Calling and Falling Not
2 Peter 1:10-15

We're looking at Peter's second letter and at this part where Peter's talking about 7 virtues. Seven virtues that if you want to be fruitful and effective in life you should add to your life, to your faith. But… lists of virtues like this - stuff you should be doing - were commonplace in Peter's day: live a virtuous life and the gods will bless you and we, society, will approve of you.

And maybe you're here this morning and you're investigating Christianity, or maybe youre already a Christian, but you think similarly to those in Peter's day: 'if I live a good enough life God will bless me.' To which those around us might add, 'yes, and if you work for an inclusive society *or* if you uphold traditional, conservative values, *we'll* approve of you.'

But what Peter's been saying is that Christianity turns that logic on its head, because it says, 'no, it's because of what *Jesus* has *already* done for you, how *he* lived the virtuous life you've failed to live and died the death you deserve to die, and that as you put your trust in him and not yourself, God *already* approves of you. He already accepts you and blesses you in Christ, *not* because of *your* moral excellence but because of Christ's. So in light of his grace to you, live a life of love.'

Now you might hear that and say, 'Great, but if I put my faith in Christ like that, how can I know that's all become true for me? How can I know that he really has accepted me? How can I know that I really have become, and am, a genuine Christian? Or, that down the line I won't just throw in the towel and decide Christianity's not for me?' Because maybe you've had friends who've done just that, or read about Christian leaders deconstructing their faith. How can you know that won't be true of you?

Well, Peter says, you can know and know with certainty.

Calling and Falling
Now, the Swiss love two things, don't they: cheese and elections. And the posters for the next elections are going up everywhere. But imagine you getting into heaven was also down to a vote. And you had to stand for election against everyone else. And you had to put up posters of you looking wise or pretty, or both. Or imagine you had to debate the other candidates and say why you were so much more worthy of getting in than they were. What chance would you stand?

Or worse, imagine there was only *one* elector, one voter, and you had to convince *him*? And that elector knew everything about you. Not you in a glossy Instagram-esque photo or you dodging the questions like a true politician, but you as you really are, you and your darkest secrets, you and your most private thoughts. Then what chance would you stand?

Well, look at v10: 'Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.' In other words, if you're a Christian, you'*ve already* been chosen. You've already been elected to God's kingdom and to experience his endless favour. And it *was* all down to the choice of one person. And he *has* already chosen you. But it wasn't based on your performance, or how smart you are, or how well you brush up. As Peter said back in v1, 'To those who *have obtained* a faith of equal standing with ours *by the righteousness of…*' who? You? No, 'of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.' So you are chosen *not* because you've managed to convince him that you're worthy, but because Jesus is. Your election stands on his grace towards you. And God loves you because he loves you, and chooses you because he chooses you.

But again, how can you know that that is true for you? Because there's clearly a risk it's not.

Verse 10 again, ‘for if you practice these qualities *you will never fall*.’ And the word for fall means to lose one’s footing. Like someone hiking a narrow mountain path, stumbling and disappearing over the edge. And Peter’s likening the Christian life to such a journey, at the end of which lies, v11, the ‘entrance into the eternal kingdom.’

But how can you know you’re going to get there and not stumble and never arrive?

And for Peter, that’s not of academic interest, is it? Because Peter was a man who knew only too well the danger of misplaced self-confidence that this would never happen to him.

It’s why, as he senses death approaching - ‘the putting off of my body’ - he calls it in v14, that he’s writing. And he’s writing, v12, ‘to remind you…’, v13 ‘to stir you up by way of reminder.’ But remind them of what, and why?

Well, why do you need reminding of anything? Because you’re in danger of forgetting it and/or because it matters. You see, imagine you’re walking through a market and the stall-holders are all calling out: ‘Fish, come and get your fresh fish’; ‘cheese, you want cheese? We’ve got the best.’ Except, instead of food, this is a market-place of ideas of philosophies of life.

And every day, throughout the day, you’re exposed to all these traders, calling out to you through advertising and media and podcasts and friends: ‘this is what really matters in life’, ‘this is the kind of life you should aspire to’, ‘this is how you should be thinking’, ‘this is what you really need.’. And within all that noise, the message of the gospel is just one voice, and it’s not even the loudest.

