

Dear Friends,

When Paul affirmed the divine origin of Scripture, "all scripture," Old and New, not just Old, (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV) his emphasis on the purpose for which God "Inspired" the Scriptures to be written and preserved, he listed four objectives for those writings. While Scripture clearly teaches us about our eternal salvation, the major theme of Scripture deals with how believers in Jesus are to order their current lives. Neither truth should be neglected. And we can't gain too much knowledge of either. The clearer our knowledge of eternal things, a Biblical perspective of those things, the stronger our pursuit of a fruitful faith, including the significant effort to grow it. Further, the four objectives deal with saved people, not with unsaved people who need salvation (In the sense of our eternal salvation). In Verse 17, Paul summed up the divine purpose for those Scriptures, "That the man of God may be perfect (Whole or complete, not lacking), thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

As Peter prepared to teach us how to grow a God-glorifying, fruitful faith in 2 Peter 1, he begins our study process "...through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." (2 Peter 1:1 KJV) Although we must immerse our minds in Scripture to gain this knowledge, Peter (And all of Scripture writers) urges us to a profoundly deeper sense of knowledge. Paul developed this thought richly in Philippians 3. In similar fashion, Peter teaches the same idea in this context. We can only cultivate the passion and commitment necessary to grow these qualities to the extent we have emptied our minds--and our lives--of things that grow pride and self-first ideas. And we can only arrive at the stated goal of our study passage, a fruitful faith, through this selfless pursuit of glory to God and service to His people. Gaining for self as a goal excludes us from a fruitful faith.

The beginning of a New Year is a good time to reflect and refine our thoughts and goals. What things truly matter to us? Enough that we become willing to give up other things to gain them? Let's begin our New Year with a fresh vision of that kind of faith, including a passion to walk away from anything that hinders it.

Love in Jesus,  
Joe Holder

### **The Fruitful Faith Formula, III**

**And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9 KJV 1900)**

The first time I heard someone say that most of the Bible teaches us how to live rather than how God saves us I was surprised. Scripture teaches both truths, and both are important. But I've come to appreciate that thought. Our study passage exemplifies the point. Peter's (The Holy Spirit's point who directed Peter to write) point in this lesson is about fruitful faith now, not going to heaven when we die. Scripture leaves us without excuse in its teachings on how to live our faith in the trenches of life. Reflect on the seven traits/behaviors which appear in this list of things Peter teaches us to add to our faith. How broad and encompassing they are. If we follow Peter's teaching, think how these things equip us for life and its varied challenges and trials. Well worth their value, but Peter takes us to a far more important result, a truly fruitful faith.

I fear that most contemporary Christians think of faith primarily as something by which they gain eternity for themselves. Given that attitude, is it any wonder that so much of our culture "...is all about me"? By using the agricultural analogy of "Fruit," Peter reminds us of an essential principle of all Biblical teaching on how to live. Our divine assignment is to use our life and abilities to bless and benefit others, not gain for self. I grew up on a farm. We had a small orchard with apple, plum, and peach trees. Not one of those fruit trees grew their fruit for their personal benefit or consumption. We were the happy beneficiaries when a fruit tree produced good fruit. How would that principle apply to our personal life if we thought of it in terms of our Christian living and faith? All the effort necessary to "...add to your faith" is to bear fruit, to honor our God and to serve and benefit others. A transforming principle indeed.

"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter keeps our minds focused on the bedrock idea of "the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Authentic Christian living never occurs in ignorance. Think about your personal daily habits. How much time does your Bible spend on the shelf versus the time in your hands? And when your Bible is in your hands, are you quickly speed reading so you can stay on schedule to read it through in a year? Not a bad thing, but also not the primary need. During the time you have your Bible in hand, do you also have paper and a pencil at hand to make notes or write questions you want to study further? Our culture rightly emphasizes the need for a good education. Do we Christians understand the same high need for a good knowledge based on Scripture? We can't begin to add these things to our faith until we have laid a solid foundation of "the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"...be in you and abound." These principles must command a major portion of our minds and our conduct. Contrast the idea of "be in you passively" or "be in you occasionally" with "be in you and abound." We must ensure that these truths are "in" us before we can approach cultivating them to abundance. We often identify people by their dominant traits or behaviors. Do we so live that people remember and identify us by our Christian virtues? Louw-Nida defines the word translated "abound" as "to have more than enough to meet one's needs." Pastors often hear the complaint from believers who acknowledge their failure to practice their faith in a given situation, "If I had

only known....” How much time—ink—does the New Testament devote to these principles? If we spend respectable time with our Bible, we will never plead ignorance for our sins. The Holy Spirit directed the men who wrote the New Testament to “Abound” in their teaching of these truths. Writing to proud Jewish religious people who loudly professed their spiritual superiority and imposed their rules severely onto others, Paul wrote, “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.” (Romans 2:1 KJV) We need this question today no less than those people in the first century?

“...they make you.” To challenge a common avoidance tactic (“This is just the way I am. Take me or leave me.” No awareness or passion to transform who we are by Jesus and His example and teaching in Scripture), ponder “make you.” I suggest “remake you” might punctuate the point in our thinking. We must confront self and come to realize that we need to be re-made in the image of Jesus if we hope to grow this fruitful, other-serving, God-honoring faith. If I analyze my life, I realize that I should have invested—at every stage, beginning to present—in “Remaking” myself more in this Jesus-image and behavior. We only gain the tools to make ourselves in this fruitful image by adding the seven principles to our thinking and conduct.

