Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Last Sunday afternoon we sung a hymn called ‘*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*.’ It is a beautiful hymn that celebrates the providence of God. It was written by a man named William Cowper. Cowper had a life filled with much sadness. His mother died when he was five years old. Of his six siblings, only one other of them survived past infancy. He was also severely bullied at school. He fell in love with his cousin, but her father did not approve of the match, and he never married after that. He became a lawyer and got a government job, but he was so terrified about having to answer questions at his job that he had a nervous breakdown. He then attempted suicide. He recovered after treatment and pastoral counselling, and he became a friend of John Newton, the Pastor and author of the hymn, ‘*Amazing Grace*.’ But he soon fell back into depression, so Newton suggested that he and Cowper write a book of hymns together. And we have two of Cowper’s hymns in our hymnal. Cowper also wrote poetry and he said that of all the gifts that God gives us, God, Himself, is the greatest. Sadly though, as Cowper grew older, depression took a deeper and deeper hold of him, to the point that though he professed faith, he had constant doubts about his eternal destination, right up until his death.

Now, what Cowper faced was extremely severe. But the fact is that all Christians struggle with doubt, sooner or later, and to one degree or another. We wonder if we really are saved. Well, in God’s providence, we have a remedy for doubt before us today. Or, to put it in a positive way, we **have instructions for how to confirm our calling and election**.

And there will be two main parts to this sermon. I will first of all explain Peter’s argument in the whole passage. This will be the **wide-angle view** of confirming our calling and election. And then we will **zoom in** on verse 5-7 and the qualities of the fruitful Christian life that are how we confirm our election and calling. So, the wide-angle perspective and then the zoomed-in view.

1. First of all then, the **wide-angle perspective** of this passage.
   1. A few moments ago we read 1 Peter 1, which is where Peter addresses believers as God’s elect. And when we looked at this passage, we saw that this means chosen to salvation before the creation of the world. And we also read that as God’s elect, we are called to be holy in all our conduct. So, to be a believer is to be a called and elect person. And this is what is in view in verse 10’s reference to “*calling and election*.” Peter is providing more teaching about being a called and elect person. And his major point here is that there is a way to confirm our calling and election.
      1. And that word **confirm** is very important. None of what he says here is about how to be saved or how to become a called and elect person. This is not about what we must do to earn our salvation. As we saw in verse 1, Peter’s letter is addressed to those who *have* obtained faith in Christ. And in verse 2, Peter prayed that believers might have *grace and peace multiplied* to us. And then in verse 3, we saw that God’s “*divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*,” and in verse 4 that we also have His “*precious and very great promises*.” So, we *have* salvation and we *have* everything we need to live the fruitful Christian life. What verses 5-11 are about is how to confirm our calling and election.
         1. Let me illustrate what I mean: I am sure you have all bought or booked something online. You put in your credit card number and you pressed ‘pay now’ or ‘book now.’ And the little circle started turning for a few seconds and then you got a message that said, ‘Purchase complete’ or ‘booking complete.’ So, it was done. But then you got a dialogue box that asked you if you wanted a confirmation email. So, you entered your email address and you clicked send. Was that last part, requesting the **confirmation email**, necessary for you to get what you ordered? If you did not request a confirmation email, would you have not gotten what you purchased? No. The purchase or booking is real. So, why are we offered a confirmation email? And why would we want a confirmation email? Because it helps you feel more certain about your purchase, and it gives you proof of your purchase. So, the confirmation email strengthens your assurance. And that is what is in view with this passage. God elects and calls. And because that election and calling is grounded in the finished work of Christ, it is absolutely, 100%, guaranteed certain. But there is a way of living that confirms that calling and election, that gives us a deeper assurance.
         2. Another way to think about it is to imagine the moment when our election and calling comes to fruition in our lives and we are saved. That is point A. And arriving in heaven is point B. Well, the *confirming* **pathway** or the *fruitful* pathway between points A and B is the pathway described in this passage. **Verse 11** says, “*For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.” In other words, if you want to confirm your calling and election, if you want less doubt and a strong assurance of salvation, then the pathway described in this passage is the pathway to walk. And I am sure that we all want this confirmation and assurance. Yes? Well, then we better examine the pathway described in verses 5-7 and see if it is the pathway that we are walking on! And we will do this in our second point.
   2. But before we do that, notice **the language** that Peter uses throughout this passage: Verse 5: “*Make every effort to* …” Verse 10, “*Be all the more diligent to* …” and “*practice these qualities* …” You have heard me mention these words from Don Carson many times, “We do not drift into holiness.” It takes sustained effort to be holy in all our conduct. Another way to put it is that if the Christian life is like a journey, then it is not a cruise but a mountain climb.
      1. You all know the effort that you have put into learning a new skill or sport or hobby or job. You know what being diligent looks like. And if you have ever had to practice something in order to become really good at it, you know how often and for how many hours you had to do the same thing or things over and over again.
      2. Well, that is what we are being called to in this passage – concentrated effort, diligence, and practice. We need to apply ourselves to the things we are going to look at in verses 5-7.
      3. But let me repeat again that we *have* faith, we are *given* grace and peace, in abundance, every day, and we *have* the promises of Christ. And all this comes to us by the “*divine power*” of God. So, the power to “*make every effort*” and to “*be all the more diligent*” and to “*practice these qualities*” comes, ultimately, not from within ourselves, but from the Father and the Son, through the Spirit who lives within each believer. So, we must ask Him, daily, to help us to “*make every effort*,” to be “*all the more diligent* …” and to “*practice these qualities*,” and then we must apply ourselves to these things.
2. So, what we are about to consider are the qualities of the effective and fruitful Christian life. And on the positive side, “*if these qualities are [ours] and are increasing*,” that confirms our calling and election. But on the negative side, if we are not practising these qualities and growing in them, then we will be “*ineffective [and] unfruitful*.” And a clear implication of verse 10 is that if we do not practice these qualities than we might fall. So, is there anyone here who wants to be ineffective and unfruitful, or constantly plagued by doubt, or even to fall? I thought not. Then let’s **zoom in** on the qualities of the fruitful Christian life listed in verses 5-7.
   1. Now, Peter addressed this letter to those who have already obtained **faith**. And to have faith is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins. So, if you have not yet done this, please do so today. You will become a child of God. He will take your guilt away from you. The Holy Spirit will live within you to guide you and empower you to live for Jesus. And you will get to experience all this with your new brothers and sisters in the church of Christ. And then you will spend eternity in heaven.
   2. And it’s worth repeating again that **none of what we will soon consider is about earning salvation or entrance to heaven**. And I can’t repeat that often enough. Have you got that? Yes? Good. But look at verse 5: “*Make every effort to supplement your faith with …”* and then the list of qualities begins. So, before we dive into the qualities, just a quick comment here about the word **supplement**. The Greek word that Peter used comes from the world of theatre. In those days, the government would provide part of the funding for a play. But the director of the play had to supplement the government funding with money of his own to cover the total costs. And this meant that the director had a personal interest in the success of the play. Now, putting this into the **spiritual context**, it would be wrong to say that God supplies faith and we supply virtue and knowledge and self-control, etc. Every fruit or gift or ability comes to us from God. But the idea that we can leave it entirely to the Spirit of God to magically produce virtue and knowledge and self-control, etc, in us, is also wrong. That is why Peter commands us to “*supplement*,” and his “*make every effort*” and “*be diligent*” and “*practice these qualities*” language is quite intentional; we must actively participate in God’s work of salvation in us.
      1. And by way of an aside, one of the most frequent criticisms of preaching that I have received over the years is ‘there is too much law and not enough gospel. Stop telling us what to do and just tell us what Jesus has done.’ Well, as you read this passage, I hope you can see that Peter is telling us what to do. It is all anchored in the gospel, and I have tried to do that today also, but the emphasis here is on what we must do. And if that is the emphasis of a Scripture text, then it needs also to be the emphasis of the sermon.

