

OH MY GOODNESS? (2 Peter 1:5) – Sunday, June 21, 2009 – Summit EFC

Series: *Know to Grow* (2 Peter 1:1-11), Message #4 – Pastor Doug Corlew

Great to have you all with us on this Father's Day, and I hope all of you dads will have a chance to enjoy something special today with family or friends. My family is going to celebrate Father's Day today by letting me fire up the grill. On Mother's Day, we like to give the women a day off from cooking. But Father's Day is different. We'll grill anytime, right guys? We almost view it as some kind of privilege.

It's a guy thing, I guess. Now I have to admit, grilling is about the only type of cooking I do around the house. Still, I like to think I'm making a valuable contribution to the family when I'm flipping burgers... But am I really? Because this week I read something that kind of put me in my place. Listen to this: It says that when a man volunteers to do the BBQ, the following chain of events is put into motion:

- 1) The woman goes to the store.
- 2) The woman fixes the salad, vegetables, and dessert.
- 3) The woman prepares the meat for cooking, places it on a tray along with the necessary cooking utensils, and takes it to the man, who is lounging beside the grill.
- 4) The man places the meat on the grill.
- 5) The woman goes inside to set the table and check the vegetables.
- 6) The woman comes out to tell the man that the meat is burning.
- 7) The man takes the meat off the grill and hands it to the woman.
- 8) The woman prepares the plates and brings them to the table.
- 9) After eating, the woman clears the table and does the dishes.
- 10) Everyone praises the man and thanks him for his cooking efforts.
- 11) The man asks the woman how she enjoyed "her night off." And,
- 12) Upon seeing her annoyed reaction, concludes that there's just no pleasing some women.

Does that bear any resemblance to the way things go at your house? I hate to admit it, but it sounds kind of familiar to me! In fact, April is such a great wife and mother that I almost feel guilty celebrating Father's Day. Seems like we should just have another Mother's Day instead. She deserves two days!

Maybe some of you guys can relate. If your wife is the one who actually *deserves* the hero status around your household – if truth be known, she's the one who keeps the family afloat – then you may be wondering if you're even all that relevant in the grand scheme of things!

So guys, this morning I want to encourage you! I want to remind you just how important you really are to the outcome of your kids' development. You have a vital role to play, and no one else can take your place. Ever wonder if you're all that necessary?...

Watch this: [DVD–*"I'll Need You Dad"*-1:30].

What a great reminder that kids of all ages have many influences in their lives that often steer them off course from Christ. Many of their responses to life situations will feel natural to them, yet will leave them feeling empty and alone.

They need *you*, Dad, to point them to Christ when no one else will! Never underestimate the power of your example, and the unique opportunity God has given you to model the character and priorities of Jesus Christ in your home.

In **2 Peter chapter 1**, we are given a portrait of what that kind of life might look like. This is week #4 in our summer series, “**Know to Grow.**” The apostle Peter challenges us to apply all diligence, to *make every effort* to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. And this is not a hopeless endeavor at all.

For as **v 3-4** says, *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, 4 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.*

5 *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith...* And then he lists some character qualities which we should be striving to attain, as followers of Jesus. Rather than summarizing our goal with a single word, Peter chooses to describe it as a series of ascending steps in **v 5-7**:

...supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So picture your growth in the Lord as a ladder or a staircase, where each step leads to the next. One quality has a way of producing another as we move upward in our pursuit of spiritual maturity.

But it all begins when you come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. ***The ladder of Christian virtue may only be climbed on the foundation of saving faith.*** So don't set your ladder on unstable ground, trusting in your own moral efforts to be righteous in God's sight.

Look at **v 1**, where Peter says we have *obtained a faith of equal standing with (his) by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.* You see, if we put our trust in the cross of Christ, then we are credited with His righteousness, and our standing before God is secure:

Saved by grace through faith. With this as your starting point, *now* make every effort to supplement your faith with these qualities. In other words, faith in Christ is the only foundation that can support the life you want to live and the life God demands. It will wear you out and you will ultimately fail if you try to climb this ladder on your own, apart from faith in Christ.

Without faith it's impossible to please God. Faith is the means whereby we respond to God's call and come to know Christ personally. And faith is the vehicle through which we receive a new nature and are given the Holy Spirit who transforms us from the inside out, so that these qualities *can* be ours.

So faith is the starting point for the Christian, but true Christian faith always results in a changed life. So Peter calls us to climb higher.

And the first step is to *supplement your faith with virtue.* What does he mean by virtue? If you go to dictionary.com you'll find the first definition of virtue to be –

“moral excellence” or “goodness.” And that's interesting, because the New American Standard Bible translates it “moral excellence” and the New International Version translates it “goodness.”

