



# WHAT IS THE PLACE OF EFFORT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

2 P e t e r 1 : 5 - 1 1

## INTRO - What is the Place of Effort in the Life of a Christian?

This passage of Scripture answers a question about the place of effort in the life of the Christian. Let's think our way through that at the outset, and then that will inform our thoughts as we examine this passage of Scripture.

We know that we did not and cannot earn salvation by anything we do or have done. No effort, no striving, no amount of self-improvement will ever make God look down and say "Ah - there is one who has made himself good enough for me to save! If only there were a few more like him!" No, we did not and cannot earn salvation by anything we do or have done.

After we believe, after we have been saved and redeemed by God, we are to rest in Christ. In Heb 4:11, it says that we are to "*strive to enter that rest.*" Why, because the work is done. We didn't do it, and we can't add to it. Salvation is a complete work that we receive.

We rest in this salvation, AND yet, at the same time, after we are born again, there is effort required.

- In 1 Tim. 4:7, we are told to discipline ourselves.
- In Phil. 3:14, we are instructed to strive as an athlete striving to

win the prize.

- In 2 Tim. 2:6, it says that we are to *"Make an effort as a farmer who works hard in order to receive some of the reward from the vineyard."*
- In Eph. 6: *"We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the principalities and the powers of this evil age."*
- And in 1 Cor. 9:27 Paul says, *"I put my body in subjection so that after preaching to others I myself might not be cast away."*

These all make sense when we remember Paul's words in Phil 2:12-13, where he instructs us to: *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God working in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

And so the Christian life is not a life without effort. We are commanded to make efforts. But listen, very importantly, what powers these efforts is not our intelligence, our intuition, or our ingenuity. It is not our natural internal drive or our Protestant Work Ethic. God empowers our efforts through his Spirit, and only in this way can we accomplish what he commands us to. As he empowers us and as we respond to him, he changes us. This is called sanctification. This means we are becoming more like Jesus. So, in the end, **it is not striving with human effort that makes the difference, but the complete surrender of obedience to God that aligns our wills with God's will and supplies us with God's power.**

Douglas Moo puts it like this: "Is not our sanctification something that God does in us by his Spirit? How can Peter, then, make it seem that our own effort is crucial? The answer to these questions comes in finding the right biblical balance between *God's contribution and our own* in the process of becoming holy. The New Testament makes crystal clear that both are necessary if we are going to make any progress at all in godly Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Moo, Douglas J.. 2 Peter, Jude (The NIV Application Commentary Book 18) (p. diligence76). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

## 1. Effort is Required

*5 For this very reason...*

Let's review: For which very reason? The answer is in vv. 3-4: *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 from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

By God's will, we have everything we need to live our lives and everything needed to grow in godliness. Through God's promises, we have become partakers of the divine nature, and because of this, we have escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. Please understand the importance of this, or you will miss the point of what he says next.

God has granted everything to us. He is *calling* us. He is *causing* us to share in his innate powers and properties. In other words, the work of salvation is done, and we did not do it. And that is important, and it is (back to v5) for *this* very reason we should...

*make every effort to supplement your faith...*

"For this very reason," meaning that God has provided us with everything we need and, as a result, we have escaped the corruption of the world because of sinful desire. Therefore, since God has provided everything we need, we are to seek spiritual maturity by fully accessing what he has made available to us.

If you have come to faith, if you have been born again, this faith is not something that you created or conjured up from within you. Faith is something you discovered you had; it was a gift that you received.

You were a spiritually dead person, as it says we all are in Eph. 2:1,

so you did not then, as a spiritually dead person, decide to have faith and then—POOF—you had faith. This is because, as a spiritually dead person, you were incapable of making a choice that honoured God. What actually happened is that faith was given to you as a gift, and then you had it. It is all at once a gift you receive, a gift you possess, and a gift you immediately begin to use to glorify the giver.

But here it says we are to supplement this gift of faith with our own efforts to obtain what only he can supply. This is very “deep end” stuff. Let's try an illustration.

### **Mitchell's Preparations**

Consider the discipline required of an athlete. A few years ago, my nephew Mitchell devoted himself to high-level soccer. He possesses a natural, unearned gift of athletic ability.

Yet, to steward that gift properly, he subjects himself to a rigorous daily regimen. When I asked him about his preparations, he detailed a highly disciplined schedule of specific dietary restrictions, calculated hydration, and intense cardiovascular and strength training. He structures his entire week around his physical readiness for game day.

