

"Make Your Calling and Election Sure"

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A Change-over from Human Corruption to Divine Excellence!

Scripture:

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:1-4).

The nature of a person is best seen in his actions and general demeanour. A person of gentle spirit will act gently; a person filled with pride will act and speak arrogantly. Similarly, the nature of a dog and that of sheep are unlike; one barks and feasts on fresh meat, the other bleats and chews grass.

So, what about the person who "shares in the divine nature"?

First, he will be a believer, and that makes him the object of God's superabundant grace stemming from his knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. But why the access to such abundant grace? The reason is that God has by "His divine power granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue".

Surely, we serve an all-powerful God who can be relied on forever. It can't be found anywhere else—not in ourselves nor in any earthly pursuit. It's only the power of God that is able to give us everything we need for our earthly life as well as for a truly godly life, and this comes from knowing Him who called us purposely to give us glory and excellence, being characteristics of His own nature!

The call to "glory and virtue" is, in turn, the basis for the "exceeding great and precious promises" He has given us to ensure that we come to share in "the divine nature", now that we have escaped the corruption that is in the world driven by lust.

In view of the wonderful provisions God has made for our salvation including making us 'partakers' of His nature (3-4), we must with "all diligence" exercise our newly acquired nature from God by

mastering the spiritual qualities which make up this nature. The application of "diligence", that is 'careful and hard working effort', is in order because we were used to another nature, the corrupt human nature acquired from Satan. Thus it would take a conscious, hard working effort to *unlearn our old nature* in order to *live our new divine nature* following repentance and initial faith in Christ.

Faith must be Proven with Deeds

So the apostle proceeds: "For this very reason, applying all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge" (v. 5, Greek text).

Faith is all-important and is indeed a spiritual constant throughout our relationship with God or we will never please Him (Heb. 11:6; 10:37-39; 11:13). But it's also the beginning point of our relationship with God, having been imparted to us through the preaching of the Word (Rom. 10:17; John 17:20; Acts 8:12). So then, it's a foundation (Heb. 6:1) on which we must build to advance in the character of God.

But why add to or "supply" or "minister" (Grk) in our faith "virtue" in particular?

By "virtue" what is meant here is 'moral excellence' or integrity or blameless conduct. And it's an appropriate complement to faith because faith must be proven with deeds. As the apostle James puts it succinctly, "faith without works is dead". He states his case in a straightforward, logical manner:

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

"And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

"Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jam. 2:14-26).

In a nutshell, a claim to faith without moral excellence demonstrated with good deeds is empty and dead! It's not saving faith (v. 14). It's a barren faith the quality of which is no more than the belief of demons that God exists and that His power is real and mighty enough to cause them to tremble! But that 'demonic faith' never produced any good. For all their belief in God and in the greatness of His power, demons are the embodiments of evil, and they will never do any good. Such is not the faith expected of a person who has come to partake of God's nature—mere belief in Him without any show of moral excellence, just evil continually! The faith of a prostitute, Rahab, is even worthier! Because she proved her faith in the God of Israel by hiding the spies Joshua sent into Jericho and

then helped them sneak away by an unusual route (Josh. 2:1-19), her faith was of the kind that saves:

Josh 6:17:

"And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent".

Josh 6:23:

"And the young men that were spies went in, and brought Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel".

Thus as believers the example of faith worthy of emulation is Abraham's works-evidenced faith. He is the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:29), and as his children in the faith we must do his "works": "They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39).

Unlike many of his physical descendants at the time of Jesus (John 7:19), father Abraham not only had faith but also demonstrated "virtue" or moral excellence in His walk with God (Gen. 17:1). How did he do that?

He obeyed God and kept His commandments: "Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5). The righteousness imputed to him on the basis of faith (Gen. 15:6) was lived in actual fact. He did not prove his faith by worshipping idols or cheating others or disobeying God in any way. Rather, he consistently vindicated his faith through obedience: "By **faith** Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, **obeyed**; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8).

Do the same to add solidity and credibility to your faith. Moral excellence is the showcase for your faith. Let the world which is full of moral corruption come to appreciate your faith through the demonstration of impeccable moral character which shows that you possess the divine nature. In his first epistle, the apostle exhorted: "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" (1 Pet. 2:12 *ESV*).