* 1. So, with all that in view, the first quality of the fruitful Christian life that we must make every effort to supplement to, or add to, faith is **virtue**.
     1. And virtue means goodness. It means behaviours that God praises and that please Him. It is the same word that is translated as “*excellence*” in relation to Jesus in verse 3. So, we want to do the Christ-like thing, which means the commanded-in-the-Bible thing, regardless of the outcome. **Philippians 4:8** says, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything [virtuous] … think about these things*.”
        1. Our world says sex outside of marriage is ok, abortion is ok, same-sex activity is ok, prostitution is ok, taking drugs is ok, watching pornography is ok, being transgender is ok, and don’t you dare speak out against any of this, in case you offend someone. But we must say, “*Thus says the Lord*… *you shall not* …” regardless of the outcome, and we must strive for and value sexual purity ourselves.
        2. And if you wonder why I have singled out sex in relation to virtue, it is because Peter will do it in chapter 2 and it is pretty much example number 1 whenever the Bible speaks about virtue. But as we heard in the Philippians quote from a moment ago, far more than just sexual matters is in view.
  2. But to faith and virtue must be added **knowledge**.
     1. And we should note here that these qualities are not unrelated or unconnected. This is not a menu that we can pick or choose from. A parallel in the Bible is the **fruit of the Spirit** in Galatians 5 – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. People sometimes call them the fruitS of the Spirit, as though you might get one or three or six of them. But it is fruit – all these characteristics are the fruit that the Spirit produces in every believer. And by the power of the Spirit, we must make every effort to supplement faith with all these qualities, because He values them all.
     2. But in keeping with the central theme of the whole letter, what is in view with knowledge is *correct*knowledge. We need to know what God praises as excellent. In other words, we must study our Bibles to learn God’s commands and sound doctrine.
     3. But notice that **knowledge comes after virtue** in this list. Pursuing knowledge for the sake of knowledge can be unhealthy. But if we pursue knowledge in order to be like Christ and in order to better thank and please God, that is good.
        1. And this is why good Bible studies or sermons, after the text has been explained, will have application points or questions. What are we to do with this knowledge? How does this knowledge shape or influence how we live? In light of what we have just learned, where do we need to change or grow?

