

The Fruit of Spiritual Progress

2 Peter 1:10-11

Wooden puzzles are one of the small joys of my life. Ever since I was a kid I've found satisfaction in trying to solve puzzles. The puzzle I'm holding was a Christmas present from my mother-in-law a few years back. This puzzle is interesting: there are 8 small pieces and 12 large pieces; altogether there are 48 magnets that hold the puzzle together. When I opened my Christmas present from Brenda's mom and held it in my hands, there was no doubt what I was supposed to do. I was supposed to take it completely apart and put it back together again. This puzzle isn't particularly hard; it only took about an hour to put back together.

Sometimes we approach the Scriptures with this same mindset. When we come across a passage or a doctrine that seems like an enigma or a paradox, we view it as a puzzle to solve. The doctrines surrounding predestination are an example of this. People who love theological puzzles think, "This is great. I'm going to spend weeks and months and years trying to figure out how God's sovereignty fits with human responsibility." Some people become so obsessed trying to figure out this puzzle that the doctrine of predestination becomes too important; it is used to answer questions it was never intended to answer.

On the other hand, people who don't love theological puzzles think, "I'm going to ignore that doctrine because it's too confusing and divisive." But that's not healthy either because no Scripture or doctrine is irrelevant. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable. . ." (2 Timothy 3:16). We need to understand the profitability of Scriptures that tell us that God has chosen us.

But what if doctrines related to God calling and choosing us aren't a puzzle to be solved? What if they are a gift to be received - a gift that gives us courage and security in our relationship with God even if we don't completely understand how they fit with human responsibility? That is my strong conviction. We do need a coherent theology; we shouldn't have all sorts of contradictions in our theology. But I don't believe that God expects us to "solve the puzzle of predestination." I believe we can experience the profitability of Scriptures that mention God calling and choosing us by paying attention to the point that the author was making. Part of the discipline and humility we need in Bible study is to notice what questions the author is answering. This perspective will guide our discussion of 2 Peter 1:10-11 which mentions how God has called and chosen us.

Last week's passage, 2 Peter 1:5-9, stressed ***our responsibility*** in the process of spiritual growth. We saw that we are called to cooperate with the grace of God in our lives by cultivating certain virtues. We "apply all diligence" in costly ways so that we become people who are full of moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, and love. If these qualities "are ours and are increasing," we will be useful and fruitful for the cause of Christ in this world.

Today we consider the next two verses in 2 Peter 1. These verses stress the fruit we will experience in our lives if we are diligently cultivating these virtues. In this context we read:

10 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;
11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

In these two verses Peter tells us three aspects of the fruit of seeking God diligently. The first one has to do with the confirmation of God's calling/choosing us.

Confirmation of God's calling/choosing us. (2 Peter 1:10a) Notice how this confirmation is a byproduct of our diligence.

10 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;

Peter wanted his readers to be certain that God had "called and chosen" them. When God calls you, He gives a compelling invitation: "Come to Me. . . Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." When He chooses you, He designates that He wants you to be His own. Some people understand this calling and choosing in a corporate sense: God calls and chooses all believers in Jesus Christ. I understand it more in an individual sense: God calls and chooses specific individuals to be His own. With either understanding, we are suppose to live with the conviction that God has initiated a relationship with us and wants us. As believers, we're not a bother or a distraction to God.

We are tempted to view this as a puzzle to solve - trying to figure out how God could choose me AND how I have to exercise faith (i.e. choose Him). Instead, I think, we should let our hearts leap with joy with the prospect that we are wanted and loved.

Notice how we gain this confidence: Peter tells us to "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you." He is following up His statement in verse 5 to "apply all diligence" in cultivating virtues such as self-control and love. Peter is talking about this same diligence and this same pursuit when he says to "be all the more diligent to make certain about [God's] calling and choosing you."

In other words, this certainty and confirmation is the byproduct of everything we've discussed the past two weeks: growing in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord, experiencing multiplied grace and peace, and being useful and fruitful as a result of the virtues we've pursued. A transformed life is convincing evidence that God has called and chosen us.

I believe that this was Jesus' point when He told His disciples just before His crucifixion, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you" (John 15:16). They were to live their lives with the confidence that

since Jesus had chosen them, their lives would bear fruit. Their mission of making disciples of all the nations wasn't some wild idea they had dreamed up; no, Jesus had called and chosen them for such a mission. That confidence kept them faithful during the most severe persecution and hardship.

Instead of living in doubt whether or not we are wanted and loved by God, we should "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing us." Sometimes this confidence is called "assurance of salvation." The book of the Bible that deals most fully and directly with assurance of salvation is 1 John. John, too, thought it important for the believer to be certain about his/her standing before God. He too taught that this confidence comes from the evidence we see in our lives. In 1 John 5:13 he wrote:

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

If you read 1 John, you will see that John had written about the importance of faith, love, and obedience. When you see these qualities in your life, you are seeing evidence that you indeed "have eternal life."

If you came to me and said, "I don't have this assurance that God has called/chosen me and that I have eternal life," I would first take you back to the gospel: Are you trusting in Jesus alone for your salvation? Do you believe that His death and resurrection are your only hope of standing before God without condemnation? Then I would encourage you to "be all the more diligent" in seeking God so that the family resemblance is unmistakable in your life. I would assure you and that Jesus isn't sitting passively in heaven waiting for you to prove yourself. He is saying to you what He said to people during His earthly ministry, "Come to Me, take My yoke upon you and learn from Me."

As a side note, having assurance of salvation as a result of noticing ways that God is transforming our lives should never make us prideful and self-sufficient; our usefulness and fruitfulness should humble us with the confirmation that "God is the One who is at work in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

The fruit of seeking God diligently:

Stability in our walk with God. (2 Peter 1:10b) The second reason for being diligent in seeking God involves the stability we can have in our walks with God.

