

“CONFIRM YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

March 25, 2018, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: II Peter 1:5-11

Introduction.

In my last three sermons on II Peter I have highlighted Peter’s emphasis on the importance of the knowledge of God.

Through the knowledge of God grace and peace are multiplied to us.

Through the knowledge of God His power has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness.

Through the knowledge of God we supplement our faith so we are not ineffective and unfruitful in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see how important this knowledge is and what a difference it makes in our lives in the deaths of two famous men in the past month. Contrast Billy Graham to Stephen Hawking.

Stephen Hawking was said to be a genius, a brilliant mind, a theoretical physicist working in the realm of cosmology and quantum mechanics. He studied the universe and yet he didn’t know the creator of the universe, being a self-avowed atheist. Is there anything more tragic than to never acknowledged the God who went to such lengths to make Himself known (Romans 1:19-23)?

Give thanks to God who has revealed Himself to us in the person and Gospel of Jesus Christ.

II Peter 1:5-8.

In the first chapter of II Peter we have been talking about the two aspects of the Gospel, God’s grace and our response in faith.

Grace is the foundation. God initiates, God loves first, God works first. While we were dead in our sin, God in His grace saved us. The grace of God in our lives is the foundation of our faith.

But that's not all there is to the Gospel. There is our response to God's grace. On the foundation of grace we build our faith and we frame and supplement that faith with certain qualities.

I purposefully read verses 5-8 again so we would have before us these eight qualities or virtues, these eight goals. None of us will attain them fully in this life, but they are blueprints for our building well.

"Make every effort to supplement your faith with ..." So these eight qualities are faith supplements.

God saves us by His sovereign grace. But that grace will be evident in our lives, it will show up, it will leave its mark. We will show that His grace is at work in us as we strive in His strength to add these virtues.

II Peter 1:9-11.

But there is a problem. Some of us have become nearsighted, even blind. We have been presuming on God's grace and forgetting to build.

The great actor Al Pacino of Godfather fame once said, "I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn't work that way. So I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness."

That statement captures a tension we may all feel but never express out loud. If God is forgiving then why stop sinning? If God is forgiving then why bother trying to live a godly or holy life?

As someone said, "I'm good at sinning, God is good at forgiving; it's a match made in heaven, right?"

Peter says the problem here is nearsightedness, completing losing sight of where we have come from and where we are going. This person doesn't get grace, and is nearsighted to the point of blindness.

Those not called and elected will hate any idea of living a godly or holy or pure life. The non-believer will have no interest in that at all. But if a Christian feels that way, then they have contradicted themselves and show their profession is not real.

If responding to that marvelous gift doesn't interest you, then it is like you have shut your eyes to one of the most beautiful things God has promise you. How could anyone forget

the joy and relief of having your sins forgiven, of having your guilt and shame taken away?

The blood of Jesus didn't wash us clean just so we could go back to wallowing in the dirt. Peter knows what that is like and he is exhorting us to remember our forgiveness and build on that foundation a strong fruit-producing faith.

Live in the joy of being forgiven sinners.

Grace is not permission to sin, it is the power to overcome sin. Grace is not God lowering His standards, or deciding to go easy on sin. Grace is the blood of Jesus sacrificed for us, it is costly and it costs us something in return, dying to our sin.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Jesus redeemed us by His blood to purify for Himself those who would live godly lives in this present age as a witness and a light. Those who live like that show they are one of His.

Is heaven full of sinners? You might be inclined to say yes, but that isn't quite right. Heaven is full of repentant sinners, transformed sinners. Heaven is full of sinners who love God more than their sin and in fact hate their sin.

No one goes to heaven without first being changed and that is what Peter is talking about. A person pursuing these qualities is bearing witness to the work of God's grace in their lives. A person growing in these qualities is confirming what is true about them, is confirming their calling and election. A person who is practicing and exercising these qualities will receive the rich reward of on entrance into the eternal kingdom of Jesus.

A person who practices these things shows to others that they are a child of grace and they show to themselves that their confidence in heaven is not unfounded or presumptuous.