* 1. But to faith and virtue and knowledge must be added **self-control**.
     1. One of the blessings of the Christian life is being part of a church; having elders and deacons and brothers and sisters to help us live the Christian life. But we also need to grow in self-control, being better able to resist temptation and make good choices and preach to ourselves.
     2. **Proverbs 25:28** says, “*A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls*.” And it’s a powerful and plain illustration.
     3. One commentator paraphrases what Peter is saying here in this way: Peter is saying, “Begin to control yourself. Say no to ungodly passions. Grow up. Get on your feet; pick up your faith; do what is right; increase in your knowledge of God; for your own salvation’s sake, begin to control yourself.”
     4. And remember, God has given us all that we need to be self-controlled.
  2. But to faith and virtue and knowledge and self-control must be added **steadfastness**.
     1. **Ephesians 4:11-14** says that Christ has given us Scripture and “*pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*.” And **Hebrews 12:1-2** says, “*Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith*.”
     2. So, the more we seek Bible teaching from the pastors and teachers that the Lord has given us, always looking to Jesus, the more steadfast or balanced or will be our progress on the pathway to heaven. And when we slip into sin, it will not derail us for long, because we will look to Christ, again, and get up and carry on.
  3. And to faith and virtue and knowledge and self-control and steadfastness must be added **godliness**.
     1. Back in **1 Peter 2:12**, Peter said, “*Keep your conduct among [unbelievers] honourable*.” And he then went on to define honourable conduct or the godly life as submission to governing authorities, adhering to the roles that God has assigned to wives and husbands, a willingness to endure suffering, avoiding a sensual or ‘party’ lifestyle, and a willingness to serve others.
     2. For this way of living is what Jesus called the **abundant** or blessed life. And if we strive to live like this, we will also have many opportunities to share the gospel, because this way of living will be more and more unlike how the world lives. And how they live brings much pain and unhappiness.
  4. But to faith and virtue and knowledge and self-control and steadfastness and godliness must be added **brotherly affection**.
     1. Now, the fact that brotherly affection is included in a list of qualities that we must make every effort to practise indicates that this does not come naturally or easily. And we see this already in the New Testament. Think of Paul and Barnabas’s falling out. Think of when Paul needed to rebuke Peter to his face. Think of Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4 who needed help because they could not agree.
     2. And, guess what, this kind of thing still happens today. And it happens here. Shock horror! So, what will you do when you are a part of it? Avoid the person? Hold on to the hurt to use against them somewhere down the road? Leave for another church? You would think that leaving for another church is something that the Bible regularly teaches, because it is how many people deal with disagreements in the church. But what the Bible teaches instead is brotherly affection.
     3. The Gospel tells us that God secured our salvation in Christ not when we had sorted our lives out and were seeking Him, but “*while we were enemies*.” So, we must show this same grace to our brothers and sisters. And **1 John 4:20** says, “*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen*.”
     4. And so, what we should do, for example, is to invite someone for dinner or visit them in hospital, even though they are on the other side of an issue. We seek restoration or we welcome efforts to be restored. We pray for those with whom we disagree and we esteem them more highly than ourselves.
  5. And this leads us into the last of the qualities that must be added to faith, which is **love**.
     1. And what is love? **1 Corinthians 13** tells us that “*love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends*.”
     2. **1 John 4:16** says, “*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him*.”
     3. And the Lord Jesus taught us that the **greatest Commandment** is that we must love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and we must love our neighbour as ourselves.

And it is in making every effort to supplement our faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, and practising them, such that we increase in these qualities, that we confirm our calling and election.

So, I trust that you can look back over the last 6 months or two years and see, by God’s grace, that these qualities are yours and are increasing. And may that give you a greater assurance of your salvation. And this is not in the sense, of, wow, aren’t I good! but in the sense of, all glory to God, look what He has done!

But I must speak also to those among us who can’t see this growth in themselves. It could be that that you are just being too hard on yourself, because sometimes we can be our own worst critic. If that is the case, then ask a mature Christian who knows you if they have seen you grow in these qualities. And hopefully, they will see what you cannot see. But **Proverbs 27:6** says, “*Faithful are the wounds of a friend*.” And it could also be that they see the same lack that you see. And if that is the case, then be thankful that the Lord has awakened you to the spiritual danger you are in. Seize this moment as an opportunity to ask for help. For as we have seen, there is a lot at stake here.

Brothers and sisters, Peter wrote these words to **encourage** believers, some of whom were struggling with doubt. He knew that we all stumble and fall. As one commentator put it,

*Satan would have every Christian think that there is no way back to a vibrant relationship with God once he or she has fallen and failed Him. What Peter has told us though is, “That's not true. Don't believe it. I fell, and I am going to finish well. You can do so too. For God has already given you what you need. [So, get up, look to Jesus, and start walking again] … Take care to arrive safely.”*

And may what we have considered together be used by the Spirit to confirm your calling and election. Amen.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, give us the true knowledge of God. And help us to hold tight to your promises in Christ. Encourage and strengthen each person to supplement his or her faith with godly qualities. And may you provide an entrance for us into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.