A Blueprint for Growth, Part II

2 Peter 1:5-21 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 8

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Last time Peter laid his foundation: a faith every Christian shares (2 Pet. 1:1), divine power that "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (1:3), and "exceedingly great and precious promises" (1:4). Now he builds on it.

Before taking the passage apart, read verses 5 through 11 and notice how each thought is fastened to the one before it: "But also for this very reason..." "For if these things are yours..." "For he who lacks these things..." "Therefore, brethren..." "for if you do these things..." "for so an entrance will be supplied..." Nothing in the passage stands on its own. Peter is building toward one thing, and verse 11 names it: "an entrance... into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

I. Add to Your Faith

> "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." (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

Faith is where it starts, and everyone starts there on level ground. That's what "like precious faith" meant (1:1). No Christian begins with a better faith than another. What he adds to it is another matter.

Peter's word for "add" is *epichoregeo*. It's built on *choregos*, the man who paid to put on a chorus, and it means to supply, generously and at your own expense. Hold on to that word. It comes back in verse 11.

Seven qualities follow, each one added to the one before:

- **Virtue** (*arete*): moral excellence. It's the same word Peter used two verses earlier, where God "called us by glory and virtue" (1:3). What He called us by, we're to add.
- **Knowledge** (*gnosis*): understanding of God's ways and His word.
- **Self-control**: mastery of one's own desires, the same desires that become "the corruption that is in the world through lust" when the flesh takes hold of them (1:4).
- **Perseverance** (*hupomone*): endurance, staying under a load without giving way.
- **Godliness** (*eusebeia*): reverence toward God that shows in how a man lives.
- **Brotherly kindness** (*philadelphia*): warm affection for the brethren.
- **Love** (*agape*): the love God Himself shows, given without asking what it gets back.

> "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." (2 Pet. 1:8-9)

Notice the word "knowledge" in verse 8. It isn't the word from verse 5. There it was *gnosis*; here it's *epignosis*, the full, thorough knowledge we looked at last time (1:2-3). The ladder starts with knowledge and ends in full knowledge. That's the movement from immaturity to maturity, and it's God's purpose for every Christian. Many stop far short of it, content to be saved, or content that someone they love is saved. God has something much higher in view.

Then Peter sets two men side by side. In one, these qualities abound, and he bears fruit. The other lacks them, and Peter calls him "shortsighted, even to blindness." He can see only what is close. Peter's word is *muopazo*, to squint the way a nearsighted man does. What's right in front of him is clear enough: this life, its needs, its pleasures, its pressures. What lies farther off blurs, and left that way long enough it drops out of sight altogether, "even to blindness."

The opposite is a man who sees a long way off, and Peter is about to name what should be fixed in his sight: the entrance into the kingdom (1:11). Hebrews describes that long view: "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus kept His own eyes on what lay ahead, and the cross came first.

And look at what the shortsighted man has forgotten: "that he *was* cleansed from his old sins." Peter doesn't question the cleansing. What the man has lost is the memory of it, and with it any sense of what he was cleansed for.

II. You Will Never Stumble

> "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." (2 Pet. 1:10-11)

"Make your call and election sure." Last time we heard Jesus say, "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Every Christian Peter is writing to has been called. Being chosen is something he tells them to make sure of, and he tells them how: "if you do these things." Notice the *if*. Both promises that follow hang on it, the sure footing in verse 10 and the abundant entrance in verse 11. "You will never stumble." Peter stacks his negatives in the Greek to make it emphatic. You will by no means stumble, not at any time.

What does "stumble" mean here? It can't mean never sinning, because "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Peter has just reminded them that they were "cleansed from [their] old sins" (1:9), and Scripture shows two cleansings. When Aaron and his sons were brought into the priesthood, they were washed once, at the door of the tabernacle (Exod. 29:4). After that, whenever they went in to minister, they washed their hands and their feet at the laver (Exod. 30:19-21). Jesus drew the same line with Peter the night He washed his feet: "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean" (John 13:10). The bath came once, when they first believed, and that's the cleansing from "old sins" Peter means. The washing of the feet is for the daily walk, and a Christian has to come for it.