So we don't presume on God's grace and subsist on the lowest possible amount, we supplement it, we exercise it, we possess it by pursuing it and persevering in it. When the grace of God takes root in someone's heart, it produces fruit in their life.

Please do not, “presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” (Romans 2:4). (Not to stealing more bikes.)

Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.

Peter is a good pastor and he doesn’t seek to motivate us based only on a negative warning. He spurs us on with a positive call to action.

Therefore, based on all I have just said, be all the more diligent, be all the more eager, make every effort to make your calling and election sure.

One of the greatest fears many Christians deal with internally is are they saved? What if they don’t get into heaven? What if Jesus says I never knew you?

God doesn’t want us to live in that kind of fear and insecurity and joylessness. He calls us to assurance, to be diligent, even eager, to have a confident assurance of our salvation.

Some people think we can never know for sure if we are save, they say to say so is arrogance on our part, or very presumptuous.

But God’s Word contradicts them. Not only can we have an assurance of our salvation, we are actually commanded to seek after it, and in fact to not do so is a kind of arrogance.

God knows those He has called and elected, He knows those who belong to Jesus and cannot be lost, He knows those whom He is at work in and is bringing to completion. He knows, and ***He wants us to know as well.*** He wants us to have joyful assurance of our calling and election and He delights to answer any prayer for more assurance.

How?

We have already talked about God’s divine power that is given to us by His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in us bears witness with our own spirits that we are children of God. We can only truly say hosanna, save us and He saves, by the Holy Spirit.

We have already talked about the knowledge of God we have from His Word and His promises, a knowledge that leads to grace and peace and assurance.

And we have talked about the fruit of our conversion, the fruit of the Spirit in us, the fruit of our being changed and transformed, evidenced by these eight qualities.

Let me switch metaphors from seeing these eight qualities as the blueprint for our building our faith to seeing them as a garden of habits. These qualities are similar to the fruit of the Spirit. In fact at least three of them are in the same list as the fruit of the Spirit.

Think of these qualities as a garden of habits in your soul. What are you cultivating, what are you producing, what evidence is there of fruit? Is there one especially lacking that you should give extra attention and prayer to?

As we tend and cultivate and fertilize we will become more like Christ reflecting the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

It's all right here, by all these means we show that our love for God and our trust in Him are genuine, the real deal.

Can we make our calling and election more sure? No and yes. What God has done is fixed and certain, but we can make our awareness of it more certain. God elects, but we must believe. Our response is essential to confirming we are truly called and chosen.

And if you do all these things *then* you will never ultimately fall and there will be richly given to you an eternal reward in heaven.

By fall here he doesn't mean we will never sin, but rather we will not abandon God or fall away from Jesus.

Listen to how Paul said it in I Timothy and how much agreement there is between Paul and Peter:

I Timothy 6:12, 19 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Show your confession is real. The elect show they are elect when they act in the manner of the elect.

II Peter 1:3 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.

Implications and application.

This Friday evening at our Good Friday service I will be presenting a monologue on the life of Peter. I covet your prayers as it is a daunting exercise in memory.

I thought it especially fitting since we are studying his last letter, a letter that reflects the most powerful and painful experience of Peter's life.

Matthew 26:31-35 Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. ... 33 Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." 34 Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." 35 Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

Peter began his denial by denying Jesus' words, "though everyone else fall away, I never will, and I will never deny you." Then Peter did exactly as Jesus said, not once, not twice, but three times.

But remember what else Jesus said to Peter:

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

In this letter Peter is doing what Jesus told him to do. He is writing out of his own painful experience to strengthen our faith and show us how not to fall. In fact three times in this letter Peter will use the root of that word to strengthen or establish.

Peter is still preaching two thousand years later on how to move from falling to finishing well and receiving the reward of our faith.

Peter fell, his courage failed, he betrayed a trust, but his faith didn't fall, because Jesus prayed for him. And so it is the Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for those who are His.

We can sin and fall but we can finish well, by God's grace through faith that is supplemented with virtue and self-control and godliness and love we can have this assurance.

Our closing hymn captures our text well, give careful thought to the words you sing.