

## 2 Peter 1:5-7

### Introduction

Brothers and sisters, “[Christ’s] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and piety, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

Why does Peter begin his letter like this? Because he believes that knowing and understanding these things is what will actually *effect* and *produce* among us pious and truly godly lives. So, see how Peter continues in verses 5-7:

**I. 2 Peter 1:5–7 — And so for *this very reason***, making every effort, supply by your faith, moral excellence, and by your moral excellence, knowledge, and by your knowledge, self-control, and by your self-control, steadfastness, and by your steadfastness, piety, and by your piety, brotherly affection, and by your brotherly affection, love.

“For this very reason,” Peter says—*because of and in light of and on the basis of* all of God’s infinite provisions, past, present, and future—“[you] make every effort...” In our fleshly way of thinking we might have thought Peter would say something like this: “For this very reason... sit back, relax, and let God.” But no one who’s truly heard Peter could even imagine responding like this. It’s precisely God’s infinite provisions for us in Christ that calls forth from us the straining of every fiber of our being. Isn’t that a wonderful mystery? *At no point* do we strain with any of our own fleshly resources. Paul puts it this way:

□ Colossians 1:29 — For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

I don’t know how that works! And yet we see that here is the *key* to the practical, everyday living of a godly and a pious life. The key is believing and understanding by faith that it’s *Christ’s* divine power and *His* precious and very great promises that are already at work within us. This explains why so much of the New Testament is spent simply unpacking and expounding the Gospel.

Peter says, “***For this very reason, making every effort...***” It’s hard to capture in a single translation the full weight of these words. The word for “make” sounds mundane enough, but it actually appears only here in the entire New Testament. It has the idea of bringing something to bear on a matter; in this context, it has the idea of summoning something up. So what is it that we’re to summon up and bring to bear? The word for “effort” literally refers to doing something with “haste” (“Mary arose and went **with haste** into the hill country...”; Lk. 1:39). But then by extension this word also refers to doing something with a great intensity of energy and earnestness and zeal – with all due diligence and effort. *This* is what we’re to summon up and bring to bear – it’s this energy and zeal and diligence; this concerted striving and effort; this

straining of every fiber of our being. Lastly, the word for “all” means **ALL**. So one commentator suggests the translation: “For this very reason, *bringing all your energy to bear...*” (cf. Green). Brothers and sisters, have we understood that the Christian life is to be a life of toiling, and striving, and straining – of making every effort and bringing all our energy to bear? And have we understood that as **we** toil and labor and strive, **we** do so with all of **Christ’s** energy that **He** powerfully works within us? “**And so for this very reason**, bringing all your energy to bear and making every effort”:

**II. 2 Peter 1:5b–7** — ...supply by your faith, moral excellence, and [supply] by [your] moral excellence, knowledge, and [supply] by [your] knowledge, self-control...

In secular Greek the word for “supply” meant “to provide something at one’s own expense.” (cf. Davids; Bauckham) One commentator says that “in NT times [this] word... was used of making a rich or lavish provision. Originally it referred to a person who paid the expenses of a chorus in staging a play.” (Blum) So now we see that the point of bringing all our energy to bear and making every possible effort is so we’ll be sure to make the most lavish and most abundant provision for all the virtues that Peter is about to list. Isn’t this an exciting and a beautiful mindset to have? There’s just something about it that’s truly wonderful. But is it really ours? The **measure** of Christ’s own divine power should also be the **measure** of our most strenuous toil and effort. The **measure** of the “*all things* pertaining to life and piety” that Christ has already granted to us should also be the **measure** of the lavishness and abundance of the provisions that *we* then daily make for all the virtues of the Christian life. It’s the *nature* of the Gospel that it should call forth from us, and even demand from us these things.

So what *exactly* is the goal of this expending of energy and this strenuous effort? It’s first of all a lavish and abundant supply of “moral excellence.” Peter says that we’re to supply *by our faith* moral excellence.

**III. 2 Peter 1:5b** — ...supply by your faith, moral excellence...

The point here is simply all that is praiseworthy – all that has the *quality* of being “good.” In verse three, Christ’s glory and *virtue* was a reference to His praiseworthy deeds of honor and renown, and that word for virtue is the same word Peter uses here and that we translate moral excellence. Straining with every fiber of our being, we are to provide abundantly for moral excellence in our lives—for all that is praiseworthy and of the very highest quality of “good.” Apart from 1 and 2 Peter, the only other place where this word is used in the New Testament is in Philippians chapter four:

□ Philippians 4:8 — Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is *lovely*, whatever is *commendable*, if there is any **excellence**, if there is anything *worthy of praise*, think about these things.

