

Sermon 5, What Holiness will Do for You, 2 Peter 1:8-9

Proposition: You can't afford to neglect holiness, because holiness bears fruit for Christ and comes from remembering your baptism.

- I. If you have too much holiness, you will be fruitful for Christ, v. 8
- II. If you have too little holiness, then you have forgotten your baptism, v. 9

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, last week we talked about how in the world you could afford to grow in sanctification the way Peter instructed us to. As you recall, I mentioned that to be holy with the seven character qualities the apostle lists would cost us everything we have. And yet, the question we should ask is not "Can I afford to become holy?" We must instead, in light of the warning in the text before us, ask ourselves the opposite of that question: "Can I afford *not to* become holy?" The answer, quite frankly, is no. No you can't afford to neglect holiness! No you can't afford to blow off everything Christ has done for you! No you can't neglect supplying virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, familial affection, and love at your own expense in your walk with Christ! You see, if you neglect these things, Peter says, you are a fruitless Christian and ultimately a blind fool.

Positively stated, holiness bears fruit for Christ and comes from remembering your baptism. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we can't afford to neglect it!

I. If you have too much holiness, you will be fruitful for Christ, v. 8

Our outline this evening is simple; indeed, I can't remember the last time I preached a two-point sermon like this. But though the outline is simple, the thought behind these two verses is profound. As we saw last week, we need to grow in the seven virtues Peter named. We provide these things for ourselves at our own expense — using, of course, the tremendous wealth that God has given to us for our very own. And when you pay the price of acquiring these virtues, you become fruitful for Christ.

First of all, you have to have the virtues. People should be able to identify some faith in your life. It should be obvious that you trust Jesus. They should hear it in how you pray, see it in how you talk to your kids, notice it in the way you think about the future. Faith cannot be hidden.

Your friends should be able to see moral excellence in you. However obscured, however defaced by remaining sin, your virtues should be noticeable. You should at least occasionally be complimented on your honesty, or your honor for your parents, or your truthfulness, or your patience. Do you have any moral excellence as a child of God?

And what about knowledge? Would someone come to you for help with a Bible question? With a theological problem? With an ethical conundrum? Brothers and sisters, if you don't have any knowledge of the content of the Christian faith you're going to have a hard time bearing fruit

for Jesus Christ. If you don't know who He is and what He loves, how in the world can you claim to be someone who has the knowledge of Christ? It's a bit like asking a student about the reading assignment. Too many wrong answers and you start to wonder whether this student even read the book! And so it is with knowledge. If you don't know what Romans is about, or why Exodus is in the Bible, or what Jesus thinks of homosexual "mirage," then you are not likely bearing much fruit for Him.

As for self-control, what will your co-workers think of your Christian faith if you routinely blow up on the job? If you sneak into their candy stash and then say "I just couldn't help myself"? If you tell them how you consistently blow it at home, doing things you don't allow your kids to do? What kind of message does that send?

Again, I'm asking about each character quality from last week because Peter specifically says that these character qualities need to be ours. He doesn't say that you have them; remember, they come at a cost and it's not a cost that everyone who claims the name of Christ wants to pay. He says *if* you have them. You may not have these character qualities. Do you? Are they yours? Have you paid the price to acquire them?

Do you have perseverance? Can you endure evil without breaking and falling into evil yourself? And how about godliness? Do you live to worship God, in public, in private, and with your family? Would your children describe you as godly?

Do you manifest familial affection toward your fellow saints? Do you love them as much as your biological family? And finally, what of love? Do you genuinely want what's best for the rest of the world, even if it costs you something?

So that's the first question. That's the easy question, believe it or not. Are these qualities yours? Do you have these seven virtues that all Christians need to show? You have the wherewithal to pay for them. You can afford them, even though they are costly.

But Peter doesn't stop there. He doesn't just want to know whether you *have* these virtues. He wants to know whether you have too much of them. Okay, so you can't have too much of a virtue. But in good earnest, he really does say that these things need to be increasing in your life. They must not only abound, but be growing. You should have more familial affection, more perseverance, more self-control than you did five years ago. These qualities should be increasing. Is that costly? You better believe it. But it's a cost you can pay because Christ has given you everything you need to grow in holiness.

So those are the two conditions. You must have the virtues of a Christian, and you must be growing in the virtues of a Christian. If you do, then you will be useful and fruitful in the knowledge of Christ.

Remember, the knowledge of Christ is the theme of this letter. Peter is writing about the knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness. And he is very clear that to know Christ means changing, becoming more like the Christ you know.

The word "ineffective" here could also be translated "idle." Imagine a printer that can print 27 pages per minute, just sitting there doing nothing. It's idle. Or imagine a Lamborghini

sitting in your garage with two flat tires. It's idle. It's not doing anything. That is a picture of a Christian who is not growing in these virtues. That Christian is idle. His power and potential for obedience is unrealized. His transmission is stuck in neutral, and the wealth that Christ gave him so that he could work for the kingdom is doing nothing. Peter also uses the word "unfruitful" to describe this Christian. My parents had three peach trees in their yard. For maybe 10 years they produced peaches the size of golf balls. The peaches were okay, but never too great. And then, for another 10 years, those trees quite producing fruit entirely. They grew, but they never grew a crop.

