

"Moral Excellence"

In a world growing more secular and less religious, I wonder if we've lost something precious. What is it? Virtue! Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're going to explore the need for virtue.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God gives us precious and very great promises in His word. And we don't want to miss a single one of these promises. Considering those promises, we must study the will of God and practice it in our lives. God wants His people to live virtuous lives to demonstrate God's love and holiness to a world that needs to see godliness and love in action. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Many people are content to go along with the crowd. One man recently revealed he was content with his salvation and he didn't feel he needed to do anything more than what he had already done many years ago. Well, God expects more than a lazy, complacent faith. He wants us to "be all the more diligent to make your calling you're your election sure." Wouldn't it be sad to presume we are right with the living God, only to find out on Judgment Day that we were never right with Him or we had fallen from His favor?

Instead of listening to what people think, turn to the Bible to find a true morality that comes from God. We should ask what God requires morally, rather than falling for worldly ways that ignore God and lead to chaos and confusion. Instead of following popular opinions and conforming to this world, we should look to God's word as our moral guide. Romans 12 and verse 2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." When people follow God's will found in Scripture, they demonstrate a life that is indeed good and acceptable and perfect.

Now if you want to study more, we offer this study free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 2 Peter 1:5 to 11, and then we'll explore our great need for moral excellence.

Our reading today comes Peter's second epistle chapter 1 verses 5 through 11.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

Great encouragement to live a morally excellent life. Lets pray together. Oh Father help us to live in ways that show our faith in You. To be more Godly. To be more loving and patient. And Father may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

2 Peter 1:3 to 4 provides a context for our reading; it says that, "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, 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 the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

I tell you God has given us everything, everything we need for life and godliness through His word, the Bible. God has called us by the gospel to His own glory and excellence. And this gospel message has granted to us His great and precious promises. Well, where else can you go to find the promise of eternal life? Where else can you go to find the forgiveness of sins? Where else can you go to learn how to live like God desires? And where else can you go to escape the corruption that is in the world?

Now because this is true, God expects you and me to be diligent in your faith, to give it your best effort. We must make living our faith in God a priority. To do that we must add some virtues to our faith! Saying that we believe and then demonstrating our faith are two different things. And sadly, many people profess faith but don't practice it. We must do better than that!

First, we must add to our faith virtue. Now virtue is moral and ethical excellence. This is a comprehensive term that refers to our morals and ethics in general. It calls us to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong. It calls us in the inner person to be everything that we ought to be. This calls for moral thinking, moral attitudes, moral relationships, and moral behaviors. God expects an excellence from his people. You remember that Peter said in 1 Peter 2 and verse 9, "But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, A holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." God is not mediocre He is excellent, and He calls His people to rise above mediocrity to a moral and spiritual excellence!

Now even in our everyday lives, God expects us to think morally excellent thoughts rather than spend our days in worldly desires. Colossians 3 verses 1 to 4 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (And) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (And) When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Now instead of complaining, coveting, and giving in to despair, God wants Christians to focus on blessings and good things. Philippians 4 and verse 8 says, "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." People admire those who have an exceptional character, virtue, uprightness, and righteousness. People appreciate purity and holiness. Employers want honest people of character. And our society, well any society, needs people of integrity and character who live honest lives.

Second, we must add to our virtue knowledge. We need a true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, knowledge that comes from the Scriptures themselves. And if everyone knew and loved the Lord Jesus, we'd see a changed world. Crime, war, chaos, and dishonesty would cease. People think ignoring God makes a better world, but they are wrong. The more people get away from God, the more confused and chaotic our society becomes. The prophet Hosea realized how devastating ignorance of God truly is. Hosea 4 and verse 6 says that, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (And) Because you have rejected knowledge, (He says) I also will reject you from being My priest. (And) Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

If we forget God and His laws, do you think we can count on God's continued blessing? Let's not fool ourselves. If we ignore the moral laws of God, we'll have a life filled with misery. You may say well, "I don't want to live by God's morals"; but I guarantee you that you will want everyone else to live by them. You want other people to be honest with you, fair with you, kind to you, and patient with you. If you think it is okay to ignore God's laws, then you have no reason to complain when people treat you in an ungodly way. They are merely following your rules. Think about it. Don't you wish that everyone followed the Lord's teaching?