Do you hear it? Or do you forget it? Not literally, like someone says, ‘Christ died for you,’ and you go, ‘Really?! I had totally forgotten!’ But the fact that you’re loved and called and chosen because of God’s grace to you in Christ, and not because of your efforts, ceases to be the thing that shapes you and motivates all you do. You know it, but you forget it in the trenches of life.

And so Peter’s determined to remind them and us of that. And yet, he’s even more specific: verse 12, ‘I intend always to remind you *of these qualities*.’ What qualities? The qualities he told us about in v5-7: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love. The things we should be supplementing our faith with if we want to be fruitful and effective

Why remind us of those? Because, v10 again, ‘if you practice these qualities you will never fall.’

Diligence and Practice

Now I became a Christian when I was about 17 at Sixth Form in school. And shortly after, my head of year called me in to his office, sat me down and said, ‘So, Slack, I gather you’ve become a *muscular* Christian.’ Apparently that was a term used in the Victorian era for a kind of Christianity that encouraged *manliness*. Needless to say, I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. I knew I’d become a Christian but as far as I could tell there had been zero change in my muscle mass. I mean I wish there had, because I was still weedy-me. And I have no idea what I replied to him, probably something like, ‘Have I?’

But he had a point, didn’t he? Verse 10, ‘Be all the more *diligent* to confirm your calling and election.’ And the verb for being diligent is from the same root as the noun Peter uses in v5 for

‘make every *effort* to supplement your faith with virtue.’ So he’s saying make every effort to confirm your calling and election, put muscle and energy into proving you’re the real deal, that you really are a Christian.

Because what does it mean to *confirm* something? Well, in Peter’s day, it meant to prove the validity, the genuineness of it. Like a goldsmith performing the acid test - applying nitric acid to a metal to see if it’s really gold, so you can confirm and prove the validity of your faith, Peter says. *And* you’re to be diligent and put some muscle into doing that.

Let’s say you want to buy a second-hand car, so you pay a visit to the second-hand car salesman - honest men if ever there were ones. And you go see the car on the forecourt of the garage and it’s sparkling clean, and the alloy wheels are pristine, and the tyres spotless. And you ask, ‘can I take it for a drive?’ And the dealer hesitates and starts making excuses, but you insist and eventually he hands you the key. You get in, turn the key in the ignition and…. Nothing. So you get out, go round the front, open the bonnet and there’s no engine. And it’s not a Tesla. That car’s going nowhere.

So you try another dealership. And they have an identical looking car, except this time, when you ask to take it for a spin, the salesman goes, ‘sure!’, tosses you the key, and this one goes!

Which one’s a shell and which one have you proven to be a real car? The one that motors. And it’s not driving it that makes it a car, it’s driving it that proves and confirms it is a car.

And Peter’s saying, you and I need to do *that* with our calling and election. We need to put it through its paces, take it out on the road of life, prove it’s the real deal, by making every effort, and being diligent to supplement our faith with these seven virtues. Or, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:1, ‘Walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have received.’

Now what if you hear that and think, ‘Yeh, but that’s not been me. I mean, I would call myself a Christian, but if I’m honest, up until now I’ve drifted rather than been diligent, I’ve been lethargic rather than actively seeking to grow in virtue. Does that mean I’m not a Christian?’ Well, in some ways, that depends on what you do now, doesn’t it? You see, the second car, the car that *was* a car and *not* a shell, would still have been a real car even if it was covered in bird poop and been used as a garbage can with rubbish stuffed to the windows. But to prove it, you’re going have to clean it up and get the engine running.

And Peter’s writing to people some of whom think you can live however you want and still call yourself a Christian. And Peter’s saying, no you can’t. You need to be diligent to prove it, to confirm it, by making every effort to live like you *are* a Christian, with Christ as your king and greatest example.

And doing that, Peter says, won’t just confirm your faith. Verse 10 again, ‘for if you practice these qualities *you will never fall*.’

Think how the opposite might be true. Peter says in v5, that you’re to make every effort to ‘supplement your faith with virtue.’ But what if you don’t? What if you’re careless about your character or moral integrity? Then you might find yourself ensnared in some sin. And if it stays hidden you’ll either be eaten up by guilt - because deep down you know the truth, or you’ll harden your heart to God - because you can’t bear to draw near to him. But if it *does* come to light you’ll

either feel shame and beat yourself up, or sink into self-pity and blame others, or do both. But in either case, if you don't remember the gospel your sin will drive you away from God, not towards him

Or think about the 'knowledge' you're to add in v5. What if you don't? Well, maybe you'll hear the arguments of the atheists and skeptics and fall for them, and begin to think you really *are* stupid to believe what you believe. When, if you'd added knowledge to virtue, you'd have begun to see the holes in their arguments and how so many of their questions depend on a Christian view of the world in the first place.

