

"Faith, Virtue & Knowledge: II Peter 1:2-11"

Dallas Willard at Bethel - October, 2008

Scribe's Comments - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The [brackets], bold, and underline disclose the scribe's commentary and cross-references other Dallas Willard teachings. This appears to be Willard's last teaching at Bethel, October, 2008.



"Building The Person on Rock Solid Righteousness:"

- The interlocking aspects of a Holy life.

[1:11:00] [Bethel Morning Session - Bethel 4]

Assumption of the Christian Life that is in the New Testament = Three Texts

[Other Willard Teachings on the II Peter 1:2-11 Text]

["Spiritual Formation - Empower & Informs Kingdom Living"](#)

["Faith, Virtue & Knowledge" Gordon](#)

["Changed Lives - Is it real?" Gordon 1 of 3 @ 44:00 - II Peter, Romans 5, Col. 3\]](#)

II Peter 1:2-11

One of the latest writings in the New Testament. We're looking at in part the reflection of the learnings that had been going on in the early Church.

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; **3** seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. **4** For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. **5** Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, **6** and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, **7** and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. **8** For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. **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.

"Divine nature" - starts with the birth from above. The idea is continuous and increasing experience in the nature of God, the divine nature.

"Corrupt" = Obsessive desire

"Applying all diligence"

How much diligence does that leave out? This would be your top priority. Like "Seek first the Kingdom of God".

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I've dreamed of the church of being "All Diligence Church".

"In your faith supply moral excellence" NIV "goodness" does not get to the sense of the word - "eirete"

"Virtue" is what you want.

"...add knowledge" - that's the third time. Knowledge is the heart of this.

This progress is ordered. It ends with agape. That will come later. It's too big to start with.

"...add self control" - So many Christians are fighting self-control. Addiction is a problem of self control.

"...add perseverance" - Stick to it-iveness. 24/7. Whole life

"...add godliness" - "eusebius"

"...brotherly kindness" - "phildalphia" - The way you deal with people generally. You're not ready for that unless you've got these other things. Finally on top of that, "agape".

If these are yours and increasing, they are all matters of degrees. As you move up the scale, every move you make effects the earlier stages, strengthens, clarifies, a back and forth influence.

If these qualities are yours...they render you in the true knowledge."

Knowledge of knowledge, creme de la creme. Knowledge is interwoven through all of this.

"He who lacks these qualities..."

If you don't live in this progression, your conversion, your first experience will dim and lose it's significance.

"*All the more diligent...*" second time "diligent" showed up.

"*Entrance into the eternal kingdom*"

Triumphant march into God's presence. How do you think that will be like...when the saints go marching in? If you live this life there will be a big hoopla when you enter.

Each one of us is a unique pleasure in God's presence. You want to be ready for the hoopla because it's coming to you if you do these things.

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Romans 5

[16:45]

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Faith brings you into a new room and your standing neck deep in grace.

We have a vision of God in His greatness. The God of hope.

"We also exalt in our tribulations"

That's a step forward in faith, to say the least.

"Count it joy when you encounter all kinds of troubles" (James)

That tribulation works patience.

Then you get another progression. That's why we accept what comes to us in life in the hope of the glory of God. We mustn't throw away where we are. That's the only place anyone has ever be blessed by God is where they are. One function of the beatitudes is to get us to point where we can say "blessed" and not throw away where are we. That we can be thankful for who we are and we had the parents who we had. I have to say that because for many people, they never get over the tribulation of the parents they had. That's a big project. Being reconciled to one's life means being reconciled to one's life and there is nothing more than being reconciled with your parents, even if they disappeared before you know them.

"We exalt in tribulation knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Notice what came last - love.

There is some difference. One point — this is presented in the passive mode, as if this just happens. That's important. We have to bring together both the passive and active modes. There is nothing that defeats people in spiritual growth more than the idea that they are passive. We really have a problem with that in the stage of Protestantism in which we live. That somehow if you got real diligent, God would be nervous. We have to work through that.