Against this, it needs to be said that the behaviour of some so-called believers leaves much to be desired. Their behaviour stinks, and this puts their faith in a bad light. Instead of being kind, these are mean; instead of being affable, they are quarrelsome. Don't mutilate your faith this way. You are required to 'fill it out' with virtue! You are to have living faith, not dead faith.

Knowledge is the Foundation of Virtue

However crucial it is, in itself "virtue" would amount to little if you do not know what you are required to do to meet the standard of moral excellence. It's critically important that you know what you are about. Hence "in your virtue [supply] knowledge".

One of the major flaws of the unbelieving Jews was that although "they have a zeal for God", it was not according to right knowledge "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to

establish their own [through human efforts], they did not submit to God's righteousness [through faith in Christ, 3:31, 9:30-33]. For Christ is the end [Grk 'telos' i.e. goal or culmination] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:2-4 *ESV*).

Without right knowledge, the pursuit of moral excellence will go awry. You simply wouldn't know the proper thing to do to achieve your goal of excellent godly behaviour. Christ stressed the dire importance of knowledge in response to a question from His disciple related to the *Parable of the Sower*:

"Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

"And He answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

"For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Matt. 13:10-12 *ESV*).

In other words, knowledge begets more and more knowledge and ignorance more and more ignorance until the little knowledge available is lost. Prov. 15:14 put it this way: "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness" (see also 18:15, 12:1).

So then, knowledge should be given a top priority. It's a source of strength (Prov. 24:5) and is more valuable than gold (Prov. 8:10). Without knowledge, there's no way we can do the will of God leading to salvation:

Mal. 2:7:

"For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts".

Luke 1:76-77:

" And thou, child [John the Baptist], shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways;

"To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins".

Col. 1:9-10:

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God".

That's why Christ lambasted the religious scholars of His day: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke 11:52).

Though they knew the teachings of God, these doctors of the law 'took away the key of knowledge' from the people by not teaching them the true knowledge of God because they themselves could not practise the truth.

Isn't this the sad state of affairs in modern-day Christianity? Many ministers of today fail to teach the truth because they themselves are "servants of corruption" (2 Pet. 2:19-21). By this failure to teach in accord with the "wholesome words of Christ", they expose themselves that they "know nothing":

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

"And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

"He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (1 Tim. 6:1-4).

So how do we gain true knowledge?

Godly fear is the starting point: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). It's because of this that He promises in Jer. 3:15: "And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding".

In Prov. 2 we read further, noticing carefully how divine knowledge produces understanding and moral uprightness:

"My son, if you receive my words and treasure up My commandments with you,

"making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;

"yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,

"if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,

"then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

"For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding;

"He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,

"guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.

"Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path;

"for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;

"discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you,

delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech,

"who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,

"who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil,

"men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.

"So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words,

"who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God;

"for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed;

"none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.

"So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous.

"For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it,

"but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it" (Prov. 2:1-22 *ESV*).

Since it's the knowledge of God's will that leads to salvation, it should be pursued at all costs as exemplified by Paul: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

Indeed, without the knowledge of Christ "in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3; cp Isa. 11:2), the Christ-like new creation is impossible:

"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;
"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col. 3:9-10).

So recognize knowledge for its worth and seek it with single-minded devotion. Wisdom is a defence just as money is also a defence, but godly knowledge excels both: "wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it" (Eccl. 7:12). The unequalled advantage of knowledge exercised in wisdom is that it gives life.

That should tell you that you spurn knowledge to bring on your own destruction:

Hos. 4:6:

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (see v. 1).

Isa. 5:13-14:

"Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.
"Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it" (see 1:3).

There's a far nobler approach: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18).

As with wisdom, ask God to imbue you with His knowledge if you lack it (Jam. 1:5); it's one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8). Knowledge is a life-long pursuit--so long as you seek to live the will of God.

Knowledge must be Tempered with Self-control

Knowledge for all its towering importance needs self-control (temperance) to keep it from being infected with the deadly virus of pride. Being knowledgeable can easily go to your head, for "knowledge puffs up [makes people arrogant], but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1 *LITV*). And pride always precedes a headlong fall: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

Hence "in your knowledge [supply] temperance" (2 Pet. 1:6a).

Besides, self-control serves to keep the lusts of the flesh at bay and therefore is a sign that one lives in the Spirit. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 9:27: "But I buffet my body [so in Greek #5299 *hupōpiazō*, buffet or disable an antagonist as a pugilist], and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (*RV*).

In Gal. 5:16-17 he urged: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (*NKJV*).

