



“You Can Live the Christian Life”

Kevin Presley

Many people put off or even refuse the decision to become a Christian because they believe they won't be able to live the Christian life. *What's the use in even beginning if I will simply be overwhelmed and drop out of the Christian race?* Recently, a friend and preaching colleague and myself were doing some mission work together in another country. We visited a woman at her shop every day because she was interested in learning about the gospel. She understood that she was lost in sin and this seemed to bother her. She understood that she could be forgiven of all her sins and be saved. She understood what she needed to do to obey the gospel and begin living the Christian life.

So, each day we would return and urge her to act upon her belief and be baptized, but each day she would delay and put the Lord off until perhaps the next day. We kept going back and asking her why she was hesitating to obey the gospel. She finally conceded that she had so many issues and problems in her life that she didn't feel she could hold out and successfully live the Christian life. She believed that all these problems had to be sorted out and reconciled before she could commit to following the Lord Jesus. On one hand, she understood that there is a cost to be counted if one would be the Lord's disciple, and that's good to realize. Changes will have to be made and priorities will have to be rearranged if one wishes to be a Christian. But she felt overwhelmed and powerless to even begin.

I think she represents many people today who like the idea of being saved, but don't know where to begin in living a faithful life. So, they think, what's the use? That may even describe you. It's one thing to know what you *should* do; it's quite another to actually *do* it. We took that dear lady to the passage that I want to study with you today and perhaps show you, as we tried to show her, that the Christian life can indeed be lived. There is not only power to become the child of God, but there is power available to live as a child of God. The apostle Peter, in this wonderful passage, shows us how it can be done.

II Peter 1:1-11 “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His

divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Think about what Peter says. *IF you do these things, you will not be barren or unfruitful, nor will you ever stumble.* That is, you’ll never stumble into sin and ultimately perdition if you follow this pathway to perfection. Not sinless perfection, but completeness, maturity, and strength in Christ Jesus. I will guarantee you today that if you truly do the things that Peter tells us here, you CAN live the Christian life. Let’s take a look at these things in more detail.

We often refer to this list as ‘the seven Christian graces.’ They are not platitudes or mere suggestions. They are not tips for a better Christian life. Rather, they are the path to the kind of perfection that Christ desires for us to eventually have in our lives as we grow in grace. By *perfection*, I mean *maturity, completeness*. Peter says that if these characteristics abound in our lives, we will never fall. We will not only finish the Christian life but do so in abundance and victory. Many are afraid to become a Christian because they won’t be able to live the Christian life. Others who have been baptized see no need to live the Christian life because as Peter suggested, they are spiritually blind and have forgotten that they were at one time purged from their old sins.

But not only must the Christian life be pursued and faithfully lived if we are to inherit heaven in the after while, but it CAN be lived. With faith in Christ as a foundation and a strong desire and diligent work, this life can be abundantly lived NOW, and heaven can be ours. One of the reasons many flounder and fail is because they don’t move beyond the beginning and pursue these things that Peter lists in this wonderful passage. If you stop and think about what the apostle Peter is telling us here, faithfulness and fruitfulness can both be obtained by any Christian. It is if we fail to continue adding these seven characteristics to our lives that he warns we will stumble into sin and ultimately, eternal perdition. We must see Peter’s words as a warning. He is shoring up the believers to whom he is writing against the attacks of false teachers and their gnostic doctrines which would lead them away from the true and pure knowledge of God to a false sense of knowledge promised by these false teachers. There are many today who would tell you that it is impossible for a Christian to fall from grace and be lost. But Peter plainly warns that such IS possible and that they were in danger of doing so if they followed after false teachers and did not ground themselves in the knowledge of Christ.

II Peter 1:8-11 “For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Notice the word *if*. That makes the promise Peter offers conditional. *IF you do these things...* Literally he's saying, *If you are doing these things, you will not fall*. He says to *be diligent*. That's an imperative verb meaning *to habitually put effort* into the matter. If we day by day diligently keep adding these things to our lives, he says we will not stumble but will be surefooted and keep climbing toward the goal. But there's a flipside to that. He says if we fail to do so, we cannot expect to enter the heavenly kingdom. Peter is warning that it is possible to fall away and fail to enter heaven even though people today deny that. Although this passage does not teach the false doctrine of 'eternal security,' what it does teach is the security of the believer, and there is a difference between the two.