The point of all this, for the purpose of this sermon, has nothing to do with soccer. It has to do with an ethos, a sense of personal commitment, of dedication to a purpose.

Mitchell has been given a gift: the gift of athletic talent. He had nothing to do with obtaining this gift. He did not will himself to be athletic; that's just how God made him. Now, he could just enjoy that gift and be proud of his talent, showing off a trick or two here and there and not doing much else with it. But if he did that, he wouldn't be a very good steward of his gift, right? So instead, his approach is to supplement his gift with effort in order to make the most of the gift!

He ended his detailed response to me with an emphatic invitation:

"Ask me about anything!"

Imagine with me, if you will, if we took the gift of salvation and the condition of our souls as seriously and specifically as my nephew takes preparation for soccer. Imagine if we understood that we've been given the gift of faith and that this is something that is not just a possession to own but a living thing that is to be supplemented and pursued for the sake of our own joy. Imagine if we knew what the goal was and then oriented our lives so that everything we did was for the purpose of reaching that goal. Imagine if we approached it according to the example that Paul sets for us in Phil. 3:12-15:

*12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, [Why?] because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.*

And then imagine if we told people about this goal and our firm dedication to it and the purpose of our joyful efforts and ended with the phrase with which Mitchell ended his message to me: "Ask me about anything!" He loves his gift and wants others to know about it!

So, if you've been given a gift, the gift of faith, what should you do with it? Don't just let it perish by neglect; don't allow it to wither or stagnate. Care for it and pay attention to it. It is not something merely to enjoy and admire; it is something that must be supplemented if you expect it to grow and thrive.

And this effort, properly understood, is not ultimately drudgery; it is joy! My mom keeps orchids. She loves to care for these beautiful flowers by paying attention to their soil conditions and the relative humidity in the room, by observing the health of the plant and making adjustments as needed.

The same is true of our faith. Remember that the faith we possess was obtained or allotted, not earned. We know from Eph. 2:8-10 that faith is a gift: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" And this is a gift without which it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) Your faith was not won by your exertion. We were born from above, it says in John 1:13, "*not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

So we've been given this gift of faith that required no initial effort on our part to obtain. But what is equally true is that effort is required for this faith to flourish. You must engage the supplements—the water, the sunlight, the fertilizer—in supplying your faith with the right temperature and humidity, the right environment that will encourage its growth.

What Peter seems to be saying here is that this gift, which is alive, will not facilitate its own flourishing. If you are truly born again, God will sustain your faith to the end. But if you want a better quality of life, a better quality of faith, you must give every advantage to your faith by supplying it with these things...

*5 For this very reason, make every effort to 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.*

Supplement your faith with...

## **1. Virtue**

With moral goodness or excellence as defined, of course, not by the standards of the world but by the standards of God's word.

## **2. Knowledge**

Remember that Peter's concern here is not strictly that we study theology and get to know the finer points of doctrine. We must always seek both to know *about* God with our minds and actually *know God* in the context of an experiential relationship.

## **3. Self-Control**

This is one of the fruits of the Spirit that enables us to avoid succumbing to temptations. The concept of self-control is not so much about gritting your teeth and "controlling your self" but allowing the Spirit of God, of whose divine nature we have partaken, to be in the driver's seat.

## **4. Steadfastness**

How do we become steadfast? It's by patiently enduring trials.

## **5. Godliness**

As we seek God and obtain knowledge of him, we become more like him as we become more like Jesus. This is by the power of God, who called us and invited us to participate in his glory and his excellence.

## **6. Brotherly Affection**

We feel a special kind of love for our flesh and blood family, but the Bible makes it clear that we should feel that same kind of special love for those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **7. Love**

Love is the overarching quality and the foundation of all the others. (See 1 Cor. 13 for a description of this love.)

There is Peter's list of qualities we must pursue with effort so that our faith is supplemented and supplied with everything it needs to flourish.

## 2. Effort Will Yield Results

*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.*

"IF these qualities are yours..." Now, let's think through this carefully. We might understand that faith is a gift, but we might think that these other virtues listed are things we need to conjure up from inside ourselves, out of the store of our own goodness and righteousness. But that's not how it works. We can see that a number of the qualities listed are fruits of the Spirit, meaning they are imputed to us, given to us, embedded in us by way of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. The virtues that Peter speaks of are not virtues we need to dig deep and find within ourselves. However, these are virtues to which we have full access. The point is not whether we have access. We have access. The point is what we will do with that access.