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Kierkegaard - Devil looking at Luther's statement, "*We are justified by faith alone*" and the Devil says, "*Hmm, I think we can do something with this.*"
And he did.

The Romans passage is wonderful because it does bring out the fact that there is much more going on than what we do. For example, "*exalting in tribulation*" is something we do. It will not be done for us.

But we don't want to forget in adding virtue to faith..., every step of the way is a gift as well as an attainment. God works with us. Spiritual disciplines, spiritual life is not a place for heroic as it use to be said, "athletes of God". Now, it is a race and we run with patience the race set before us looking to "*Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.*" We run. We don't mess around. "*We buffet our body and go for the prize.*" That's all well and good as long as you remember you are not running the race alone. It is the grace of God.

Remember my sayings:

Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.

You have to keep the attitude right. That doesn't mean you abate your efforts. Most of our time today is going to be talking about our effort.

The other statement I have given you:

What is grace? It is God acting in our lives to accomplish what we can't accomplish on our own.

That one ended in love, didn't it? It's where it always ends!

Colossians 3:1-17

[25:25]

A marvelous overview of the Christian life. What is said here will wind in the same place but it will describe the process differently. This passage includes "mortification" in the process.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 [a]Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

He starts with the resurrected life. You are a born again as partakers of the divine nature.

"You've been raised up" that's the assumption.

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You were born from above - the Kingdom of God surrounding you. The presence of God. the Kingdom is at hand. As Jesus said, it is not a big hoopla, it is present around you. That's what gives you the resurrection life. We go back by investing in that.

Seek what is above". What is above? The Kingdom of God.

What does that mean practically? I expect that in action around me and in me and in others.

We want to be as practical as we can.

"Seek the things that are above."

The honest question in our fellowship - How are you seeking the things that are above today? Perhaps we should say, "Did you find anything?"

We romanticize seeking. What happens when you find it. We have to translate that into practical action where we are.

How we need to help our young people, out little people to find this.

My heart for young males - Middle School.

We need to teach people how to seek things that are above.

The surprising statement - you're dead. Your life is hid with Christ in God. Did you know that you're dead? What your life amounts to is something you yourself you don't know. Your life is hid with Christ in God. God is now hidden. He has to hide so people can succeed in running from him. If God wasn't hidden, human history would be over. He hides so that we can hide. He hides us so we can grow and make choices. We do. God wants us to have choices so He allows us to be alive in Christ, to know that but not to know what it really means. Like what He did on the Mount of Transfiguration. Why didn't he do that all the time? Wouldn't that have won the world if He walk around glowing with his clothing brighter than lightning. That would be something. Even Moses, they had to put a lightshade over his head so they could talk to him.

v. 5 - "mortify your members on the earth". Your "members" are not your ears, nose, hands. Your members are things you can do without God. Remember about "flesh" last night? You fit in in here.

"Fornication, uncleanness, desires out of balance, evil concupiscence, covetousness, which is idolatry."

Who is the god in covetousness? Me! I ought to have what you have.

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"Mortify" - let it die.

"Mortgage" - You kill of by degrees.

"Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy...put off the old man, put on the new man...renewed in knowledge"

Then he lands solidly in social ethics as they count - no Greek, Jew...Christ is all and in all."

Scythian - the absolute bottom of the human barrel. Forget that they are Scythians. All those distinctions are relegated to insignificance in the life from above.

"Mercy, kindness, humilty, meekness, long suffering...forgive as Christ forgave you..."

"Above all these, put on love which is the bond of perfection."

The ribbon you tie around the whole thing.

The assumption back of the New Testament is that we will grow steadily and move more and more into the things that support agape. Agape is so complex and so rich. May passages trying to say what it is.

What's happening is the birthing of a new concept.

CC Lewise, *The Four Loves*

Eros - passion

People say, "What's your passion?" I don't feel very good about that.

"They that are in christ have crucified the passions..."

Passion is passive, not active. That's why we speak of the "passion of Christ" was what He suffered. I think we want to be careful with it. Eros is not exactly the answer.