If you have experienced the Holy Spirit baptism, self-control is one component of "the fruit of the Spirit" you will bear as a natural manifestation of your divine nature (Gal. 5:23). It goes hand-in-hand with righteousness:

Acts 24:25:

"And as he [Paul] reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix [the Roman Procurator of Judea] was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you" (ESV).

Self-control is at the core of the believer's life in a sinful world in which he should not feel at home but act as a stranger by keeping away from lusts: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11).

You need self-control to keep your sense of spiritual self-importance in perspective and so avoid the self-righteous posture of the Pharisee in Jesus' parable who ascribed to himself a higher spiritual standing with God because of his religious observances than the tax collector praying next to him (Luke 18:9-13). But Jesus took him down a peg or two: "I tell you, this man [tax collector] went down to his house justified, rather than the other [Pharisee]. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

Indeed, unless you have your spiritual pride under control, you will have the doors of the kingdom slammed in your face:

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

"And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them,

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:1-4).

Are you as humble in heart and innocent in disposition as a child who has no inherent spiritual worth or power but for the grace of God at work in your life? No matter the spiritual gifts and talents at your disposal--as a preacher, miracle-worker, or teacher--know that you are just a vessel of the Lord and not the source of the grace. Don't take proudly take credit what is rightfully the Lord's. The Apostle Paul confessed: "... I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

The need to stay spiritually humble was the reason why the same Apostle Paul endured "a thorn in the flesh", described as "a messenger of Satan", lest he be "exalted above measure" through "the abundance of revelations" (1 Cor. 12:7). On realizing that it was the will of the Lord when the Lord answered him, " My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" after three earnest pleas for the removal of the thorn (vv. 8-9a), Paul rejoiced: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (vv. 9b-10).

Self-control is good for your spiritual life in Christ—in curbing your pride and fleshly lusts.

Self-control Requires Perseverance

The story is told of a cadet participating in a parade who, rather than breach the strict orders of his superiors not to flinch under any circumstances, stoically endured a piercing insect bite. Much as the hapless chap wanted to rub the place because it itched so badly, he bore the pain by exercising self-control without giving in to the temptation to tickle himself. What enabled him to maintain his self-control was perseverance.

That is why the second part of 2 Pet. 1:6 urges us: "in your self-control [supply] perseverance". This is because self-control needs perseverance to be sustained. Without perseverance, self-control will simply frizzle out.

Christ commended the church in Ephesus in His opening remarks to them: "I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary" (Rev. 2:3 *ESV*).

Self-control—restraining yourself from a strong feeling or something you very much want to do—is not an easy task, but with perseverance it can be done. In Ps 37 David exhorts us to both self-control and perseverance in calling on the faithful to "rest in the LORD" in the face of the prosperity of the wicked:

"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

"Cease [refrain] from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil" (vv. 7-8).

It's a call to faith, but faith which has the ingredients of self-control and perseverance: Hold back yourself from anger and worry even as you quieten yourself in the LORD and "wait" for Him "patiently". Faith is the heart of the matter, but how can that faith be enduring if you cannot control your fears and doubts or persevere in trusting in the LORD?

We read in Heb. 10:36: "you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised" (*ESV*). This endurance in doing God's will would include self-control without which God's will would be jeopardized in favour of our will--or at least take precedence over God's will.

You need to develop perseverance to maintain self-control on a consistent basis. If you lack the grace of perseverance, ask "the God of all grace" to supply you some. It's one of the elements of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22).

Persevere in Godliness

But what is the point of perseverance if it's not to persevere in godliness? The two are clearly linked as seen in the following scriptures:

Rom. 2:6-7:

God "will render to every man according to his deeds:

"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life".

Heb. 12:1-3:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, 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.
"Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted" (ESV).

Rev. 3:10-11:

"Because you have kept My word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" (ESV).

In concluding the *Parable of the Sower*, Christ said: "The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit" (Luke 8:15 GNB).

Having known and observed the godly way of life, what will ensure that you receive the ultimate reward of eternal life is perseverance in Christ's holy way in which there is life. Never move away from "the hope of the Gospel" by failing to persist in holiness and righteousness—your new essence brought about by Christ's death on your behalf:

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

"He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him,

"if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister" (Col. 1:21-23 ESV).

Indeed, should we fail to persevere in righteousness, the dire consequences would include not only the forfeiture of the reward of eternal life ("the hope of the Gospel) but also a horrible judgment by fire:

"... if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

"But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:26-31).

