

ADDING TO OUR FAITH

In seeking to progress from milk to the solid food of the Holy Word, the apostle speaks thus:

“... leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: *not laying again the foundation* of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (Heb. 6:1).

In these words, we find that Repentance and Faith are two *foundation* principles for the believer in Christ. That is to say, they do not form an end in themselves, but rather form a basis, or foundation upon which an edifice should be built. Our reading in 2 Peter speaks of those things we ought to build upon this foundation:

“... 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” (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

Here then, are seven qualities to be developed upon the basis of a faith in the true Gospel. The apostle continues to describe the importance of these:

“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” (2 Pet. 1:8).

We must therefore consider these qualities with all due diligence so that they might abound in us also. It is to that end therefore, that we shall proceed to examine each one in turn:

Virtue

Virtue is the first of those principles that should be erected upon our foundation of faith. The first Epistle of Peter also speaks of “virtue” thus:

“... ye are a chosen generation ... that you should *shew forth the virtues* (AV Marg.) of him that hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9)

What we find from this passage is that the virtue which we must learn to fill ourselves with, and “shew forth” is not of our own righteousness. This is a mistake that the Jews made in the time of Christ: they sought to establish their own righteousness without faith in Him:

“... they being ignorant of God’s Righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3)

Instead of seeking self praise and the approbation of those around them, true disciples of Christ ought rather to seek the glory of Yahweh, and submit themselves to the principles of His Righteousness. The attributes of Yahweh that comprise His Glory were declared before Moses:

“... Yahweh passed by before him, and proclaimed Yahweh, Yahweh El, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and Truth, keeping mercy for thousands” (Exo. 234:6-7)

These are the virtues which we must seek to develop: moulding our character to become more like Yahweh, as “it is written Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Seeking to add to our faith this fine array of virtuous things, we seek to become more like our Maker as time progresses.

Knowledge

Knowledge is a vital addition, yet which can take much time to grow. Notice that in 2 Peter 1, these qualities are already based upon a foundation of knowledge and faith. Sometimes it is thought that all we need to have is a grasp of the most basic of First Principles, and that will suffice us in respect of our spiritual needs. However, this position is lacking, in that the Bible teaches otherwise. So Peter gave the closing exhortation:

“grow in grace *and in the knowledge* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18)

And again:

“... put on the new man, which is *renewed in knowledge* after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10).

We can add to this: the example of unbelief on Israel as recorded through Hosea: “My people are destroyed *for lack of knowledge*: because they have rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee ..” (Hos. 4:5).

Knowledge therefore is some thing we must seek to develop. Not simply in order that we can accrue a knowledge of various facts and figures (vitaly important though they are), but rather to develop wisdom, and an understanding of Divine ways, knowing both good and evil. “Solid food belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:13-14).

Temperance

The word literally means: “self control”. As Messiah taught “in your patience possess ye your souls” (Lu. 21:19). A lack of self control manifests itself in various ways, from uncontrolled anger, to uncontrolled grief. The example given by the Spirit-led Apostle, speaks of a competitor in the Olympic games:

“every man that striveth for the mastery *is temperate in all things*. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible ...” (1 Cor. 9:25).

Those who strive to receive a corruptible prize must have total self discipline and control – how much more then than those who seek an incorruptible crown. The same idea comes through many times in Scripture. Consider the following words to Timothy:

“thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:1-40).

The figure is different, but the message the same: we ought to have self-control in all our ways, that we might not be lured away by the attractions of what we might call the world outside.

Patience

The word in the Greek signifies *endurance*, and the idea is one of enduring hardships in the cause of the Truth. It is a quality that must be developed in Christ’s brethren, in order that we might be able to withstand in a day of evil. James spoke of it thus:

“my brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith *worketh patience*. ***But let patience have her perfect work***, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1: 2-4).

Patience therefore, is manifested in our approach to “diverse temptations”, or “trials” as the word can be rendered. Again, this quality of Endurance is for a purpose: to develop our characters as a loving Father chastises his children for their own good, teaching them right and wrong. As we read elsewhere:

“despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth ever son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6-7)

When we are in times of trial therefore, we ought to be able to rejoice in our tribulations (difficult though they may be), knowing that such things are tokens of God’s love towards us, to mould our character into an array of attributes suitable for perpetuation into eternity.

Godliness

The word here, signifies *reverence*. Lack of reverence is a blight in the society in which we live. But moreover, it can be a problem amongst the household of those who ought to know better. Reverence is fundamental in our approach before God:

“thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I will dwell in the high and holy place, with him that is also that is of a contrite and humble spirit ...” (Isa. 57:15).

We must therefore be of a humble and a contrite spirit before our God. Humility and reverence are two different qualities, but they are closely related: humility brings reverence, and contrition is a manifestation of humility. There is no room for self pride in His Presence, as will be made known before all at the last.

The same word is used in 1 Timothy chapter 4:

“exercise thyself unto godliness (*reverence*). For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness (*reverence*) is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:7-8).

Just as men and women exercise themselves in order to become as fit as they possibly can, even so the believer must exercise himself in spiritual things – for the reward is greater.

Brotherly Kindness

It is written in the proverbs that “a man that hath friends must show himself friendly” (Prov. 18:24). And how much more should that principle apply to those who profess to be Messiah’s brethren! Brotherly kindness, we would suggest, might solve many of the problems now besetting the brotherhood. We must display such friendship and love to those of like precious faith. “See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22) is the Apostle’s maxim. Again, it is written: “be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). And again, “look not every man on his own things, but

every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). The list could go on: the theme is an essential one to grasp.

These principles are things which we must embrace in the context of Fellowship. It would appear for many that fellowship is all about making sure we don't be defiled by our brother's offences. However, Bible fellowship is about brotherly love – but more than this: “with a pure heart” Not feignedly, but a real “fervent” desire to help each other along the way towards the land of Inheritance. Whilst we fully endorse the need and scriptural command to withdraw from unrepentant errorists, that is only part of the doctrine of fellowship – the other side is the rejoicing with, and admonishing of and from those of like precious faith, that together we might lift up the hands that fail, and strengthen the feeble knees, and prepare each other for the coming kingdom.

Charity

The word here is *agape* which signifies “love”. This is the highest form of love that a man can have towards his fellows: it is the love the Messiah spoke of in saying: “greater love hath no man than this, than that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jno. 15:13). It is thus a *sacrificial* love, and one which subsist between Christ's brethren. As the Master said in prayer to his Father: “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jno. 17:26). Just as Messiah laid down his life in service to his Father, and his brethren, even so we must lay our lives down in service towards Yahweh, and our brethren. Not in the same way of course, but following a principle of rendering a loving service before God and man

In each of these aspects, we behold features that show forth a pattern of righteousness, that is abundantly seen in Messiah, our Saviour. He showed forth the Name and Virtue of His Father. He had, and implemented knowledge of Scripture, particularly in relation to his own death and resurrection spoken of there. He, above all men had total self control, remaining in humble obedience to his Father. He displayed reverence in prayer to Yahweh. He showed forth loving kindness and *agape* love towards his brethren.

When we look to Christ as the Word Made Flesh, we find a convergence of all of these attributes in him. An in him, we have an example to follow: “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

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