Is that the kind of Christian you want to be? The flat-tired Christian? The no-fruit Christian? The revving-in-neutral Christian? Peter was a blue-collar kind of guy. He wasn't interested in a dog that wouldn't hunt. He wasn't interested in bait that fish didn't like. He wasn't interested in people called Christians who never grew fruit for Jesus in their lives.

There are people who claim the name of Christ, who would say that they know Him, who are idle and unfruitful. The purpose of this text is to get you to ask yourself, "Am I one of them?"

If you're not growing, you're one of them. If you're not increasing in the seven virtues, you're one of them. Repent! Seek to spend the capital God has entrusted to you in order that you might have "too much" holiness, in order that you might be abounding in these virtues so that Christ might have some fruit in your life!

Now, what is the fruit Christ is looking for? Some think that it's especially converts. The soul-winning Christian, that's the fruitful servant that Jesus loves to see. My uncle met a man who bragged that he had led five hundred souls a year to the Lord for the last fifteen years. Is that specifically the fruit that's in view here? I don't think so. It seems to me that rather, the fruit Jesus is looking for is the fruit of a holy, morally upright life. He doesn't say "Give all diligence to add to your faith converts." He says you need to add these virtues to your faith. Moral excellence is what the Lord loves to see! Being holy is the same thing as being fruitful for Christ. You were created to be like Jesus. The more like Him you are, the more you are fulfilling your purpose.

II. If you have too little holiness, then you have forgotten your baptism, v. 9

But the apostle goes on to address the flip side here. The one who has too little holiness, who, far from abounding actually lacks the seven character qualities, is blind and nearsighted.

This is sort of like one of the mismatched couplets in Proverbs that we've been looking at recently. Peter doesn't say 'The one who has these qualities is fruitful, but the one who lacks them is unfruitful.' He says "The one who has these qualities is fruitful, but the one who lacks them is blind."

Now, isn't that interesting? How did blindness become the opposite of fruitfulness? I would only comment that this opposition between fruitfulness and blindness highlights the reality that Peter's key theme is the knowledge of Christ. To know Him is to become like Him. But to fail to see Him in His beauty is ultimately the same as being unfruitful. To see Christ is to grow the ethical fruits that please Him; to be blind to Him, to refuse to see Him, whether through

myopia, eye disease, deliberately shutting your eyes (the Greek could refer to any of these conditions) is to fail to bear the ethical fruits that He loves.

Don't be blind, Christian! Don't ever stop looking at Jesus. Don't look to your own costly progress in virtue. That's not what makes you holy. Look at Christ, and see in Him the glory that transforms you to be like Him.

Well, not only has the person without these qualities failed to look at Christ; he's also forgotten his baptism. Almost all commentators are agreed that the cleansing from former sins here is a reference to the baptism that "washes away sins," as Ananias told Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:16). Brothers and sisters, if you aren't walking in holiness, you've forgotten your baptism! Now, for our confession we read what the Larger Catechism has to say on improving your baptism. Again, I would remind you what we saw there a few moments ago.

WLC 167 How is our baptism to be improved by us? A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

Brothers and sisters, someone who does not have the character qualities of v. 8 has forgotten his baptism. He has overlooked the reality signified and sealed in the sacrament. Remember, that reality is the forgiveness of sins and union with Christ in His death and resurrection. That is the spiritual currency we have been given that enables us to pay the cost of growing in sanctification. And someone who doesn't pay that cost, who doesn't grow in virtue, knowledge, self-control, love, and all the rest of it, has forgotten that he was baptized. He lives just like someone who never had the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit applied to him. He acts like someone whose sins were never washed away at all.

Now, does this verse imply that baptism only brings washing away of the sins committed up to the moment of its administration? Not at all. We know that baptism signifies union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and that the power of the cross is not only good up to the moment of our baptism but through a whole lifetime, a whole eternity! Peter is simply highlighting the fact that in uniting us to Christ for salvation, one of the things baptism does is cleanse us from past sins and give us a fresh start so that we can begin to put on these virtuous character qualities that he lists. You don't have to walk around burdened by what you used to be.

You are free to be who you are in Christ! This freedom comes from steadily looking to Christ for the riches that allow you to be fruitful and holy. Forgetting to do this means that you fail to come to worship, where you can see Christ best. It means that you fail to listen to His word on a daily basis. It means that you fail to think about who He is. In forgetting Him, in failing to remind yourself of Him, you become blind. You become like one of the unbaptized, like a non-Christian who walks in this world without faith, hope, or love. Is that who you want to be? I trust that it's not. I trust that this warning appeals to your heart. I beg you, fellow Christian: Spend the spiritual currency Christ has given you through His death and resurrection to undergo the costly work of sanctification so that you might live as one cleansed from sin, bearing fruit to eternal life. Peter is not teaching salvation by works; he's teaching salvation with works. Do those works; make your Savior glad. Amen.