Or, what if you don't, v6, supplement 'knowledge with self-control.' Well, then going after pleasure - any pleasure - will become a feature of your life and it won't be long before you think there's a whole load more pleasure out there in the world than in Christ, and like the prodigal son you'll leave your father's home, heading for the pig sty.

Or what if you don't add the 'steadfastness' Peter talks about in v6. Then when sorrows come you'll be overwhelmed by life's pain, and rather than pressing on through the storm in the knowledge that the refuge of Christ's kingdom lies ahead, you'll turn back, thinking the world or unbelief offers you something safer.

Or think about what happens if you don't supplement 'steadfastness with godliness' (v6) - the godliness that this combination of reverence for God and respect for those he's put in authority over us. Well, then you'll become vulnerable to the spirit of the age, the wind blowing from right or left, and you'll begin to think that you're the one who gets to decide right or wrong, or no one else can tell you what to do. And maybe you can think of Christians who used to speak lots about Jesus but now something else, some new issue, politics or an anti-woke agenda has taken his place. And you wonder, what ever happened to Jesus?

Or verse 7, supplement 'godliness with brotherly affection' but what if you don't? Well, getting hurt by people in church is pretty much inevitable, but if you're not making every effort to cover those offences with affection, they're going to build up, and with them scar tissue, and you'll become hard-hearted, first to your brother or sister, then to the church and ultimately to the faith. And so in the absence of the ointment of affection, the wounds fester and eventually it'll feel too painful to come.

Or what about the final virtue: 'love' (v7)? What if you don't make every effort to be adding love for God and one another to your faith? Well, like a bucket with holes, your love will eventually run dry. And the problem is, we all do what we love doing. So if the bucket of love for God and his people is empty, God and his people will slide down your list of priorities. And then, instead of sticking on the path to Christ's kingdom, which can be hard going in places, you'll start noticing this path, or that path, alternative paths heading places you now love more than God.

But, Peter says, if you *do* practice these things, if you are daily putting muscle and energy into cultivating your character and relationship with God and his people 'you will never fall.'

Ok, but if it requires effort, how can you ever know you've done enough? Because the danger is you can begin to think that me finishing the race, me entering the kingdom, *is* all down to me. And that is fertile ground for anxiety and the thought that God will only love me if I *do* do enough.

The King and the Welcome

Well, as we've seen, the first thing Peter does in this letter is tell us that we've obtained all the honours and privileges of faith *not* because of our righteousness but because of Jesus. And he's called us and chosen us not because of our moral excellencies, but his.

But what begins with grace ends with grace.

Verse 11, 'For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' And that verb, *provided for*, is the same verb Peter used for *supplementing* your faith with these 7 virtues. In other words, we can think 'here I am, busy working away, supplementing my faith with virtue, and knowledge and self-control and it's all down to my effort' and Peter's saying, 'well, actually, it's Jesus doing the supplementing through you. It's him who's providing for you. It's him who's working in you.' As Paul writes in Col 1:29, 'For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.' Or as he says to the Philippians, 'It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil 2:13). So, as you do the work on your character and your knowledge, what you discover is that you *wanting* to do that and you *doing* it, are all down to Jesus working in you.

And he doesn't do just enough so you limp across the line, exhausted and broken. Peter says an entrance will be '*richly* provided' for you (v11). So this isn't you getting into the kingdom of God by the skin of your teeth. Instead, this is like when England win the Rugby World Cup and come home with the trophy! Or a victorious Olympic athlete is welcomed home by her home city. When you finish your race, Peter says, and finally reach home, there is going to be a lavish feast. And Christ your king, v11 'our Lord and Saviour' is the one who's generously, super-abundantly, paying for it all. Because he's the king who turns gallons of water into gallons of wine, and who feeds a multitude from a few rolls, and says, 'where sin increased, grace increased all the more!' (Rom 5:20).

So, how can you confirm your calling and election? How can you never fall? How can you finally enter the kingdom? Remind yourself of the gospel. Remind yourself of your king, and then make every effort to grow more like him.