10 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;

Peter tells us that as long as we practice (or "do") the things he has been urging in this chapter, we will "never stumble." The term stumble is used in different ways in the NT. For example, in James 3:2 James comments that "we all stumble in many ways" - meaning that each of us sins in different ways. But here in 2 Peter 1:10 Peter uses the term with the heightened sense of stumbling beyond the hope of getting up, of experiencing complete ruin in regards to our faith. As long as we continue to practice things like self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness, and love, we will remain on

sure footing. When we quit pursuing these qualities - as Peter wrote in verse 9 - we are blind or short-sighted; stumbling is just a matter of time.

There is a healthy fear of sin and spiritual ruin that should motivate us to be diligent in seeking God. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, for example, Paul explained that he took great pains to train himself so that he might practice what he preached. He said that he practiced self-control (like a runner) so that he might win the race (and not be disqualified). It's possible to live our lives with a sense of stability that comes from knowing that we are doing what we should be doing in seeking God and His will. This doesn't mean that we never sin or that we're immune to the normal "ups and downs" that accompany life in this world. But we can have stability.

Here Peter gives one more motivation for being diligent in our walk with God: "for as long as you practice [or keep doing] these things, you will never stumble." You need to be honest with yourself about whether or not you have ordered your life in such a way that your pursuit of God is "the main thing" you are doing in this world. There is a huge difference between "practicing these things" and merely dabbling in them every once in a while. Given what is at stake, we should give as much intentionality and diligence to our walk with God as any other pursuit in our lives.

***The fruit of seeking God diligently:
A lavish reception into our eternal home. (2 Peter 1:11)***

11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

The NT speaks about different aspects of "the kingdom." Jesus talked about the kingdom as something He was establishing here on earth. His basic message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom is basically wherever the King reigns. The incarnation of Christ was an invasion of sorts: the King of Israel came to Jerusalem to establish His throne forever. Most thought that the Messiah would come to establish a kingdom just like all the other kingdoms of this world - one with borders and armies. But Jesus came to establish a heavenly kingdom that transcends borders and nationalities and ethnicities. Jesus inaugurated this kingdom through His life, death, and resurrection. Whoever believes in Him becomes a citizen of this kingdom (Philippians 3:20).

But the NT also speaks of the future kingdom of God that will be established at Jesus' return. Peter seems to have this aspect of the kingdom in mind when he writes, "for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be [future tense] abundantly supplied to you." When he writes "in this way" he is referring to the way of life he's been describing - a life marked by spiritual progress, practicing virtues such as self-control and moral excellence, all the while convinced of God's calling and choosing us. Those who live that type of life can be assured of a lavish welcome into their eternal home.

He's not saying that if you work hard enough you'll earn entrance into heaven. Our salvation itself is purely a gift: "For by grace you have been saved by faith." Rather, Peter is simply saying that there is promise of great reward after we've run the race well and crossed the finish line. Another way to say it is that those who live under the reign of God in this life will be lavishly welcomed into the kingdom when it is fully established in the next life.

You probably don't realize it, but I have exercised great self-control by not using a single illustration from the Olympics the past two Sundays. This morning, however, you're not so fortunate. Scholars actually believe that Peter used terms in this verse that alluded to the homecoming that Olympic athletes received in the first century. If you won a race at the Olympic games, the people in your home town would build a special entrance in the city walls in your honor. When you came through that entrance you would receive an extravagant, lavish welcome home. This past week Olympic athletes from all over the world were welcomed home with parades and cheering and celebration.

Those celebrations pale in comparison to the way God will welcome into "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" those who have lived under His reign in this life. This is one more motivation to live as fully as possible in the kingdom here and now. This, of course, is the way of living that is advocated throughout the New Testament. Jesus, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount explained what it looks like to live in the kingdom of God here and now. When we let God reign in our lives and in our circumstances we live a life of purity, a life without revenge and retaliation; we love our enemies instead of cursing them; and we do things for God's eyes alone (pray, give, and fast). Yes, it's a life of self-denial. But it is by far the best life a human being can possibly live.

Peter, in this passage, has detailed the fruit of seeking God diligently: 1) assurance of salvation, 2) stability in our walk with God, and 3) anticipation of a lavish reception into our eternal home.

I don't know how you receive a challenge to "be all the more diligent" in your walk with God. But I think it would be a huge mistake to hear this passage as God being demanding and threatening. I think that this challenge reveals God's heart as our heavenly Father. What God wants for us is analogous to what parents want for their children.

First, God wants us to have assurance of salvation because there is great blessing in knowing that we're wanted and loved. It would grieve my heart if my kids didn't know that I "want" and love them - if they said, "Honestly, I'm not even sure my dad cares if I'm dead or alive." I think it grieves the heart of God when we don't live with the assurance that He wants us for eternity.

Second, God wants us to live solid, stable lives instead of lives characterized by stumbling and spiritual ruin. In the same way Brenda and I want our kids to discipline themselves and exert all sorts of effort so that they would learn and grow and develop qualities that would give them a stable life. God isn't punishing us by saying, "Be all the

more diligent. . .” No, He is blessing us because diligence leads to stability, fruitfulness, and usefulness.

Third, God wants us to be filled with anticipation about our eternal home. I want my kids to love coming home and being with us. When one of our girls is driving in from out of town, I can’t think of anything else; I’m looking out the window, looking down the street, etc. I want them to anticipate coming home. I give them as lavish a welcome as they can stand. God tells us that a life of discipleship heightens our anticipation about coming home to Him.

Since this fruit - assurance, stability, and a lavish reception - is the byproduct of seeking and finding God, He blesses us by telling us, “be all the more diligent. . .practice these things. . . live this way. . .”