We can grow in these qualities. They can be increasingly present in our lives. And if we are not growing in them, in other words, if we refrain from supplementing our faith with the qualities listed above, we might become one of two things:

### 1. Ineffective

We will accomplish less for the Lord than we should. We will, in a sense, not live up to our potential. The state of being unemployed is sometimes due to circumstances outside of someone's control, but at other times it is due to someone not wanting to work. Such a person would like to "just enjoy life" without contributing to their own livelihood. The Bible calls such a person a sluggard. We can be spiritual sluggards as well, and if we are, we will be ineffective.

### 2. Unfruitful

What does it mean to be unfruitful? If you have been born again as the Bible describes, you are a tree that is meant to bear fruit. So if you are unfruitful, you are not yielding the fruit you ought to yield.

You are a tree that is not producing according to its nature. Either that or you are not the type of tree you claim to be.

Recall Psalm 1:1-3:

*1 Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

*2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*3 He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.*

Those who delight in the law of the Lord, in "God's words about God's ways," are like trees planted by streams of water that yield fruit in their season. Is that you? Are you yielding fruit?

The contrast here again is between knowing about God and actually knowing God. Merely knowing about God will not yield spiritual fruit; only actually knowing God can do that. Knowledge of God is ineffective and insufficient to yield the transformation that comes from genuinely knowing God.

Knowing facts about God is good. And intellectual knowledge is easier to obtain. But the experiential knowledge, well... that requires some discipline and sacrifice and submission. And this is why God does not reward those who seek only knowledge about him, but those who seek him—HIM, his Spirit, his person. And this indeed requires effort.

R.C. Sproul made an interesting comment on this passage. "There are churches that project a profile of a Christian as someone who

does not dance, go to movies, or drink and smoke, as if these were major matters in the kingdom of God. *It is much easier to refrain from moviegoing than to acquire a character known for patience, kindness, and meekness.*"<sup>2</sup> It's true, isn't it? Isn't the Christian life too often portrayed as one where we constantly labour to avoid sinful things? And we *are* to avoid sinful things, but our efforts must be applied primarily toward obtaining what is truly good—what God says is good—and not to avoiding what is bad. It is primarily effort to pursue, not effort to avoid.

This, by the way, is what Phil. 4:8 is teaching. *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.* The Christian life is primarily about pursuing the good, not about avoiding the bad. And you can tell this is the case by what Peter writes next.

### **3. Benefit 1: You Will Never Fall**

*9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*

Blindness here, of course, is not referring to physical blindness but to spiritual blindness. If you lack the qualities he's just listed, you won't see things clearly. If you lack these qualities, you've forgotten a very important truth.

If we forget what Christ has done for us, that he cleansed us from our former sins, we will have no positive vision of what we are to do to increase our faith in him. We become shortsighted, thinking "Well, I have faith and that's enough. It will get me to heaven, so I guess

---

<sup>2</sup> Sproul, R.C.. 1–2 Peter: An Expositional Commentary (p. 194). Ligonier Ministries. Kindle Edition.

that's taken care of." If we think this way, we are shortsighted.

We look forward to the future benefits of salvation while overlooking the benefits in the present. The Christian life is not a bunch of waiting around. We don't need to wait until after we die to experience eternal life. We can begin to experience eternal life already today. How? By doing what Peter writes about in this letter, by supplementing our faith with the qualities he lists.

*2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.*

What a sweet promise he is making here! If you practice these qualities, you will never fall!

The biblical author James tells us that faith that doesn't result in any good works proves itself to be dead. Just as you would look at a person and if that person didn't eat or breathe or move, you would know they are dead. Faith is the same way: if your faith doesn't eat or breathe or move, there is no life in it, and consequently, there is no spiritual life in you.

In saying this, he has no desire to invoke a type of spiritual paranoia, where you constantly doubt whether or not you are saved. Far from it. He wants us to examine ourselves, but not become self-focused. That is never the solution. Rather, we are to engage in this ongoing process of confirming our calling and election by practicing the qualities listed above.

In the United States, they occasionally hold confirmation hearings for federal judges. The purpose of a confirmation hearing is to bring a person nominated for a position before a panel that will examine them. These people bring every type of examination and analysis to bear on that person to determine whether or not he or she is worthy. Testimony will be given, evidence will be presented. And everything will be thoroughly examined until, in the end, there is no doubt as to

whether the candidate is fit for office.