The emphasis of this word for “moral excellence”—and of every other word in Peter’s list—is especially on our outward deeds and actions, and also our words. We’re not simply to pursue a life that escapes disapproval, but rather the kind of life that elicits and invites and calls forth the

very highest praise. What a high calling we have! Having, then, supplied by our faith, moral excellence, we must supply by our moral excellence, “knowledge.”

**IV. 2 Peter 1:5c** — ...supply by your moral excellence, knowledge...

As we’ve already seen in verse three, this knowledge isn’t a head knowledge, but a practical wisdom that always discerns faithfully what is the mind and will of God for us (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16). Paul writes in Colossians:

- Colossians 1:9–10 — We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the **knowledge** of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the **knowledge** of God.

We have this same idea in Romans chapter twelve and Ephesians chapter five:

- Romans 12:2 — Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- Ephesians 5:8–10 — At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Straining, therefore, with every fiber of our being, we are to provide lavishly for a practical and experiential knowledge of the mind and will of God for us. This certainly assumes prayer and reading the Scriptures, but the main emphasis is on the “knowledge” of God’s will that comes from daily doing His will. In other words, we’re not just to live a life that avoids gross ignorance of the will of God, but rather the kind of life that’s constantly *learning* what the will of God is *experientially* – in the day to day living of our lives. Once again, we can only marvel—and be convicted—at this high calling that is ours.

Having, then, supplied by our moral excellence, knowledge, we must also supply by our knowledge, “self-control.”

**V. 2 Peter 1:6a** — ...supply by your knowledge, self-control...

“Self-control” approaches these same themes of “moral excellence” and “knowledge” from the “negative” perspective. We’re not to be driven or controlled by fleshly desires or appetites, but rather these appetites and desires are to be in every way subdued and controlled by us. The world, as much as is possible, lives by the motto, “if it feels good, do it,” and so the world exercises “self-control” only in so far as it feels constrained to do so. How often can the same thing be said of Christians – that we live **as much as is possible** by the same motto, “if it feels good, do it,” and only exercise “self-control” in so far as we feel constrained to do so? We might think specifically of the areas of food, and sexuality, and also in our day of entertainment and social media. What’s happening today is that “*professing*” Christians are becoming “addicted” to

more and more things – they’re being ruled by their desires. We don’t think it’s an addiction. We think we could deny ourselves at any time, but more and more, we’re deceiving ourselves.

We said that self-control is more of a “negative” Christian virtue, but there’s also a sense in which it’s a wholly positive thing. We are to be positively characterized by self-control; it’s to be a word that actually sums up our whole way of life (cf. Titus 1:7-8). It’s not so much that we’re to be self-controlled just in some areas, but that “self-control” is to characterize our whole approach to the whole of life in this passing and temporary world. I think of what the Apostle John writes:

- 1 John 2:15–17 — Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

And Paul writes in 1 Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 9:25–27 — 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.

To sum up, therefore: Straining with every fiber of our being, we are to provide lavishly for a lifestyle that’s wholly characterized by self-control – where we’re not ruled by the desires associated with this passing and temporary world, but instead where we diligently discipline ourselves in everything and *practice* self-denial.

Having, then, supplied by our knowledge, self-control, we must also supply by our self-control, “steadfastness.”

**VI. 2 Peter 1:6b** — ...supply by your self-control, steadfastness...

If self-control emphasizes the danger of desires from within, then steadfastness emphasizes the danger of pressures from without. This word is often translated “endurance” and it has the basic meaning of “bearing up under the weight of something,” but in the Bible it means more than just gritting our teeth with a kind of stoic resignation to our fate; it means *continuing on* and *persevering in* the true faith in spite of all the pressures of the world *because of* the **hope** that lies before us. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us:

- Hebrews 12:1–2 — Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with **endurance** the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, *who for the joy that was set before him endured* the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Hebrews 10:36 — You have need of **endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God *you may receive what is promised*.