Philia - friendship love.

Storge - family love

Agape - Jesus takes the word "agape" and gives it an entirely fresh and new meaning.

Read Plato's Symposium - You are not going to find agape. If you find the word, you won't find the fact because that word bears the weight of revelation of the nature of God.

Eros will do for the guys on Olympus.

Philia - friendship in Aristotle and Plato.

Storge - assumed within families and it is a good thing but it doesn't get you agape.

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We want to understand the significance of "agape" as it is now supported and unfolded through the other terms that get used in these progressions. Don't forget these passages reveal the assumption about the normal Christian life.

Christians in the NT are disciples. Disciples began to be called Christians when they could not be called Jews anymore. It is "disciples" who are called Christians but that has changed today. I have talked about that but I'm not going back to that.

Stages in II Peter

[41:30]

If you or I were to look at this passage and say, "I'm going to do it."
How would I add "virtue to my faith?"

We start by saying, "What is faith?" Faith is confidence or trust. Interesting we apply trust to financial institutions and faith to churches. Trust is where you put your weight on it. Every now and then we need to switch those.

Through the miracle of the work of the Spirit, I find I have faith in Christ. That means He's the one. He is the Master. Try Maestro. Use some different language to get the greatness of Christ. What my faith is in is Christ. I have to think about Him in a certain way. What I don't know, He knows. What I can't handle, He can. I'm not going to be wiped out by doing what He said. That's big. Because very few people have that kind of confidence in Jesus, to believe what He said and do what He taught and it will be okay. [44:20]

Faith - If you believe something you are ready to act as if it were true.

You need more than that but you need that. It applies to "Forgiveness of Sins" - If I believe Jesus is the redeemer I am not trying to redeem myself. I am not the one who manages that.

Affairs of daily life - I am constantly calling on Him because I have trust in Him.

"Add to your faith virtue"

[45:50]

Virtue is reliable habits. It has a long history among the Greeks. It is a power in you to do something. You get that by training. Virtue comes through training. When we talk about adding virtue to our faith, we are talking about training and doing things.

* Surgeon - perform operations over and over to the point that you are the ability to do them well. Virtue is tied to doing things well.

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Someone who has the virtue of "Honesty" is someone who practices it, who has it down. In a situation that calls for it, you just do it because you have been trained.

Training brings virtue.

Blessed is someone who has an upbringing that has trained them in virtue.

Many Christians who are professing Christians are troubled by vices - they run on the old habits.

You have faith in Christ. Now submit yourself to training in His words and His deeds. That may mean sometimes doing them blindly just because He said. Perhaps doing what He says to develop that habit.

Raising Children

[48:30]

* A child raised in a good home will pick up good habits.

They will develop virtues that they do not understand. You don't want to try to get your child to understand why it's important to be "clean & thrifty". They won't understand it anyway so you train them and they become "clean & thrifty" people.

If they enter a stage of rebellion against you and they will say, "Why?" and you will explain why and they will still not get it and finally you will say, "Because I said." That's training. They know that's not a reason and you know it's not a reason but you have to end the session and get on with the training.

Aristotle

"If you are not raised with good habits, you will never understand ethics."

If you've been raised with good habits, then by teaching and instruction you can come to understanding.

You want to get the progression here. In the early stages of Christian growth, the important thing is not to communicate understanding, it is to train. The understanding needs to be there in those who are doing the training because they are to set the example.

You add **virtue** by training. That's why it's absolutely vital that their be communities of disciples. People say, "why isn't there a chapter in Romans on Spiritual Disciplines?" There is remarkably little in the New Testament to

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tell you to do the things what you are supposed to do. Why? They had a community of people who were living it. Peter, "We ere called by his glory and excellence." It is the glory and excellence of the community that inducts them and trains them. As they go along, they can add "**knowledge**" to their virtue.

[51:45] You train up a **child** well in your **home** or their community, they know what to do but they don't understand why they do that. When they step out of the home, out of the church, out of the community, into the world, they are easily confused, especially in our day when there is no reliable presentation of moral **knowledge** in their community, rarely in their churches. That's what I've been referring to in these sessions.