Of course, the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, and so the word that Peter actually used here is –

the Greek word *arête*. Now this word is rarely used in the New Testament, but it was a very popular word in Greek philosophy and ethics. Thinking non-Christians of the first century were greatly concerned about the question, “*What is it that makes a person good or excellent at being a human?*” Peter’s original readers would have been familiar with these philosophical debates, and all of us can relate to the struggle.

Someone once said, “*A father is a man who expects his son to be as good a man as he meant to be.*” We’re all conscious of our failures, and even though we want our kids to be good, none of us ever live up to our own standards.

One guy was in a hurry taking his 8-year-old son to school, and he made a U-turn at a red light where it was prohibited. “Oops, I just made an illegal turn!” he said. “That’s okay, Dad,” the son said. “The police car right behind us did the same thing.” It’s hard to always do good.

But *arête* means *even more* than just *doing* good. *Arête* referred to “essential, intrinsic goodness.” Do you see the difference? You can *do* good by caring for the sick, showing kindness to strangers, extending hospitality to outsiders, pursuing justice for the underdog. Those are all good deeds.

But an evil person can also do any of that. They say that Hitler used to love posing for pictures with little children. Idi Amin used to cry when he heard sad stories. Stalin was kind to his own daughters. Even the wicked know how to *do* good. They just lack the capacity to *be* good.

All of *us* want to *look* good and we like to *feel* good. Sometimes we even want to *do* good. But when Peter describes a growing Christian, he chooses a word that has primarily to do with something we *are*, before anything we do or look or feel.

A great preacher once said, “*Character is what a man is in the dark.*” – even when no one is around to see or benefit from his goodness. At the funeral of Fred Mitchell, former chairman of China Inland Mission, the man who delivered his eulogy said this: “*You never caught Fred Mitchell off his guard because he never needed to be on it.*” There’s a big difference between doing good and being good.

I mentioned that the apostles rarely used this word *arête*, and the early church fathers also seemed to generally avoid it, possibly because the Greek philosophers sought to glorify human excellence and achievement, without regard for dependence on Christ or the glory of God.

But still, Peter chooses to borrow this word from the secular arena to make his point that when a person comes to faith in Christ, he should then begin to live the kind of life that is respected by everyone, even unbelievers, because of its outstanding and consistent moral excellence or goodness. This was a very important concept to Peter. If you’ll turn back a page or two to his first letter –

In **1 Peter 2:12** he writes, *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

Or again in **1 Peter 4:3-5** he writes, *The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

In other words, if you have placed your faith in Christ, there should be a distinction in your lifestyle. Maybe you’re not going to fit in quite so easily anymore in certain circles. Don’t be surprised if people are surprised that you have new interests now. You’re no longer interested in wasting your life.

As far as you're concerned, the time that is past is sufficient for your sin. Your days are already far too few before you are going to give an account to Almighty God. So you can't afford to mess around in that old way of life. You're a new person now. You're dead to sin and alive to God.

When you are enslaved in sin, your life becomes self-absorbed and trivial, because you're drifting further and further from the image of Jesus Christ. But when God saves you, you escape this corrupting influence. You become a partaker of the divine nature and a marvelous transformation takes place.

It's not just a matter of what you *don't* do anymore. God didn't create you *not* to do something. If that was the goal, He would have never created you, because if you never existed, you would have never sinned. God made each of us in His image, and He wants us to re-capture that image as we surrender to the work of His Spirit in us.

You see, when Peter says to supplement your faith with *arête*, we need to realize that this is not the first time he has used the word in this letter. Just two verses earlier, if we go back to **2 Peter 1** –

At the end of **v 3**, he says that Jesus Christ *called us to his own glory and* (what?) excellence. Guess what? Same word: moral excellence, virtue. We are compelled by the *arête* of Jesus Christ – this is what draws us to Him, and this is our goal – that we would enter into His goodness. Well there's good news.

Because according to **v 4**, it is by His *arête*, by His goodness, that *He has given to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature*.

In other words, since we are united with Christ and empowered by His Spirit, we can live a morally excellent life that's not artificial, but real and genuine, because *arête* is the character of God within us.

As **Charles Spurgeon** said, *The grand point is not to wear the garb, nor use the brogue of religion, but to possess the life of God within, and feel and think as Jesus would have done because of that inner life. Small is the value of external religion unless it is the outcome of a life within.*

And to me, the exciting point is this: As we supplement our faith with virtue, the compelling image of Jesus Christ is restored in us, so that our formerly wasted or even pathetic lives can become compelling! God wants the world to see His virtue, His moral excellence and goodness, in you!