"A fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation shall devour God's adversaries"—not people who never knew His will—but those who previously had knowledge of His truth but fell away from it into sin. But what if they persevere in the truth to the end?

Surely, salvation will be theirs:

"And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

"But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:12-13 ESV).

So be motivated by the sure promise of salvation to persevere in godliness. Let nothing distract or discourage you. Not worldly friends, neither love of money nor your personal moral weakness. None of these has the promise of eternal life.

Instead, place your complete trust in the Lord Jesus through whom you "can do all things" (Phil. 4:13) and stay the course. He will never fail you. Even though you may fail yourself, know that He "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24).

The simple formula is, trust Him and persevere!

Brotherly Kindness is an Essential Aspect of Godliness

Despite the wide range of meanings and virtues it encompasses, is it possible to lay claim to godliness be without showing brotherly kindness?

Because such a scenario would be a mockery of godliness, the second part of 2 Pet 1:7 urges us: "in your godliness [supply] brotherly kindness".

The truth is, brotherly kindness or affection is a basic requirement of godliness or your practice of godliness is suspect! Notice what the apostle says in 1 Pet. 1:22: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth [godliness] for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (ESV).

Brotherly love is a duty of godliness; in fact, it's one of its chief objectives which ought to be carried out sincerely from the heart without prompting. It's a holy feeling God Himself inspires in His Spirit-filled people. Paul wrote to the brethren in Thessalonica:

"Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, "for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more" (1 Thess. 4:9-10 *ESV*).

Yet, isn't it a fact that although some people portray themselves as godly, they have nothing to show for brotherly affection?

That was why the Apostle took pains to remind us, "in your godliness minister brother kindness". He was not being superfluous since ideally godliness entails brotherly kindness/love. He was addressing a painful reality: Some 'believers' appear to have all the characteristics of godliness—profession of faith in God and in Christ, scripture reading, regular church attendance, etc—but not to love their fellow Christian brother! If not, how on earth could a Christian hate his brother?

Unthinkable as it is, it does happen. And God has no flattering words for the Christian who goes against the grain to hate his brother: "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15 *ESV*).

The Christian norm is to love one another in obedience to Christ and as a testimony to the world that we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). Indeed, we should fall over ourselves to show love to one another by competing to outdo each other in showing honour to a fellow brother (Rom. 12:10).

So "let the brotherly love continue" which is essentially kindness shown to your brother in need and affliction and even strangers out of empathy (Heb. 13:1-3). Make your godly life credible by practising brotherly love. Or your godliness is hollow, fake and incomplete.

Take a hard look around you; there's a brother or sister whose situation you can relieve. Don't harden yourself against him (Deut. 15:7). Listen to the 'still small voice' of God urging you from within, 'help out, help out'. The Lord knows your little gesture will lighten a burden; yes it will evoke a smile and a hymn of praise to Him. His love will be felt through your kindness (Matt. 5:16). "Let brotherly love continue"!

Love is the Mother of all Kindness

The last divine quality the Apostle mentions to have the full complement of "the divine nature" is love. Interestingly, the reverse is the case in Apostle Paul's listing of the spiritual virtues that make up "the fruit of the Spirit" in Gal. 5:22-23. There, love heads the list. Thus in either way, love stands out. Love is indispensable; it is the beginning and end of godliness; the be-all and end-all of our faith.

So why would the apostle just stop at brotherly kindness? He must move on to the base—love: "in your brotherly kindness [supply, minister, add] love" (2 Pet. 1:7b). The reason for this last command is that kindness stems from love. Without love there will be no brotherly kindness or affection. In 1 John 3:15, the Apostle John poses a rhetorical question which portrays kindness as the whole point of the divine love believers should demonstrate:

"But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" (RV).

The love from God, which He teaches those who love Him, is inseparable from kindness. Kindness is the essence of divine love; it's that which reveals God's love in you. To this extent, if you don't show love to your brother in need by showing kindness to him, the love of God is not in you. You neither love God nor have His heavenly brand of selfless love:

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

"And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat [him] loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 4:20-5:1).

So then, if you find it difficult to show kindness to a fellow brother in need or even do so reluctantly, it's an indication that the love of God does not live in you. True brotherly kindness inspired by true divine love is spontaneous and unforced.

This was the kind of spontaneous show of kindness Christ exhibited when He fed thousand hungry people out of "compassion":

"When He went ashore he saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

"Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.'