By the security of the believer, I mean that Peter outlines the pathway of growth in such a way that if it is followed, the believer can see it through. The believer can ultimately be saved. The Christian life is within reach and it is attainable if we follow this pathway of grace that Peter outlines. By daily supplying these characteristics to your faith, you will move from one level of maturity to the next until reaching the goal. I can promise you, based upon the authority of the word of God, if you have doubts as to whether or not you can live the Christian life, that you most certainly can and you can live it triumphantly, victoriously, and gloriously if you sequentially follow this path that Peter lays out.

First of all, in **verse 5**, Peter says *"...giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue..."* That can also be translated more clearly, *in your faith, supply moral excellence*. He is not talking about conquering one thing then moving on to something else. Rather, laying something alongside the things you already possess. Notice that Peter says it all begins with faith. This is the kind of faith that one places in Christ to save him. That faith is the foundation not only for salvation, but for the Christian life and it is consequently a very simple and straightforward thing. It means simply to obediently trust Christ. That's the kind of faith that we must have to be saved.

Now, that faith may not really know or understand much, but it believes what it knows. In other words, that faith may simply consist of the very basic yet profound knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, and that through Him our sins can be forgiven by God. That profound fact is the foundation upon which everything else must be built, but everything else may come later. The faith that leads to salvation is a very simple thing.

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

That means that faith is our ground or confidence in the things we cannot see and the promises that we've not yet obtained or received.

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

When we obey the gospel, we do so with a very rudimentary and simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. A child-like faith. You don't generally come to Christ with a great knowledge, but with a very simple knowledge. And you believe and you trust what you DO know. If you're willing to place enough faith in Christ to unconditionally follow and obey Him, though you may not know at that point where that path will ultimately lead through life, you can begin the Christian life. For everything that will come after is built upon that faith as a foundation. If you don't have that faith as a foundation, then everything else we talk about today is meaningless. You begin with a simple foundational faith in Jesus.

Notice again that with that faith as a foundation, Peter says we must begin adding things in the order that he names them. The word *add* here really means *to bring alongside* and the intensity of this verb means *to heap it up in abundance, to lavishly supply* the thing alongside your faith. So, alongside our faith, we are to add virtue or moral excellence. By this, he means that we are to have the moral excellence or virtue to do what we know by faith to do. Again, we don't know very much when we come to Christ, but virtue means that we eagerly do the things that we DO know to do. Ironically, some fail to do what they know to do because they're afraid they're not doing what they don't know to do. In other words, we run ahead of ourselves and become intimidated and overwhelmed at the prospect of a Christian life because of the unknown before us. Peter says that what you know about now is doing what you DO know to do.

For example, Peter said to those on the Day of Pentecost, **“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38)**. Do you think that all those people had degrees in theology and that they all knew the deep truths of redemption and sanctification? Do you think the 3,000 who obeyed the gospel in baptism that day understood even a fraction of a portion of the things that were ahead of them? That they would learn even in the few days to follow? Of course not. But the Bible says that those who gladly received Peter's word—that Jesus was the Christ—were baptized. They acted upon what they understood Peter told them to do. They WERE baptized without delay, as soon as they understood that's what they needed to do to be saved, and they were added to the number of disciples. They immediately did what they then knew that God expected them to do.

That's the kind of moral excellence or virtue that Peter refers to. You may believe, but you've failed to step out and be baptized to have your sins forgiven. You may be waiting because of all the things you DON'T know. Friend, you need to stop waiting and do what Christ has commanded you to do, because of what comes next. **“...to virtue knowledge...”** You must know something to have faith, but the knowledge that Peter speaks of in this passage is the knowledge that grows. It is the ongoing attainment of knowledge that grows wider and deeper as time goes on. I've met people who haven't even gotten past baptism because they don't understand the book of **Revelation**. They want to learn about prophecy or church doctrine. I've sat across the kitchen table from people in Bible study who I couldn't even get to stop and think about what it takes to become a Christian and be converted because they were bound and determined to know what the mark of the beast is or to understand Daniel's seventy weeks or Ezekiel's vision of the wheel. They claim that because they can't understand all that they want to understand about the Bible that they're not ready to be baptized.