And the Apostle Paul writes:

- 1 Thessalonians 1:3 — ...remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter has already reminded us of the precious and very great promises that Christ has granted to us, and so now he calls us to the Christian virtue of a patient endurance and a perseverance in hope – that no matter what the pressures from without may be—whether the threat of some kind of suffering or persecution, or especially in this letter a kind of “peer pressure” from false teachers to conform—we will daily *practice* steadfastness, continuing on and persevering in the faith. Bringing all our energy to bear, we are to provide lavishly for a steadfastness that continues on in the face of anything and everything that Satan throws against us. This is to be the very nature and quality of our Christian life.

Having, then, supplied by our self-control, steadfastness, we must also supply by our steadfastness, “piety” (or “godliness”).

**VII. 2 Peter 1:6c** — ...supply by your steadfastness, piety...

We saw in verse three that the basic idea of this word is that of duty, of devout loyalty, and careful devotion. It has above all else a *Godward* focus. So we could ask ourselves questions like these: Do we have piety *toward the Lord*? Is our life characterized by an attitude of careful reverence, and loyalty, and devotion *to the Lord*? Are we *religiously* faithful, scrupulously devout, and pious Christians – “serious” Christians *visibly marked by the fear of the Lord*?

Straining with every fiber of our being, toiling and striving with all zeal and diligence, we are to make abundant provision for a life that is wholly oriented *around* and directed *to* the Lord. It’s not that we acknowledge that God is there (revolving around us), but that we—quite literally—revolve around Him, with Him at the very center of our existence – of all our living, and all our doing, and all our speaking.

Having, then, supplied by our steadfastness, piety, we must also supply by our piety, brotherly affection.

**VIII. 2 Peter 1:7a** — ...supply by your piety, brotherly affection...

“*Philadelphia*” is a word that the Greeks used exclusively for the very unique and special bond of affection between biological family members. In other words, the unique kind of love between biological brothers and sisters was regarded as so special and so important that it was even given its own name – *philadelphia*; brotherly love, or sibling affection. So it was a *radical* thing – something the Greeks even scorned and mocked (cf. Davids) – when biologically unrelated Christians – even Jews and Greeks – started calling each other “brothers and sisters” and even

described the love that they had for one another as a sibling, or a family love – using that word “*philadelphia*.” Do we realize, today, how radical it is to describe our love and affection for one another using this same language? This is something that’s impossible for the world to understand or comprehend because it grows entirely out of the miracle of the new birth by which we have all become, *together*, sons and daughters of God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3).

- Galatians 3:26 — In Christ Jesus you are *all* sons of God, through faith.
- James 1:18 — Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...
- John 1:12–13 — To all who... [received] him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

It’s this awesome miracle that allows us now, and even requires us to take that word for “sibling affection” and “family love” and make it a true description of our relationships one with another. So Paul writes simply:

- Romans 12:10 (cf. 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:22) — Love one another ***with the affection of siblings***.

Brothers and sisters, bringing all of our energy to bear and straining with every fiber of our being, we are to make abundant provision for loving one another *with the affection of family* – as siblings who are all children of the same heavenly Father.

Having, then, supplied by our piety, brotherly affection, we must also supply by our brotherly affection, “love.”

**IX. 2 Peter 1:7b** — ...supply by your brotherly affection, **love**...

Love is the crowning virtue in this list of virtues. Paul writes:

- 1 Corinthians 13:13 — So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Love – both love for God and love for our neighbor – encompasses all of the other virtues and is the thread or the glue that binds them all together as one.

- Colossians 3:14 — Above all these [other virtues] put on love, which binds [all the virtues] together in perfect harmony.

To sum up, then, brothers and sisters, straining with every fiber of our being and toiling and striving with all zeal and diligence, we are to make abundant and lavish provision for a life that is wholly characterized by love. Not the “live and let live” “love” of the world, but the love that actively seeks the temporal *and* the eternal welfare of those around us because we’ve also come to love the one *true* God.

## Conclusion

Are you worried that this is a lot to remember?—that you won't have this whole list of virtues all clearly categorized in your mind when you go home? *Don't* worry!