"But Jesus said, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.'

"They said to Him, 'We have only five loaves here and two fish.'

"And He said, 'Bring them here to me.'

"Then He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

"And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

"And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matt. 14:14-21 *ESV*).

Out of compassion Christ healed their sick and out of the same compassion He fed their starving, ignoring the reservations of His disciples. Jesus exemplified the sacred saying that "God loves a cheerful". Himself God, He lived His own word. And so must those begotten of Him:

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7 *ESV*).

But above all, we must not only practise love because kindness is all-important but also because love is everything! Without love, we are nothing:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

"And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3 *ESV*).

Love is the reason for being. In other words, if you don't have love you might as well repudiate your humanity! All your life's achievements are of no value.

Without love, we are nothing before God and to a lesser extent man. Worship is all about loving God with purity and sincerity and then loving your fellow human being as yourself. "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). Break either of these two commandments of love, and you are a heathen! You have missed the meaning of true worship.

In God's eyes, you are completely lawless. Sinful. Love, then, is the keeping of the commandments of God which regulate the relationship between God and man and man and his fellow man so we will love God with all our heart as well as our fellow human being as ourselves. We read in Rom. 13:

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

"For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10 *ESV*).

Love is everything. It cements everything, with regard to our relationship with God and with our fellow man. It's the logical object of faith. If you can't love, you can't call yourself a worshipper of God, a believer.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8). You must be too, as a person who has come to share in His nature. That means compassion, kindness, faithfulness, and goodness.

A man close to God in character dwells close to Him (Ps 15:1-5; 24:3-5). That is the ultimate outcome of the seven qualities of "the divine nature" examined so far. But then, one must not be complacent.

Abound in the Chain of Graces

Cumulative growth in the chain of graces that spring from faith in our transformation into "the divine nature" should be the priority of each one of us called to reflect God's "glory and excellence". Spiritual complacency is the one thing that should be avoided. Thus the Apostle tells us:

"... if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins" (2 Pet. 1:8-9 *ESV*).

Abound in the seven spiritual characteristics of the believer who shares in God's nature, and you will not be "ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". You will excel and excel in the excellences of God and in the gifts of His grace and Spirit. The synergy of grace can't be quantified. You will abound with divine knowledge and with "grace upon grace" from the Lord Jesus (John 1:16).

On the other hand, continue to diminish in the qualities of "the divine nature", and you will contract spiritual myopia. You will be unable to see beyond the present. The resurrection, eternal life, the reign of the saints with God in the coming Kingdom--all will no longer count. A purposeless faith is as good as abandoned. Your actions show you no longer appreciate that you were cleansed from your former sins when you turned to Christ through repentance and faith in His Name.

Indolence has taken the better part of you; you don't exert yourself in the things of God. You don't care about demonstrating your faith with deeds, persevering in righteousness, or advancing in divine knowledge. You don't care about keeping your pride and lusts at bay; you don't care about attending the prayer meeting or about praying privately as appropriate. Certainly, you don't care about what help you can give to a brother you know is in need to show your brotherly kindness and love. You don't care about anything God wants you to care about. You have grown spiritually lazy.

The key to the solution is again "diligence":

"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10 *ESV*).

The message is straightforward enough: The way you make your "calling" to Christ and "election" for salvation in Him "sure" is to practice the qualities of the divine nature *assiduously, diligently, through the application of hard work*. This is because by so doing "you will never fall"--that is fail, err or stray into sin, the result of which will be loss of salvation.

So, what if you don't fall because you "diligently" applied yourself to the heavenly qualities?

You will have the full right to enter the Kingdom of God:

"For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11 *ESV*).

Is not this the ultimate end in view for us as believers? To become permanent king-priests of God crowned with glory and immortality? A glorious eternal state where we will never experience pain, suffering or poverty?

If it's the qualities of moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love that will grant us admission into the Kingdom, we had better keep them in mind at all times with a view to practising them:

"Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have" (v. 12 ESV).

You can never have enough of reminders about the need to practise the qualities of "the divine nature". The fruit of your faith are those qualities. They are the proof that, having believed in Christ, you have become a partaker of "the divine nature". You have not been called to an empty faith but to a faith filled with divine purpose.

The duty of your faith is to showcase the character of God. By so doing, you will "make your calling and election sure". What that means is eternity with God--whose nature you already share—in His Kingdom of righteousness. Amen!

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