

Sermon 4, Making Sanctification Affordable, 2 Peter 1:5-7

Proposition: Because you've been given everything necessary to life and godliness, spend that wealth to acquire these seven moral necessities!

- I. What You Have, vv. 1-4
- II. What to Spend it on, vv. 5-7
 - A. Virtue
 - B. Knowledge
 - C. Self-Control
 - D. Perseverance
 - E. Godliness
 - F. Familial Affection
 - G. Love

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I think all of you know by now that sanctification is a costly endeavor. It's a spendy thing, this sanctification process. In fact, it requires everything you've got. You have to constantly question yourself and your own thoughts and decisions, take everything to the Lord in prayer, constantly repent, and constantly pick up after failure and move on or else remind yourself that your success is not reason to get self-righteous and surly toward the people around you. The process of getting holier is one that takes a great deal of mental, emotional, and moral effort — so much effort that we all know that the process will completely collapse without the support of an entire team of people that we call the church, plus liberal applications of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit that get us back on track.

And so, with that background, maybe exhausted by our own efforts to be good, we come this evening to Peter's crazy arithmetic of virtue. He has already told us that God has given us faith, but now he tells us to add seven major character qualities to the faith we've got. Keep adding new ways of being good to your life, the apostle tells us. I don't know about you, but for years I've sort of looked at this passage with a "thanks a lot" attitude. Really, Peter? Add seven additional character qualities? Couldn't you have spent a little more time encouraging us with what we have in Christ before hitting us over the head with our own inadequacy, reminding us of what we need to be good Christians?

But brothers and sisters, as I hope to show you tonight, this is a faulty way of reading Peter's words. The text is actually telling us how we can afford to pay the price that sanctification demands. As we will see, God has given us a gift card to which we can charge all

the costs of sanctification. He has provided us with everything we need to pay the price of adding these character qualities to our lives.

I. What You Have, vv. 1-4

Don't believe me? Then just take a quick tour with me of what the apostle tells us we have been given. As I just mentioned, the first thing we've received is faith. Faith is a grace, and thus is an effect created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It's something we received from God that allows us to trust Him implicitly. If you are a believer this evening, you have received faith from Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

But there's more. More than faith, you also have the knowledge of Christ. This is the core of Christianity. To know Jesus is what it's all about! And not only do you know Jesus. You have *everything* necessary for life and godliness. That's the key phrase I want to focus on for the rest of this sermon. That clause at the beginning of v. 3 is more pregnant with meaning than the commerce clause of the Constitution, in which the Supreme Court found a power to mandate racial equality in restaurants.¹ While our American Constitution is no doubt a majestic document, anything it has to say, any meaning it conveys, pales in comparison to the glory of Peter's proclamation that we have everything necessary to life and godliness. Brothers and sisters, this is a credit card with no limits. This is a gift card with no expiration. This is a blank check drawn on a bottomless bank account. This, family of God, is the gift that God's divine power has granted to you, to me, and to every other believer.

This is what we have. And it is from this wealth that you and I can pay sanctification's costs. What makes sanctification affordable? Simply this: We are paying for it not with capital we earned, but with capital we have been *given*.

II. What to Spend it on, vv. 5-7

You see, the verb here telling us what character qualities to add to our faith is not "add" at all. The verb literally means "to supply at one's own expense." Now, no major English translation renders it that way because that adds too many words to the sentence. "Furnish" or "supplement" or "add" is how you'll typically see it translated. But if we think of providing at our own expense, we see the glory and promise of this passage. You see, Peter tells us that we are to pay the cost of sanctification out of our own pockets. You supply these character qualities, and you do so at your own expense.

Now, preacher, you say, how is that good news? How exactly does it make sanctification affordable to tell me to supply these seven virtues at my own expense?

I'll tell you. You can afford to pay the cost of sanctification because Christ's divine power has already given you everything you need for life and godliness. You supply it at your expense, not in the sense that you cough up everything out of your own resources but in earlier sense that God has already given you what you need to grow these character qualities in your life. His gift is a true gift. If I give my brother \$50 for Christmas, then it is his \$50 to use as he sees fit. I can't

¹ *Katzenbach v. McClung*, 379 U.S. 294 (1964).