Notice how Peter presents these virtues as though each virtue grows out of the one that comes before it (“supply *by* your moral excellence knowledge, and supply *by* your knowledge self-control...”). It can be very tempting for pastors and teachers to turn this into a “science.” We try to show how *logically* each virtue leads on to the one that comes *after* and flows out of the one that comes *before*. But that's not at all what Peter intended for us to do. Peter's just using a literary device that was common in his day even outside of the Bible; and so not only is the **order** of these virtues completely random (except for probably the first and the last – “faith” and “love”) but their **number** can also be completely random – it could have been less and it could have been more; some could have been left out and others could have been included. When Peter describes one virtue as being supplied by another, he's just showing that they're all interrelated and that in the end we can sum them all up with just a single word – “love.” But somehow, we're *all* drawn instinctively to the “science” of things. What I mean by this is that it's attractive to us to think of going home and working on one virtue at a time. At the very least, for “practical purposes” we want to isolate the virtues in our mind so that we can work on them and master them individually (cf. Schreiner). But this is the very antithesis of true Christianity. This is the very definition of legalism and moralism and it leads not to freedom, but to bondage; not to victory, but to defeat; not to peace, but to despair; and not to humility, but to pride.

Notice, too, that though we briefly explored the *meaning* of each one of these virtues, we never entered into what I might call the “science” of their application. I think we could say that in a sense it's the “lists of virtues” in the Bible that come the closest to our ideas, today, of practical application. In fact, these verses *are* Peter's “practical application.” But if this is so, then we can't help but see that Peter's practical application falls woefully short of today's standards. Can you imagine the complaints of Peter's readers if they had lived in a culture like our own? Peter lacked specificity; he lacked examples; he lacked any real “science” of application. It's easy for us to conclude, today, that it's the job of pastors and teachers to make up for this “deficiency” in the Bible. Now certainly, we wouldn't call it a deficiency, but this is very often what it can amount to. We want the “science” of moral excellence; we want that general precept of moral excellence *spelled out* for us in its specific, real life applications. We want the science of knowledge, and the science of self-control, and the science of godliness, and the science of brotherly affection, and the science of love and we want this science written down in books and sermons. But I believe it's a telling thing that the Bible itself never provides us with this thing that we all instinctively and naturally crave. Peter assumed that this catalogue of virtues—which could have been shorter or longer, and could have left out some and included others—was *all* the “application” that his readers needed. It was then their job as Spirit-filled Christians to engage constantly in the work of discerning what these virtues should look like in their individual lives from day to day. I fear that today's definition of practical application can at the very least lead easily to moralism and legalism and that it often robs us of the joy of cultivating true, biblical discernment.

At this point, I think it can be helpful to make a distinction between the role of the teacher and preacher and the role of the “counselor” (not a “professional” counselor). **The role of the preacher is to teach and explain the meaning of God’s Word and to press *that Word* home to the hearts of his hearers.** At times, he may apply the Scripture to a specific situation within the body, or outside the body, or within the culture of his time. But in general, after he has explained the meaning of the Word, and declared and set forth the riches of the Word, and then pressed *that Word* home to the hearts of his hearers, the pastor-teacher leaves the fleshing out of that Word to each of his individual listeners who have all been anointed and filled themselves with the *Holy Spirit*. The “counselor,” on the other hand, goes “beyond” this and does not generally teach and preach the word. We can think of a counselor as a tool that the Holy Spirit uses to help a “dysfunctioning” (not a dysfunctional) Christian learn to function properly again. In this case, ***even though the Scriptures are always the foundation***, it’s usually true that very little of the counselor’s time is spent reading or explaining Scripture. In the context of counseling, it’s appropriate that the approach should be *topical* and that ***comparatively*** very little time is spent expounding the Scriptures themselves. But then it’s also important in this context of “counseling” that we be extra careful that things don’t—even in subtle ways—degenerate into the “science” of application – a science which the Scriptures *themselves* never give to us. Let us be glad that for the general work of preaching and teaching—and for the living of the Christian life—the Scriptures themselves have already included in black and white on the written page *all* of the “practical applications” that we shall ever need. And if we want the *Bible’s* version of practical application, all we have to do as believers who are anointed by the Spirit is **read** 2 Peter 1:5-7.

“[Christ’s] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and piety, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

And **so for this very reason, bringing all your energy to bear** [toiling and laboring and straining with every fiber of your being], supply by your faith, an abundance of moral excellence, and supply by your moral excellence, an abundance of knowledge, and supply by your knowledge, an abundance of self-control, and supply by your self-control, an abundance of steadfastness, and supply by your steadfastness, an abundance of piety, and supply by your piety, an abundance of brotherly affection, and supply by your brotherly affection, an abundance of love.”