“...they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Scripture often teaches by both negative (What should not be or what we should not be or do) and positive (What we should be and do) concepts. Peter’s first point deals with the negative, what we should long to avoid. He presumes his readers—we—have gained a respectable knowledge of “our Lord Jesus Christ.” By “our,” Peter includes his readers along with himself as having a present knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The idea is that we gain a “Working” knowledge of Jesus, not an academic or philosophical knowledge, akin to Paul’s passionate longing in Philippians 3:8-11. This “knowledge” is far more than awareness of facts. It takes us to our deepest self and an inner respectful sense of Jesus in our personal experience. Paul reasoned in that context that he first had to eliminate some things from his life that fed pride in self. Think of his reasoning in this uncomplicated way. If Paul—if you or I—had his mind stuffed full of things, he could not fill his mind with a sense of knowing Jesus in his deepest passions and thoughts. Before we can begin to add these seven habits to our life, we also must “Count” the things we have treasured with pride as a total loss. Only then can we begin to grasp this transforming knowing Jesus and the power of His resurrection.

Peter (Nor Paul) was casual about this idea of a fruitful faith. Along with a sound knowledge of Jesus, it was the foundation of a truly fruitful, other-serving, God-honoring faith. He developed these principles at the very beginning of this letter.

“But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” A deficient unfruitful faith is not a sure indication that a person is “Not really saved at all,” the errant teaching of modern “Lordship salvation.” That the deficiency is grave we should never question or diminish. This failure is solemn indeed. But let’s follow the text to its grave warning, not impute what the text does not teach.

1. “...is blind.” This unfruitful person has eyes, but failure to cultivate and live by these seven principles causes a spiritual eye disease that results in spiritual blindness.
2. “...and cannot see afar off.” Perhaps this unfruitful believer has an elementary sense of spiritual things in their immediate presence. However, they have no long-term sense of spiritual wisdom and vision. They have no concept of how a present attitude or conduct will impact their spiritual health into the future. Fulfilling their immediate appetite seems the most important thing in life to them. Often these “Short-sighted” believers repeat the same sins or errors repeatedly. They fail to learn from their mistakes, so they repeat them.
3. “...and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” If you were to ask many contemporary Christians, “Is it possible for someone to be saved and not know it?” their immediate answer would be, “No, not possible.” Isn’t that precisely what Peter described in this point? He did not write that these unfruitful people lost their salvation, but that they have forgotten it. What a dreadful, fearful thing for a redeemed child of grace to allow. We should pray daily for sensitive awareness of our faith and our active use of it to be fruitful in it, not forgetful of the Lord’s greatest mercies and love toward us.

What is faith? Yes, Paul defines it generally in Hebrews 11:1. This verse reveals more of what faith does than define it. It gives substance to our hope in the Lord. In Colossians 1:27, “...Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Thus, hope in the sense of the word as used in Scripture, is not our private dream or wish. It is the working of the indwelling Jesus in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus’ words, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” (John 14:18 KJV) He fulfilled that promise in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Paul further describes the working of faith in us as “...the evidence of things not seen.” Our perception of all things spiritual grows out of indwelling faith. Without it, we would have no awareness of those realities. In this verse, Paul gave us a good description of faith’s working in us, but not specifically a definition.

We need to return to the simplicity of the gospel and of Scripture’s revelation to answer the question. Think for a moment of your ordinary life experience. We frequently meet people we’ve never known before. We learn their names. We see their face and associate their face with their name. Over time we become familiar with their voices and their mannerisms that form a unique memory of them in our mind. But we need much more than these superficial things to comfortably trust and respect them. How will they react under pressure? What will they do when doing the wrong thing might be easier for them than doing the right thing? Only as we observe them in the pressure cooker do we learn whether we can trust and respect them. Eventually, if they measure

up, we form a comfortable trust in them. Then we truly “Have faith” in them. Why should we think of Biblical faith in God differently? Have you seen your God in the trenches of your life? When friends forsook you? And did He not measure up fully to your needs? If so, you learn to regard Him in “Faith.” You know by experience that His character is trustworthy and kind.

This foundation for sound Biblical faith describes the beginning of the process which Peter outlined in 2 Peter 1. We begin with knowledge, knowledge about Jesus from Scripture, but also personal knowledge from experience. As we learn of His goodness and His faithfulness, we understand and join Paul in a growing willingness to let go of all our earthly “Stuff” which we once held onto with pride, for we know that we must let go those things before we can begin to truly “...know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” (Philippians 3:10 KJV)

At this point in our journey of faith, we have carefully built the foundation of true Biblical knowledge based both on Scripture and affirming personal experience, so that we are ready to begin the fruitful faith process. This commendable achievement is not the end goal for our faith. It is more the beginning of the faith-journey. If we hope to continue on this pathway of faith, we will begin a lifelong process of adding each of these seven godly qualities to our firm faith in Jesus. To the extent we truly imbed these ideas and behaviors into our life habits we can realize the wonders of a fruitful faith. It is a lifelong process, but it is the worthiest, most blessed, and rewarding process we can pursue in our life. Let’s help each other together on this journey of fruitful faith. A good way to start a New Year, and a good way to live our life to the end.

Elder Joe Holder