The same is true of our lives. We are to be diligent in confirming our calling and election. We are to be diligent in examining the evidence, in bringing witnesses for and against to see whether we possess the real thing or are presenting a counterfeit.

What is it that we are to confirm?

1. **Our calling** - Each person who is born again at one point received a divine invitation to embrace salvation. Can you confirm? Did you receive this invitation?
2. **Our election** - Each person who is born again and received a divine invitation to embrace salvation was chosen to receive that invitation by God. Can you confirm? Were you chosen to receive this invitation by God?

Now, when we are commanded to practice the qualities listed, you need to know that this means we *can* practice these qualities:

- Virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.
- These are all qualities to be practiced. Practice requires effort. Effort cannot save us, so what is the purpose of effort?
- What does it do for us? What does it accomplish?
- The result will be that we stand firm to the end: "You will never fall."
- Peter tells us that practicing these qualities will ensure that we never fall.

Now, what we are commanded to do here, to confirm our calling and election, might induce a bit of fear. Because, in some cases, people might do this and discover that they are not saved, not truly born again! They thought they were, but they actually weren't. Now, if this happens to you, I want you to know that it is a great blessing, a merciful discovery! Because that in itself could be your invitation to

trust Christ and place your faith in him.

But let me also address those of you who are generally confident of your salvation.

Have you ever felt that tension or gone through a time when you're really wrestling with this question? Am I saved? Am I not? Am I falling? Have I fallen? If you have asked these questions, what can you take from this passage? How do we become more confident in the security of our salvation? How can we confidently confirm our calling and election?

For some believers, this tension, worry or anxiety about their salvation can be nearly constant. This is probably because you find that you don't always measure up perfectly. On some days, you're just a lousy example of a human being. (Listen, we all have these days.) What should you do? On those days, you have a long talk with God.

First, you must remember that you have been cleansed from your former sins. This is not a future promise. It's not, "Someday you will be cleansed from your sins." This is a present reality. So when you doubt it, proclaim it to be true nonetheless, because it is. Your salvation is secure, so rest in that. But your sanctification is still in progress, so...

Second, when you have days like this, find a private space where you can talk out loud to God and articulate the struggle with words. You wrestle with these thoughts and feelings, and you say, "Lord, I want to please you. And I find that I often don't practice these qualities. Sometimes, they seem out of reach. In fact, sometimes I desire to do the opposite, to do what I know is sinful!" And then you do this: tell him, out loud, those specific sins that you struggle to put to death. And then just beg for his mercy: "Please help me!" I can promise you, brother or sister, that this will be effective!

Why? Because this is part of confirming your calling and election.

You'll know you are his because when you struggle, you cry out, and when you cry out to him, he helps you. The spiritual power is there, and it comes from the Holy Spirit who is in you.

As you do this, you will, over time, become not lazy or complacent, but more assured, more secure, and always doing less of the wrong kind of striving. You will understand how to practice all that God offers you from the store of his great riches, not strive to earn his love or strive to compensate for your sin.

And then after a while, you will have walked with the Lord for so long and confirmed your calling and election so often that the process I just described no longer takes weeks or months or years of struggle. Because if you persist in that process of honestly wrestling with your sin before the Lord, and asking him to empower your obedience, you will come to know him in a new way.

You might still have a thought, a doubt flash across your mind, but then you're going to think about all the ways that God has been faithful to you. And you're going to think about all the ways you've seen him change you over time, causing you to become more like Jesus. We become more like Jesus by God's grace, by his gift of faith to us, and our efforts to supplement that faith with what he commands us and then enables us to do.

Douglass Moo puts it like this: "God elects; but I must believe. God preserves me until the end; but I must 'put to death the misdeeds of the body' if I hope to find eternal life... Both are taught in Scripture, and we must affirm both if we are to remain biblical."<sup>3</sup>

The first benefit is this: if we practice these qualities, we will never fall. The second benefit is found in v11

---

<sup>3</sup> Moo, Douglas J.. 2 Peter, Jude (The NIV Application Commentary Book 18) (p. 81). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

## 4. Benefit 2: Entrance Into the Eternal Kingdom

*11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

In this way, by practicing these qualities, there will be RICHLY (abundantly) provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom. A means of entering, a path, a door.

Picture salvation as an open door. As soon as you pass through the door, you are saved. You become a citizen of the eternal kingdom. And as you learn the customs and practices of this new kingdom to which you belong, you become a more fitting citizen. You are being assimilated, but into the very best collective (not like the Borg).