Matthew 25:29 “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.”

In other words, you can't expect a deep knowledge of the Bible until you have the faith and virtue to take care of the simple things first. Why should God give you more if you do nothing with what He HAS given you? But when you have the diligence to do what you DO understand in simple, beginning faith, then and only then will your understanding be open to more. So, don't make the mistake of failing to obey what you know to do because of the things you don't know. Add to your faith virtue, then you can begin adding knowledge—that is, growing in the knowledge of Christ. As time goes by, your knowledge will grow deeper and deeper as you continue putting into practice what you learn along the way. That kind of growing and yielding spirit will only lead to greater, deeper, and much more vast knowledge. Then in **verse 6**, Peter says, **“to knowledge self-control...”** Self-control is often a real challenge for the Christian. The temptations of the old life rear their head and the old appetites pull against us. But by

adding to faith obedience and to our obedience the ongoing and growing knowledge of Christ, as we grow in that knowledge, what we'll find is that it becomes easier to control our passions and to restrain ourselves from the works of the flesh.

Paul said in **II Corinthians 3:18** that as we look into the word of God, ***“beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, (we) are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*** When we grow in our knowledge of Christ, we will grow in the likeness of Christ. You know, it's pointless to talk to a sinner about self-control. You can't reform a sinner. You can't take a man who is living in sin outside of Jesus Christ and clean up his life and rid it of sin. It will not work. **Romans 6** illustrates that until one dies in his spirit to sin, sin will reign in that person's mortal body. That's why you can't be saved merely by trying to clean up your life. That's getting the cart before the horse. You have to yield to Christ in gospel obedience, and then and only then by His power, HE can clean up your life. That's why Peter says that temperance or self-control comes after faith, virtue, and knowledge. Then he says, ***“to self-control perseverance...”*** Self-control is not something that one practices just once or once in a while; rather it becomes a way of life. First one resolves to be pure. Then comes that struggle and that difficult work of controlling our mind and body, bringing it under submission in order to become pure and holy. Until finally, self-control begins to become a way of life for the maturing Christian. What I'm saying is that it becomes easier. Easier to restrain ourselves from evil. Like a person who goes on a diet. It requires more diligence at the first, but as it becomes a habit or lifestyle, the temptation lessens, and it becomes more natural for us to control our desires and impulses. It might be very difficult for you right now to imagine yourself laying aside the sin that is in your life. But if you come to the Lord Jesus Christ in a humble, simple, obedient attitude of faith and you do what Peter says right here, you will find those temptations will start to be replaced by the desire to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 6 says next, ***“...to perseverance godliness...”*** Remember that earlier, Peter said that God has given us *all things that pertain to life and godliness (verse 3)*. In other words, He has given us a way to reach this state of godliness or Godlikeness. And that is, by adding these graces to our lives. In the process of all of this, we are becoming more and more like God in our character and way of life. We are becoming *partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (verse 4)*. He says in **verse 7** that we add ***“to godliness brotherly kindness...”*** We become more like God and begin to view others through the eyes of God. That causes us to love our brothers and sisters like God loves them. No wonder Jesus said, ***“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)***.

He finishes in **verse 7**, ***“...and to brotherly kindness love.”*** The crowning virtue of all, agape love. This type of love is not a sentiment or feeling. It is certainly not an acceptance of sin or evil, as people often define love today. No, we're talking about a Godlike love. The supreme characteristic of those who are like Him. To love Him with all we have and all we are, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This type of perfect, heavenly love is the perfection of the work of the gospel in our hearts and lives. It is the summit of Christian growth and behavior when all that we are and all that we do is borne out of that kind of Godlike love.

Friend, that could be your life. You CAN live the Christian life. You live it one step, one day at a time. But it begins with simple faith and acting upon that simple faith in simple gospel obedience. Then letting the sanctifying word of God go to work in your heart and life, shaping you day by day into the image of Jesus and of God Himself.

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