This is your mission! Peter says, *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)*. It's the same word.

Not only our lips, but our lives should declare the excellencies or the goodness of Jesus Christ, who alone is truly virtuous. That's why He is the object of our worship. That's why we proclaim His *arête*.

So Peter's answer to the question, "What is it that makes a person good or excellent at being a human?" is to point us to Jesus Christ. He is the ideal human. He is the Man, par excellence, and your excellence as a man, or woman, should be measured by your Christ-likeness.

Dads, remember that on this Father's Day. It's wonderful if you excel at grilling the meat, or fixing the toilet, or earning the paycheck, or throwing the baseball, or helping with the algebra homework. Keep it up. But there is something much more important. To be a good man, an excellent man, a man of virtue is to become like Jesus Christ, who *called us to his own glory and excellence*.

I find it interesting that Peter would pair up those words: *glory and arête*. I wonder if he was thinking about the day Moses dared to ask God for that incredible favor.

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' (Ex 33:18-19). Isn't that fascinating? Moses asks to see His glory, and God says, "I will show you my goodness." God equates His glory with His goodness!

Right after this, *The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:6-7).* Moses caught a glimpse of the goodness of the Lord when he saw His glory.

But Moses wasn't the only one with a mountain-top experience like this. Peter himself was invited by Jesus up to the mountain, along with James and John. And there they saw the glory of the Lord, as Jesus was transfigured before them in a dazzling brightness.

And so later, in this very chapter Peter recalls that day - *We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (v 16b-18)*

So both Moses and Peter were given a very similar glimpse into heaven. Both were eyewitnesses of God's majesty and glory. Both knew that His glory is His goodness, and His goodness is His name, and His name is His character – His very essence, the sum of all He is.

So when Peter says to supplement your faith with virtue, it's more than a call to good manners, regular hygiene and public decency. And it's more than an appeal to the human potential of moral achievement. This is nothing less than an invitation to enter and experience and imitate the very person of God.

And dads, there is a very practical application for us in a passage like this one. We all appreciate the encouragement we receive on Father's Day, but the voice that Peter heard on the mountain reminds us that a good father expresses appreciation to his kids. Even the Lord Jesus was strengthened when He heard those words from His heavenly Father: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Pastor **Philip Ryken** tells this story about one memorable at-bat during his son's first baseball season, when *he repeatedly hit the tee instead of the ball. And it was obvious what the problem was. He wasn't keeping his eye on the ball; he was looking right at me instead. He was unable to get a base hit until finally I stepped out of sight. We joked about that the rest of the season, but what the incident shows is the power of fatherly approval. My son wanted me to take pleasure in his accomplishment even before he accomplished it. I observed the same desire at work the time he caught a pop fly. Before he threw the ball over to first base to complete the double-play, he glanced over his shoulder to make sure I'd seen his catch. In a way, I'm touched that my son wants me to take pleasure in his success. But I'm also awestruck by my responsibility as a father. A father's love means almost everything to a child. It establishes his or her identity. It brings peace, security, and joy. If a father's affection matters so much, then it had better be the kind of affection that is just as strong after a strikeout as it is after a grand slam.*

Aren't you glad that our Heavenly Father loves unconditionally, even when we fail to accomplish our spiritual goals, even when we stumble and fall off of this ladder? Remember that virtue must be added to faith. We make every effort to become *arête* only because God has already counted us *arête* in His Son. It's not a matter of earning His approval; it's all of grace.

One day, a man ran up and knelt before (Jesus) and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17) But Jesus doesn’t immediately respond to the man’s question. Instead, Jesus detects something going on beneath the question.

And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” (Mark 10:18) Jesus is trying to cause this man to consider the implications of his words. No one is completely good except God Himself. So he shouldn’t address Jesus as “Good Teacher” unless He’s prepared to acknowledge that Jesus is God.

But this guy isn’t coming to humbly put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s coming to show off his own human righteousness. So Jesus plays along, and gives him a long list of things to do to inherit eternal life, and it proves to be too much for him. He walks away dejected because he can’t do it all. None of us can.

According to the apostle Paul, *No one does good, not even one...* And he says, *I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh* (Rom 3:12; 7:18). The testimony of Scripture is consistent:

Trying to *do* good without first *being* good is an exercise in futility. First, we must partake of the divine nature – to receive by faith the love of the only One who is good – God alone.

Then begins the journey that will only be complete when we see the Savior face to face – as day by day, moment by moment, we make every effort to supplement our faith with virtue. Amen.

Benediction: May you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – resting secure in your faith, while making every effort to take the first step toward spiritual maturity – by supplementing your faith with virtue. To the glory of our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.