tell him, “Wait, that’s not what I was thinking!” It’s his money now, and he uses it to buy whatever he wants to buy. That’s what “gift” means. God has given you everything you need. It’s yours. And you can waste it. Some Christians do. I won’t name names, because the point here is not to make us think about other people who don’t live up to their wealth in Christ. Rather, it’s to get us to invest our own wealth in Christ wisely. You have the wherewithal to pay the cost of sanctification. God has already handed that check to you. In our Ephesians study a year ago we already saw this truth. Paul put it in the language of having every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Peter puts it in the language of having everything necessary for life and godliness. Both apostles are saying the same thing! But where Paul spends more time focusing on the reality of the gift, Peter spends more time focusing on how to use the gift. Because we have this gift of everything we need to pay the price of sanctification, you and I are called to furnish these seven qualities at our own expense. Allow me to remind you at this point that it is going to feel like your own expense. Sanctification doesn’t bring that easy feeling of spending someone else’s money. You know that what you’re spending on it is your own. It costs a lot — in fact, it costs everything you have. And at some level, where that money came from doesn’t feel relevant. It might have been earned, it might have been a gift, it might have been found on the street, but it’s all your money and parting with it can be hard. Peter makes no bones about that aspect of the Christian life. Instead, fisherman that he is, he is very forthright. “God has given you everything. Now spend everything to acquire the pearl of great price.” Just because God gave it, in other words, doesn’t make it any less yours!

Christians have noted for centuries that 2 Peter is Peter’s final effort to bring his teachings and Paul’s together. Here in the Presbyterian church, we are thoroughgoing Paulinists and stand against the allegedly “Petrine” teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and “Johannine” teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church. We focus on the reality that God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. So He did; praise Him for that! Peter doesn’t downplay that reality at all. But his emphasis falls, even more heavily than Paul’s, on the truth that now that God has given it to you, it’s yours. But with great wealth comes great responsibility. It’s from Christ; we could call that the Pauline emphasis. But it’s a gift and therefore yours; we could call that the Petrine emphasis. But both tell us the same truth, that we must take the power to live the Christian life (whom Paul identifies as the Holy Spirit) and make use of it — that we must appropriate every spiritual blessing.

So, Christian, what are you to provide out of your own pocket, the pocket that Jesus has filled up to the brim with spiritual currency?

A. Virtue

The first thing you and I are called to provide at our own expense is virtue. Now, that word has a “Catholic” ring in many of our ears. In the modern evangelical church, we don’t talk about virtue. In fact, the word only appears in the NT here and in Philippians 4:8. The Catholic tradition talks about upright moral behavior under the heading of “virtue” not so much because Scripture makes a big deal out of “virtue” as because the ancient philosophers, and especially

Aristotle, used it as a catchall ethical category. The word retains this meaning in modern English. “Virtue” simply means any and every moral excellence, and its use here shows the Greek flavor of 2 Peter. While most of the NT has a strong Jewish flavor, this particular letter sounds really Hellenistic — as shown by its use of Hellenistic terms like virtue and godliness. You and I are to pay the cost of acquiring moral excellence out of the tremendous spiritual wealth that is already ours in Christ.

In other words, we need to be people that others would describe as morally excellent. “He’s a good guy. She’s a straight arrow. I would trust them with my life.” Is that how people talk about us here at Harvest Church?

B. Knowledge

Now, let’s talk for a second about the form here. Peter repeats every virtue, in the form a ... b, b ... c, c ... d, and so on. Is he saying with psychological realism that we must acquire the virtues in the order he lists them? That we can never hope to have self-control until we have knowledge, and that we will never show familial affection until we have mastered perseverance? I don’t think so. Rather, the point is simply to show that all the virtues are interconnected, and that we can truly describe the Christian faith as beginning with faith and ending with love.

That said, what would it look like to pay the cost of acquiring knowledge? Well, I think it would look like some later nights reading theology books. It would look like using your commute to listen to Scripture, sermons, and seminary courses rather than to sports and weather. It would look like investing time as a family into family worship rather than into Netflix. It would look like being able explain any truth of the faith from Scripture to a seeker or inquirer.

Brothers and sisters, the fact that you are here listening already tells me that you are paying the price of acquiring the knowledge you need to flourish as a Christian. Don’t give up on that. Double down on it. Yes, it will cost you some sleep, some TV time, some pushback from your children who don’t want to learn the truth. But you can afford to pay that cost out of pocket because Christ has given you uncountable wealth.

C. Self-Control

The third quality Peter demands that we invest in is self-control. This is a tough one, as we all know. Moral excellence, knowledge — we major in those things. But self-control? Saying no to that second donut? Keeping your mouth shut when a family member does something stupid? Choosing the book of Genesis over *Hell’s Kitchen* or *Midsomer Murders*? Brothers and sisters, self-control comes at a very high cost of pain and self-denial. How can you afford that cost? Only by reaching deep into the gift Jesus has already given you, the gift of everything you need for life and godliness. That includes everything you need to be self-controlled. By the power of the Holy Spirit, with the faith and life and knowledge that Christ has supplied you, you can say no to yourself. You can stop sinning that favorite besetting sin. Pursue self-control!