God has made full provision for the sins of that walk too, and Israel saw it pictured every year on the Day of Atonement. The high priest killed "the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people," and sprinkled its blood "on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat" (Lev. 16:15). Then he laid both hands on a second goat, confessed over it "all the iniquities of the children of Israel," and "the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land" (Lev. 16:21-22). The sin was covered, and it was carried away.

Christ fulfills what that day pictured. "With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). And for the dust picked up along the way, the provision still stands: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Cleansing is God's work, start to finish. Nothing on Peter's list is a way of paying for sin.

So the stumbling Peter has in mind is a fall from the place where a man stood. He ends the letter with the same warning: "beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2 Pet. 3:17). The man who keeps adding these qualities won't fall from where he stands.

And something will be supplied to him in return: "an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting [*aionios*, age-lasting] kingdom." "Supplied" is the same word Peter used for "add" in verse 5. Supply these things to your faith, and an entrance will be supplied to you. In his first letter Peter asked, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18). Here he holds out the other end of the scale: an entrance supplied *abundantly*.

III. "The Faith"

Peter will soon warn about false teachers, and before he does, it helps to know what Scripture means by "the faith." Is it the faith a man exercised when he first believed, or something he's to keep exercising? Look at how it's used:

- Paul and Barnabas went back through Galatia "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22).
- "If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard" (Col. 1:23).
- "Your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer" (2 Thess. 1:4-5).
- "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Every one of these is spoken to people who had already believed. The faith is something they continue in and keep, and it points ahead every time: to entering the kingdom, to being counted

worthy of it, to a crown laid up for that Day. "The faith" is the message of the coming kingdom and the walk that goes with it.

Israel lived this out first. In Egypt each household put a lamb's blood on the door, and God said, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13). That blood brought them out, and for a reason: "He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers" (Deut. 6:23). Going into the land called for faith in what God had said about it, and obedience in going up to take it from the enemies who held it.

That's where the redeemed generation failed. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:18-19). These were people the blood had already brought out. Their unbelief didn't send them back to Egypt. It kept them out of the land.

Hebrews tells that story to Christians because the picture is the same. We've been redeemed by our Passover Lamb, and for a purpose. There's a land ahead of us too, a heavenly one, and it has enemies in it: "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). That's what "the faith" is about. And to fall away from it is what Israel did at the border: a redeemed people turning back short of the land.

IV. The Faith and False Teachers

Paul carried the same concern. He'd warned the elders of Ephesus that "from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30), and later he left Timothy in Ephesus "that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). Ephesus was the great port of Asia, one of the regions Peter's letters went to.

Paul's first letter to Timothy keeps coming back to it. Some "concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck" (1:19). "In latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (4:1), and Paul's word for "depart" there is the verb our word *apostasy* comes from. Near the close he warns about anyone who "teaches otherwise," men "who suppose that godliness is a means of gain" (6:3, 5), and he names the snare: "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness" (6:10). Then he turns to Timothy:

> "But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Tim. 6:11-12)

Set that list beside Peter's. Godliness, faith, and love are on both, and Paul's "patience" is the same word as Peter's "perseverance." Two apostles, writing into the same region, give the same remedy against the same danger.

Now look at what Timothy is told to lay hold of: "eternal [*aionios*] life, to which you were also called." Timothy was already "a man of God." He was made alive when he believed (Eph. 2:5), and nobody has to fight to take hold of what was given to him then. This is the life of the age to come, and Paul ties it to that time himself: Timothy is to keep the commandment "until our Lord Jesus

Christ's appearing" (6:14). A few verses later Paul tells the rich to be "storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (6:19). Laying hold of that life and receiving an abundant entrance into the kingdom are the same goal, at the same time, described by two apostles.

V. Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

Peter says his readers already "know" these things and are "established in the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12). It had been taught in that region for years. He's going to remind them anyway, as long as he's "in this tent," and make sure they can call it to mind "after my decease" (1:13, 15). Why so much urgency? Look back at verse 11. He wants an abundant entrance for every one of them. And the subject he presses is the Lord's coming:

> "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.... And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain." (2 Pet. 1:16, 18)

In the first message of this series we stood on that mountain with Peter and watched what he learned there. This time, look at what Jesus said just before they climbed it. Matthew puts the two scenes back to back:

> "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." (Matt. 16:24-27)

Jesus is speaking to His disciples, men who were already His, and telling them what following Him will cost. The word for "life" in verse 25 and "soul" in verse 26 is the same word, *psuche*. The man who keeps his life for himself in this age loses it; the man who loses it for Christ's sake finds it. This is "the salvation of your souls" that Peter put at the end of faith (1 Pet. 1:9), and Jesus sets it on the day He comes "and then He will reward each according to his works." The reckoning comes first, and the kingdom after it.

Then: "there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light" (Matt. 17:1-2).

That's what Peter means by "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He'd seen it ahead of time. Six days separated the cost Jesus named from the glory He showed, and they came in that order.

VI. A Light in a Dark Place

> "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first,

> that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

The mountain confirmed what the prophets had written. For centuries they'd spoken of Messiah's glory and kingdom, and three men saw it ahead of time. So pay attention to that word, Peter says, "as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns." Hebrews puts it the same way: "we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (Heb. 2:1). A lamp is for the dark, and it's needed until the day comes.

"No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." The prophets didn't originate what they wrote, so no reader has the right to make it mean what he'd like. Scripture interprets Scripture, one passage shedding light on another: "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:10). It takes work. But God hasn't given His word one way to some and another way to others. When two Christians read the same prophecy in opposite ways, they can't both be right, and "you believe yours and I'll believe mine" won't settle it. Going back to the text, line upon line, will.

That lamp in a dark place takes us back to the beginning. "The earth was [became] without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.... Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen. 1:2-3). That isn't how God first made it. He "did not create it in vain" (Isa. 45:18), and Isaiah's word for "vain" is the word Genesis uses for "without form." Something happened in between, and Ezekiel names it, speaking to the anointed cherub (Ezek. 28:14): "You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities" (Ezek. 28:18). Into that darkness God spoke light.

Paul reaches back to the same moment:

> "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.... For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:3-4, 6)

"God who commanded light to shine out of darkness" is Genesis 1. And the light He shines now is "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Peter had seen that face. On the mountain "His face shone like the sun" (Matt. 17:2). Paul gives the message its name: "the gospel of the glory of Christ."

Who doesn't see it? Those "who do not believe," and Paul says they "are perishing." A man dead in trespasses (Eph. 2:1) is already dead. What's perishing is something still alive and being lost. Paul has already told us whom he means. A few verses earlier, speaking of Israel: "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament.... when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart" (2 Cor. 3:14-15). These were Jews, a people God had redeemed, reading Moses without believing that Jesus was the Messiah Moses wrote of. Christians can be unbelieving about the same thing today: who Christ is, and what He's coming to do.

John opens his Gospel with the same light: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4-5). Then he introduces the man sent "to bear witness of the Light" (1:7), and John the Baptist's witness was

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2). From the start, the light has to do with the kingdom.

Until the day dawns, the light is carried the way Paul describes: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels.... We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed... struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:7-9). It's the order Peter saw on the mountain, suffering first and the glory after.

Applying "A Blueprint for Growth, Part II"

Peter's blueprint is simple to state. Start with faith, and keep adding to it. Each quality builds on the last, from knowledge to full knowledge, and the man who keeps doing these things will never stumble from where he stands. The man who doesn't grows shortsighted and forgets what he was cleansed for.

At the far end is an entrance into the coming kingdom, supplied abundantly. That's what "the faith" has always been about, from Israel at the edge of the land to Timothy fighting to lay hold of the life of the age to come. Peter saw the King's glory on the mountain, and he'd learned that the cost Jesus named comes first. So keep the lamp in view until the day dawns. Heed the prophetic word, let Scripture interpret Scripture, and keep your eyes fixed far ahead.

Looking Ahead

Next, Peter names the danger he's been preparing them for: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1).

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.