Third, we must add to our knowledge self-control. Now self-control is the opposite of self-indulgence. 1 Peter 1:14 to 16 says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'you shall be holy, for I am holy.'" We must learn to say no and deny ourselves sinful pleasures and place our hope in the Lord Jesus. The pleasures of sin don't last; they will in time cause misery and ruin. And the truth and the love of God gives us courage and strength to find freedom. The Lord teaches us self-control, so that we are able to overcome temptation and break the chains of sin. Self-control leads to virtue. Self-control means that I will no longer allow what might hurt me to enslave me. I am no longer a child; I can and I will do what is right and best.

Fourth, we must add to our self-control patience. Patience or perseverance enables us to keep on keeping on in our pursuit of a godly character, now even though we may suffer for doing so. 1 Peter 2:21 to 24 says, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (And) When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but (He) continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

God sent Jesus to this earth to sacrifice His body for our sins; I cannot describe how difficult and painful His trials and crucifixion must have been. I do know, through it all, Jesus did not call for twelve legions of angels or stop His suffering. He suffered many many hours until He died. You see He never gave up on us. And all the misery and insults didn't stop Him from fulfilling the Father's will. He patiently and lovingly endured the cross by entrusting himself to His Father. When we need patience, we too should entrust our souls to the Father's hands.

Fifth, we must add to our patience godliness. Now Godliness refers to our faith put into practice. Because we believe and take God seriously, we live godly lives. Now Godliness is the devotion to God that we practice in our day-to-day walk. It's the attitude of reverence, which seeks to please God in all things. It desires a right relation with both God and others. So Godliness leads to a holy life and sets us apart from what is common or profane. Godly people work hard to be more and more like Christ.

The apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:14 to 16, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." Some folks think that because we're saved by grace, we don't have to worry about our salvation and can live any way we want and still go to heaven. Well this is not God's teaching; that's man's teaching; God expects us to repent of our sins. 2 Peter 3 and verse 9 speaks to Christians and it says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Grace doesn't open the door to sin; it closes it! Titus 2:11 to 12 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, but instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age."

Sixth, we must add to our godliness, brotherly kindness. Now "Brotherly kindness" is the that love saints should have for one another. The Lord Jesus said in John 13:34 to 5, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Brotherly love arises from our common faith in Christ, our common hope in heaven, and our common love for God. Love for Christ overflows into loving our brothers and sisters fervently from our hearts. Now this love, based on a shared relationship with Christ, can be sensed immediately even though two Christians may never have met before. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1 and verse 22, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart."

And seventh, last, we must add to our brotherly kindness love. 1 Corinthians 13:1 to 3 says that, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." God is love, and we know how to love because the Father and the Lord Jesus loved us. And without love in our hearts and lives, we can never be what God wants us to be. Loving God and others is our highest calling.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:44 to 48, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

God loved us, even before we thought to love Him. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3 and verse 16). 1 John 4 and verse 19 simply says that, "We love, because He first loved us." We love God, because Jesus loved and forgave us. We love and forgive others, because God first loved us and forgave us.

My friend how are you doing on this scale of seven virtues? Are you making your calling and election sure, or have you become blind and forgotten how God forgave you?

Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to add to our faith virtue and knowledge, self control, and patience and godliness, brotherly kindness and love. Help us to be Your children. To show forth our love for You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Peter speaks clearly about these seven virtues. He said in verses 8 to 11, "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

Now I suspect that you want to be useful to God and fruitful. I suspect you want an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord in heaven. I know I do! I want to make certain God's calling and choosing me. I don't want any surprises on Judgment Day. Well to do this we must be all the more diligent to make our calling and election sure. We don't want to forget the great price the Lord Jesus paid for our sins. We want to add to our faith the virtues that God expects from His children.

Now to add these things to your faith, you must first come to the faith. You must become a Christian by placing your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting of your sins, publicly confessing your faith, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. God washes us clean with the blood of Jesus when we're baptized. (Acts 22:16) And He wants to give us newness of life and He adds us to His church. After you become a Christian, remain faithful to the Lord, persevere. Don't let anything keep you from serving the Lord all the days of your life. Make your calling and election sure!

Well we hope that today's study about virtue has stirred you to be more diligent in your service to God. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. You can also watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! We ask that you subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. And we also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. If you get a hold of us don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

We do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, call us, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.