Dysfunctional **families** are not new. What is new is dysfunctional communities. It isn't as if the older communities were perfect. They weren't. But in the older communities, there was a teaching about what is good and right that picked people up.

* When you child comes to USC now, we say, "*We're not your Momma & Papa, you can do anything you want to, just don't hurt anybody.*"

That's one of the dumbest statements on record. It creates an absolute illusion about what freedom is, about what hurting some is. When we take them into the Chemistry lab, we don't say do anything you want.

We need to add **knowledge** to our **virtue**. The progression here is important. You have to have the virtues in order to come to know them. People who do not have the virtues very rarely come to know them, to understand them.

That's why you who as a Christian and your practice virues and those around you who are not Christians look at you as you are crazy.

I joke with my students, "What does sexual purity mean today?" [54:30]

They have got the foggiest ideas. It is a joke to students today.

* "The 40 Year Old Virgin" movie

That's the way these things are approached now.

Understand why it is so important to add knowledge to virtue. Understand what **virtue** is, why it is good, what will ruin it.

Each time the word "**knowledge**" comes around, you want to understand it is addressing a different issue.

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First reference of knowledge - v. 2 - *"Grace & peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

That's what generates faith. You learn about God and Jesus Christ and you put your confidence in Him. Faith alone will not produce in you what God intends you to be. [56:10]

Faith has to be supplemented by virtue. Virtue does not stand on its own two legs. If you're going to have virtue that stands up, you have to have knowledge. That is one of the greatest problems today for **the church** is to address a world that has dismissed and does not claim to have any knowledge of virtue. "We don't deal with that." That is where law, politics and social pressure come in. But there is no moral control of that because there is no understanding based on faith in God, training, and insight into why virtue is good, what it is, how it works.

This is where we have to go to work today. We have to understand that faith alone un-supplemented by these other things will not provide for life what God knows we need in life.

That's not just a project for you individually. That's a project of the redeemed community in the world we actually live in .

"Add to your virtue knowledge."

Faith is unstable without virtue. Virtue is unstable without knowledge. Knowledge helps you understand what virtue is, how it applies to life. One thing it will teach you is that there is no one virtue that does all. Human beings can obsess and think that is the whole deal.

* "Well I pay my bills."

Congratulations. Is there anything else you do? People are apt to wrap up their whole moral nature in one moral character. Legalism tends to do that. Emphasizes one virtue that omits other things.

* Jesus ran into people so conscientious about tithing they would count out herb seeds. You know people that are like that.

You need a range of virtues because they don't all deal with the same issue.

* Jesus, *"I rather have mercy that sacrifice"* to the people gone on just sacrifice.

We need to understand there is probably no "closed list" of virtues. There are some more inclusive. Of course, love in the New Testament is a virtue

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that is inclusive, at least requiring those others thing sbefor you can love. If you love appropriately, you will take care of those other things especially the law is something that if you love appropriately, you will keep the law. There is a catch because love does not necessarily teach you appropriateness. So you need intelligence which is a virue. You need industry what it hard work .You will teach you that. You need to have a balance in your life. Spiritual disciplines, don't go to seed on one or another. Virtues supplement one another. We know that they are and we can teach others what they are.

Remember, **Knowledge**, qualifies in ways that nothing else doe. If you have knowledge, I repeat, you are qualified to act, supervise action, to formulate policy and implement it and to teach. [1:02:30]

The person who is virtuous can't necessarily teach it. One of the things that knowledge brings is the capacity to live in the community in a different and more helpful way.

This gets in to the things we've touched on several times in talking about how you learn to do the things that Jesus said. If you want to be a person whose "Yes is a yes, and No is a no" you have to be able to pick up on your habits of saying when your Yes is a No and your No is a Yes.

* Spin Doctors - good at saying Yes's that are No's.

Jesus, "let your Yes be Yes and No be No." That's a virtue predicated on other virtues. You also have to be wise and listen and understand how people are taking things.