D. Perseverance

The next quality is one that our culture is divided on. While we would definitely recognize the first three as desirable qualities, and while we continue to admire those who push through their pain to come out on the other side, there is a huge undercurrent in our culture that looks at perseverance as virtually being an evil. This quality is the ability to suffer evils without breaking down. It is not to be confused with codependency, Stockholm syndrome, or enabling abuse. Rather, it is more like patience — the ability to suffer unpleasant things, things which are truly evil, without falling into anger and malice. This quality is important because we are all going to experience things that are unpleasant and downright wrong. The person without perseverance will break down when treated this way and start trying to fight evil with evil. It takes perseverance to overcome evil with good, to remain committed to the good no matter how strong the evil seems to be.

Is perseverance only going to come at a heavy cost of suffering? Absolutely. You can't persevere without something evil to endure! But again, Peter's point here is that this is a cost you can afford to pay because of the spiritual wealth you already have. So get ready. Difficulty is coming, whether you're a Christian or not. But only if you're a believer will you have the strength to endure it without breaking down and sinning.

E. Godliness

Now, just as virtue was something you don't hear about among contemporary Protestants, so godliness is something you don't hear about among Roman Catholics. This too is a term that's not very common in Scripture, nor indeed in our circles these days, though in the Reformation and post-Reformation period our Protestant forebears used it all the time. In that era, the term particularly signified devotion to Christ as expressed in private worship, family worship, and corporate worship combined with a holy life. That is certainly part of the meaning as Peter used the term. But that is not the whole of godliness. Godliness, or *eusebia* in Greek, refers to a full-orbed obedience to the fifth commandment, preserving the honor and performing the duties belonging to everyone in their different places and relations. Honoring your parents and the officials of the state is a key part of *eusebia*. Performing your civic duties and contributing to the life of your city is another key part of it. The godly person doesn't just worship God; he also honors his parents and the state insofar as it is over him.

Do you show this godliness, this respect for authority in the home, in the civil society, and in religious affairs? It costs something to be godly. But again, it's a cost you can afford to pay because your Father has already given you everything you need.

F. Familial Affection

Well, the next character quality is *philadelphia*, or literally, brotherly love. That phrase is so common that we forget what it means. It means that you and I in the church need to love each other with the love we would ordinarily show only to our blood relatives. That's what this means. The feeling you have for your biological brother, and the care you would show to him, is to be extended to every member of the church.

The rubber meets the road on this one when your family asks you to skip church events in order to attend their events. Peter doesn't say to love God's people *more* than you love your family. But he does say to love your church family *as much as* you love your family. If your biological family trumps your church family every time, I think that's a pretty clear indication that you don't love your church family as much your biological family.

This is a high call. It costs something to bring a whole church into the same level of affection that you show to your family. If you don't have a family, or if your family has rejected you, you know you need that family love and you are happy to plug in to the church and show that kind of love here. But when your biological family is alive and well, it's only natural to prioritize them over the church. In fact, we have an English proverb that says just that: "Blood is thicker than water." In other words, the biological tie is stronger than the tie of baptism, the water that brought you into the church. And it is. But Peter is telling us that it shouldn't be. Will this call cost you something? You better believe it will. If you insist on loving the church as much as your blood family, you will face a lot of opposition, especially from your family. You'll think you must be crazy half the time. But brothers and sisters, that is what the text means when it says to pay the price of brotherly love. You can afford to bring the whole church in to experience this kind of love precisely because your wallet has been filled by Christ Himself, who left His "biological" family of the Father and Spirit in order to bring all of us as genuine sons with Him.

If you and I will truly dwell in the house of the Lord forever, we need to get started on living like it right now.

G. Love

Well, on top of all the rest of the qualities, we need to show love. This is the greatest of the virtues, the one that sums them all up.

We were just talking about brotherly love — that is, loving your church family the way you love your biological family. But of course, as we all know, the Christian precept is bigger even than that. God doesn't just call us to love our own. He calls us to love everybody. That is the Christian call — nothing less. At the very least, even if you can't delight in every last human being and make them your best friend, you must wish well to everyone and do what you can according to your place and calling to bless everyone.

Does that sound even harder than loving your church family? Of course it does! The other virtues are merely facets of this one master virtue, for to love is to fulfill the law. Does it cost something? Of course! It cost Jesus His life, and it won't cost you any less.

But you can love freely because you have been loved freely. Jesus paid it all. Now He's filled your pockets and asks you to pay it all. You and I must love not only each other but the rest of humanity.

Can you do that? Can you love, for Him? You have everything you need. You can afford to. In fact, I should say, you can't afford not to. Amen.