It's difficult to find a fitting metaphor. When you enter the door of salvation, you are saved and secure. But you must not remain on the entry carpet inside the door! You must explore this great salvation as if it were a large house with many rooms. You must press into this great salvation because there are endless discoveries ahead, and they are all wonderful!

As we press in, we are becoming more fully citizens of heaven as we practice these things. Every time we "practice these things" that Peter mentions, we are becoming more like what we will be when we are fully perfected. Our lives become a little less temporal and a little more eternal when we practice these things. You step through the door a little more.

All that to say: **God will save you without your help, but when it comes to changing you, he expects a lot of participation.**

## CONCLUSION

Let me end with a caution. If you see what Peter writes here as a command to work hard to win salvation, you will be miserable. You

won't be able to accomplish it at all. And why is that? Why are some people striving so hard at these things and unable to accomplish them?

It may be because you are not born again, and therefore, do not have God's Spirit living in you. Or it may be that you are saved and have the Holy Spirit, but haven't learned how to rely on him and access his power for your life.

Some of the most miserable people in the world are those who are trying to be holy apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. They don't have the power to do what the Bible tells them to do. They see that the Bible tells them to do it, but they don't have the spiritual power to do it, and that's very frustrating.

If you are not born again and do not have the Holy Spirit living in you, you will try to emulate the qualities listed in these verses without any spiritual power. And that will make you miserable because you'll strive and strive and strive to do this, but you won't have the power to do it because you're not filled with the Holy Spirit.

If you recognize yourself in this description, I urge you to call out to God this morning! The power for living that you are seeking is available. If you call on his name, he will answer you, he will save you, and you will receive the power of his Spirit to obey his commands.

There are others of you who have faith, but it is still small, still the size of a mustard seed. First, I want to assure you that this is enough! But you might find the command to "practice these qualities" very difficult. And that is probably because you don't understand the place of effort in the Christian life.

Your salvation was won by the efforts of Jesus Christ, not by your own efforts. That work is done! You don't have to do it, and if you wanted to, you can't! No amount of "practicing these things" can obtain salvation or keep you saved. The power to practice these

things came from God and continues to come from him. You are already saved; stop trying to save yourself!

But here's what your efforts can do... Your efforts can make your life in Christ a richer experience. Your efforts will bring you, as C.S. Lewis put it, "Further up and further in" to, as Peter puts it here, "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Summarizing this teaching, Spurgeon said this: "God has been diligently at work with you—now you must diligently work together with Him."<sup>4</sup>

God gives us the ability to practice these qualities, but it is our responsibility to use the power he has given us to enter more fully into his kingdom. If you have not yet passed through the door of salvation, that door is open to you today! I'd be happy to lead you through, as would many others here this morning. If you have passed through the door of salvation, praise be to God! Make every effort to enter more fully into your salvation! And we will do it together as we journey along in faith in this local body.

LET'S PRAY

---

<sup>4</sup> Spurgeon, Charles. Commentary on 1 & 2 Peter and Jude (Spurgeon Commentary Series) . Titus Books. Kindle Edition.

## Discussion

### Introduction

1. How does the Bible balance the tension between resting in Christ's finished work and the commands to "strive," "discipline," and "wrestle"?

### Effort is Required

2. We are commanded to "supplement" our faith. Why does a living faith require intentional supplements—like the right environment and care—to truly flourish?

3. How does the biblical concept of "self-control" relate to allowing the Holy Spirit to be in the "driver's seat" of our lives?

### Effort Will Yield Results

4. What does it look like practically to be a "spiritual sluggard," and how does this lead to an ineffective Christian life?

5. What difference does it make if the Christian life is primarily about actively pursuing the good things God offers us, rather than just constantly labouring to avoid what is bad?

### Benefit 1 (You Will Never Fall)

6. How can we actively "confirm our calling and election" without falling into a state of "spiritual paranoia"?

7. Why is it actually a "merciful discovery" if someone examines their life and realizes they might not truly be saved?

## **Benefit 2 (Entrance Into the Eternal Kingdom)**

8. How does practicing these qualities allow us to experience the benefits of eternal life today, rather than just waiting until we die?

9. How does the metaphor of exploring a "large house with many rooms" illustrate the ongoing process of pressing into our great salvation?

## **Conclusion**

10. Why are people who try to pursue holiness without being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit often some of the most miserable and frustrated people in the world?

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, lead pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit: [cbcilderton.ca/contact-us](http://cbcilderton.ca/contact-us)

