"...for if you do these things, you're never going to fall..."—and then verse 11—"For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Now there are three results of a growing faith, and they're awesome. The first is assurance, verse 10; the second is stability, verse 10; and the third is a triumphant jubilation and an entrance into heaven, verse 11.

God wants you to have assurance. Notice he says, "Make your calling and election sure." What is he talking about? Make sure you're saved. Nothing is more important for you this morning than to make sure that you're saved. Make sure that you're a child of God. Do you know beyond any shadow of a doubt right now that you are a child of God? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Do you know that you've been born again? Do you know that when you die you're going to go to heaven? That you belong to Jesus? If so, that's assurance, blessed assurance. The songs are coming to me again.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Blessed assurance. You see, when you have a growing faith—here's the context—guess what it brings to you? Assurance. When your faith is growing, it brings to you an assurance that "I am His child."

And then it brings to you stability, verse 10. "For if you do these things, you will never fall." Now that doesn't mean that you're never going to sin. But it means that you'll never be completely

wiped out. You'll never fully backslide. You might fall for a time. You might falter and stumble. Did you notice that the prodigal son—underline the word "son"—finally came to his senses and returned back to the Father; right? He left the pigs behind and he came back to the Father. I believe God's children always come home. And when they do, God reaches out His arms and receives them gladly. If you have a prodigal son or daughter, don't stop praying, because God is searching and striving with them. They will come back. You just keep praying, you just keep believing God. God answers prayer.

I'm a living example of that. I was a prodigal. There was a time my mom and dad prayed and cried and agonized over their son, and what God has done is more than they could ever imagine. My mom is in heaven, but she lived to see me preach the Word. And she sat under my preaching for many years. I have her Bible full of notes that are from my sermons. So she spent hours praying for her prodigal son, who God saved and called to the ministry, and then taught her the Word of God. God answers prayer.

I believe that a growing faith brings assurance, brings stability and then brings a triumphant entrance into heaven. Amazing. Verse 11 says, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." It's not a question of if you go to heaven. The question in this verse is how you go to heaven. You go, "Well, John, I don't understand what you mean." I believe that if you're a born-again child of God, you are going to heaven; amen? You're going to heaven. But here's the question: Will you go triumphantly? Will you go victoriously? Will you go enthusiastically?

It's a little radical, but I used it first service, and they didn't complain too much. But you ever notice a lot of times that Christians who are going to heaven, while on earth, they look like hell? What's with that? It looks like they've been baptized in lemon juice! "Did you forget you're going to heaven?" "Well, I don't know for sure. I don't read my Bible. I'm not that good of a Christian. I just have these horrible thoughts. I'm just such a bad person." And they lack assurance. They're going to heaven but they look miserable. I love what D. L. Moody said. He said, "A little faith will take your soul to heaven." You know why? Because a little faith in a big God is all that matters. It's the object of your faith. But he also said, "A lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul." "A little faith will take you to heaven, but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul."

And that's the problem; a lot of Christians aren't growing their faith. They're not building their faith. They're not walking in faith. They're not resting on God's promises. They don't read, they don't pray, they don't live the Christian life. They're just stagnant. They're not putting all into it. They're not bringing alongside an earnestness, a diligence. You've got to pray, you've got to be in fellowship, you've got to say no to temptation. God saves you by His grace, but you need to "work out your faith with fear and trembling," even though it's God Who works in you "both to will and to do His good pleasure." There's a joint participation there. I don't fully understand, but God's not going to save you apart from your will, surrendering to Him, and God's not going to sanctify you apart from you working at it. So it's not a question of going to heaven; it's a question of how you're going to go to heaven.

You know the Bible says that when we get to heaven, we're going to stand before the "bema," b-e-m-a, the "reward seat of Christ." And all of our service and all of our works are going to be tried by fire. And there're two categories of works if you are a Christian. Some have works that are made of "wood, hay and stubble." Now when wood, hay and stubble is put to the fire at the bema, what's going to happen to it? It's going to be gone. You still get to go to heaven, but you have no reward. You have a saved soul but a wasted life. But the other category is "gold, silver and precious stones." Those people had a growing faith. And they served the Lord, and they weren't blind, and they could see eternal value, and they were living for Jesus Christ, and they loved others, and they forgave others, and they were god-like in the way they lived and when they get to heaven: "gold, silver and precious stones." And when they get to heaven, they're going to hear these words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

I proposed to you in closing this morning, those are the only words that matter. It doesn't matter how big your house is, how much money you make, how wonderful your family is. It doesn't really matter about your hobbies or your health or your bank account. All that matters is that one day when you look at the face of Jesus Christ that you hear Him say to you, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

You're going to go to heaven, but how are you going to get there? Is it going to be triumphant? Is it going to be victorious? You know that the Bible indicates that some people are going to be ashamed when they see the Lord. They'll be saved but by the skin of their teeth. I don't want to just go to heaven. I want to go to heaven triumphantly. How about you? I want to go to heaven victoriously. Amen?

Let's pray.