

CHARACTERISTIC TWO: VIRTUE

Lesson 5: Moral Goodness

Over the next couple of lessons, we will discuss the second characteristic that Peter tells us to add to our faith, virtue. Virtue isn't a word that's spoken very much in modern society and unfortunately, it's for good reason. There are many that have forgotten the importance of adding this trait to their lives. The word translated *virtue* here is the Greek word ἀρετῆς (*aretēs*) and it simply means moral goodness & excellence. In other words, the good moral fiber and character of a person. Does one make the right moral choices regardless of who they are around or even if no one is watching? Virtue is about making Godly choices because deep down we know it's the right thing to do, even if making that choice will cost us.

This characteristic is vital for the life of a believer, particularly for men, because we're to be examples of moral goodness and excellence to those around us, whether at home in front of our family or out in the public arena. Every day we're given the opportunity to make right or wrong choices, but I believe the decision to make the right choice begins long before we come to the moment of choice. Pressure only pulls out what's already inside of us or as Jesus points out in Luke 6:43-45 when He says:

⁴³ For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.¹

Our immediate choices are a result of things that we've previously allowed to be formed in our heart, and they will ultimately come forth when the pressure mounts, whether good or bad. For example, what comes out when you squeeze a lemon? Not apple or orange juice, but lemon juice, the pressure is only bringing out what's already inside of it.

The problem is, all of us are born with a tendency towards wrong moral decisions, motives or attitudes because we're born in sin. Consequently, our immediate response when pressed with a moral decision is to do what comes naturally, to sin and make the wrong choice. Think about a time when you were a child and you were caught doing something wrong. Your immediate response was probably to deny it, even though you knew you were guilty because you knew there were consequences if you told the truth. It's that inward nature of denial that comes from sin. When we decide to follow Christ, we are completely freed and cleansed from sin spiritually, but it doesn't mean that our

thinking or deep-rooted convictions or lack thereof change immediately. Put another way, salvation is immediate, but sanctification is a process. It's a process of continually exchanging our thinking for God's thinking, our morals for His morals, our desires for His desires and our actions for His actions. The only way to do this by way of transformation as Paul says in Romans 12:1-2 when he says:

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.²

The process is submitting ourselves to God by listening to the Holy Spirit, not conforming ourselves to the patterns or actions of the world, but being transformed by renewing our minds. The only way I know to renew one's mind is through the reading and preaching of God's Word and then by the power of the Holy Spirit applying what we've learned to our lives. This is the only way that we become Christ like and start to portray the virtuous life that Jesus lived in our own lives. Is it easy? Hardly! It takes work, commitment and tenacity, because there are going to be things that you won't get right the first time, sometimes the second time and even sometimes more, the key, as we say in our Recovery Alive program, is to *Keep Not Quitting!* Immediately repent and start a new day making Godly choices.

I want to encourage those of you that have been on this walk with Christ for a long time that you continue to add moral goodness or godly choices to your life. If you're just starting on this journey with Jesus, I encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you areas in your life in which you've struggled to have good moral fortitude and for Him to help you in your next challenge to make the right choice. I can tell you from experience, He will convict you but also encourage and give you the power to make the right moral decisions.

Lesson 5 Questions

1. What is virtue and why is it important?

2. What can we practically do to “exchange our thinking for God’s thinking, our morals for His morals, our desires for His desires and our actions for His actions”?

3. What is an area of your life that you’ve struggled to make the morally good or Godly choice?

4. What can you do to help you make the right choices under pressure in the future?

¹ Lk 6:43–45 (NKJV).

² Ro 12:1–2 (NKJV).