"Add to your Knowledge Self Control"

[1:04:25]

The word is a very interesting word. It combines "ego" and "government" - means "self government." The things you decide to do, you will not be deflected by circumstances, inner or outer. You are able to make a decision and carry through with it. The opposite of self-control is impulse.

* Credit Cards - Impulse buying is the lack of self-control

Virtue might be as simple as having a procedure of making decisions. The old adage, "Count to ten."

Desire — We talked last night about desire and how desire takes control of the will. That's the opposite of self-control. That leads to uncontrollable outbursts of anger, means of hurting people because desire is in ascendancy.

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* Pornography - the problem is self-control. Over & over they say, "I'm not going to do that anymore." Then they don't know how to carry thru with it.

Most of the bad things that happen, especially around Christians would not happened if they had self-control. When they do happen, they plead, "I just couldn't help it." You can help it. **A lot of self control is choosing the training - setting up circumstances that will extend your self control.** This is extremely important for life - the capacity to not be deflected from the good you've set before you as a goal.

Short Term & Long Term Control

[1:08:15]

Long Term - For many of us, long term is worse than our short term. That means long term objectives we can't carry through with.

* "If I went to school, I won't get out until I'm 63."

Well, you're going to be 63 anyways.

The issue is how are you going to be when your 63?

Having to stick with something over the long run present itself to us in ways that we can't carry though with our goal.

Short term - The key is more like learning to be aware of what is coming up.

In dealing with temptation which is the enemy of self-control, it never jumps upon you instantaneously. It always comes in degrees.

* The song - "*She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes*"

You learn to recognize what is coming around the mountain. When you do that, then you are able to have recourse to things that will help you do what you have decided to do.

* Pornography - It's always coming around the mountain before it gets there. The temptation to cultivate lust by looking as Jesus spoke of is always coming around the mountain.

All you need to do is teach yourself is to use those things that you use to use to get ready to do things that you said you weren't going to do is to use those cues to do something different. Jump off the mountain, get out of the way. There is always a way. Scripture says, "God has made a way. There is not temptation that has taken you..."

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The person who says, "I can't help it." You can help it. Saying, "I can't help it" is a way of avoiding responsibility. That says *"I'm not really to blame."*

To help it, you may need help to help it. By no means am I saying that all you need is will power. That is absolute poison. Don't drink from that bottle. Will power is not the answer. Our will is a tiny force aligned with a tiny mind. There's almost nothing you can accomplish by will power alone. It's when your will moves to arranging circumstances and relationships in a certain way that it becomes powerful.

The primary function of the will is to trust God. Actually, if you just dwell there, that will take care of most temptations.

Self-control...You're going to need some faith, you're going to need some virtues, you're going to need some knowledge, then you'll see how it's going to strengthen your faith and strengthen your virtues. That back effect between these things is very important to understand.

Perseverance

[1:12:05]

You see these things are related. If you don't have self-control, you can't have perseverance. You'll get pulled of whatever is it you are thinking of doing by circumstances, by inner movements, by other people so you have to have to have self-control that allows you to say,
"I won't do what I'm being invited to do."

That goes back to my point I've made a couple of times - The function of morality is to give us a place to stand so that we can do what we don't want to and not do what we want to do. The problem for righteousness is always desire. We really need to study the New Testament to see what it says about these things. As I have said, desire is not bad, it is essential. The problem is if it is allowed to cover, that where the problem is.

~ ~ ~ **End of Session at 1:13:15 with garbled audio** ~ ~ ~

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The 8-Step Divine Love Ladder - How to Become a Loving Person

Faith

Virtue

Knowledge

Self-Control

Perseverance

Godliness

Friendly Kindness

—> Agape Love

Friendly Kindness

Godliness

Perseverance

Self-Control

Knowledge

Virtue

Faith

AGAPE LOVE
FRIENDLY KINDNESS
GODLINESS
PERSEVERANCE
SELF-CONTROL
KNOWLEDGE
VIRTUE
FAITH

