

One Last Thing Before I Die:

This Is What's At Stake

A Study of 2 Peter 1:8-11

Characteristic of Completeness: Eternity

Big Idea: When we add works to our faith on earth, God adds abundance to our entrance in heaven.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 6:19-20; 25:21; John 13:35;

1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 10:12; 13:1-3

Introduction:

- A. I've never watched the ► game show, *Deal or No Deal*. But my son bought a hand-held electronic version of the game and showed me how to play it. It's a game in which you as the contestant are continually offered two choices: Take the money that is being offered and end the game, or continue to play taking your chances for getting even more money at the risk of ending up with a lot less. It's take the money, or take your chances. Deal or no deal.

It quickly became apparent to me that I would play the real game a lot differently than I play the electronic version.

For example, if the electronic game offers me \$500,000, but I have a chance of getting a million, I defiantly say "No deal" and I go for the million. Why? Because there's nothing really at stake. There's no real money on the table. There's nothing to lose. Might as well go for it.

But if I'm a contestant on the real TV show with real money and I'm offered a choice: Take the \$500,000 or go for the million, I take the \$500,000, no question.

You see, my choices are governed largely by what's at stake.

Now ► that I think about it, I suspect this is true in just about every area of life: Choices are governed by what's at stake. Or at least choices are governed by what is *perceived* to be at stake. We operate on this principle all the time.

Children pick up on this very quickly. Obey or disobey? The choice is governed by what's at stake. Highly permissive homes are those in which there's nothing much at stake. The consequences of disobedience and obedience are not much different. Children get this and make choices accordingly.

It's hard to think of a situation where this principle does not apply.

For the student in the classroom, it's study or no study. Teachers motivate the student to study by setting up a grading system where there's something at stake.

For the employee in the workplace, it's work or no work. The employer motivates the employee to work by setting up a performance evaluation and compensation system where there's something at stake.

For the subcontractor on a construction site, it's finish or no finish. The general contractor motivates the subcontractor by withholding a portion of his pay until the job is finished satisfactorily so that there's something at stake.

- B. For the Christian, it's grow or no grow. But what's at stake? How are we motivated to grow more and more like Christ? What are the consequences of growing or not growing?

I suspect a prevalent view in the Christian community, whether or not we're willing to admit it, is that there's not much at stake in the Christian life. Having believed in Jesus for eternal life, I'm forgiven and heaven is secure. Yes, growing more and more like Christ is a good thing, but there's really not much at stake.

- C. The Apostle Peter begs to differ. We recently began studying our way through Peter's last letter—the letter we call Second Peter, the one he wrote as he faced imminent death.

As you may recall, in the first part of his letter, Peter tells us that God has given believers both the capacity and responsibility to grow. He lists seven areas in which we are responsible to grow including virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

The text we're going to study today is 2 Peter 1:8-11. Here Peter tells us what's at stake. He explains some consequences of the grow-or-no-grow choice. It's very important to understand Peter clearly on this because making right choices is largely a matter of having the right understanding of what's at stake.

Let me read the text through one time. Then we'll get to work. Peter ► says:

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:8 For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ► 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ► 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ► 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- D. In this text, Peter sets up ► a grow-or-no-grow comparison for us to consider. First, I want to unpack and lay out all the comparisons. Then, we'll go back and more fully explore the meaning of each comparison.

1. In the ► first part of Verse 8, Peter introduces the grow side of the grow-or-no-grow comparison. He says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:8 For if these things are yours and abound . . .

The “things” to which Peter is referring are the seven areas of growth he listed in back in Verse 5-7, including virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

2. In the ► last part of Verse 8, Peter connects some consequences with the choice to grow. He says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:8 For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we can ► put “not barren” and “not unfruitful” on the grow side of the comparison.

3. Then, in ► the first part of Verse 9, Peter introduces the no-grow side of the comparison, saying,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:9 . . . he who lacks these things . . .

So the comparison is between the one in whom “these things” are abounding and the one in whom “these things” are lacking.”

4. In ► the last part of Verse 9, Peter connects some consequences with the no-grow choice. He says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

So, we can ► put “shortsighted/blind” and “forgetful” on the no-grow side.

5. In ► Verse 10, Peter jumps back to the grow side, saying,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble

Remember, I’m not going to talk about what all this means until we fill out the comparisons. For now, we can simply put ► two more things on the grow side: “call and election sure,” and “will never stumble.”

6. Finally, in ► Verse 11, Peter adds more to the grow side. He says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Whatever it means, we can ► add this to the grow side: “entrance to kingdom supplied abundantly.”

7. We can now fill out the comparisons by supplying implied opposites.
- a. For example, back up in Verse 8, when Peter says the growing person is not barren and not unfruitful, we may infer that the no-grow person ► is, in contrast, barren and unfruitful.
 - b. Likewise, in Verse 9, when Peter says the no-grow person is shortsighted, blind, and forgetful, we may infer that the growing person ► is not shortsighted, not blind, and not forgetful.
 - c. In Verse 10, when Peter says the growing person will make his call and election sure and will never stumble, we may infer that the person who is not growing ► will make his call and election *unsure* and *will* stumble.
 - d. Finally, in Verse 11, when Peter says entrance to the kingdom will be supplied abundantly to the growing person, the clear implication is that such will ► not be supplied for the person who does not grow.
8. We now have the full comparison.

	GROW	NO GROW
v. 8a/9a	If "these things" are abounding, then . . .	If "these things" are lacking, then . . .
v. 8b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not barren • Not unfruitful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barren • Unfruitful
v. 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not shortsighted/Blind • Not forgetful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortsighted/Blind • Forgetful
v. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call and election sure • Will never stumble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call and election unsure • Will stumble
v. 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance to kingdom supplied abundantly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance to kingdom not supplied abundantly

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We haven't considered what it means yet, but it does look sobering, especially on the no-grow side. If we don't grow, we are barren, unfruitful, shortsighted, blind, forgetful people whose call and election is unsure, who will stumble, and who will not receive an abundant entrance to the kingdom.

There appears to be an awful lot at stake in this grow-or-no-grow decision. I'm now going to go back through our comparisons ► line by line and consider what they mean for us today as believers in Jesus Christ. From the text, I find at least four things are at stake.

I. First, ► our productivity is at stake. I get this from Verse 8, where Peter says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:8 For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- A. The original Greek word for ► "barren" means to be unproductive, useless, or worthless.¹ It can also mean lazy.²
- B. The word for ► "unfruitful" is a close synonym describing those who do no good deeds, or those who bear no fruit.³

¹ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "ἀργός," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

² Ibid.

- C. When Peter says, ► “you will be *neither* barren *nor* unfruitful,” he’s using a figure of speech known as meiosis (or litotes) in which a double negative is used to emphasize a contrastingly strong positive.⁴ His point is that the growing person will be *highly* productive.
- D. But the question remains: Productive in what sense or in what realm? Peter says it is ► “in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There are a number of words for knowledge in Greek. This one indicates “a greater participation by the knower in the object known.”⁵ It can include a relational knowledge. So, I think Peter is talking about our relationship with Christ. The kind of productivity Peter has in mind has to do with growth in our relationship with Jesus.

Peter does not seem to call into question whether or not his readers have a relationship with Jesus. He assumes they do.⁶ The issue is whether or not they’re growing in the relationship as indicated by abounding virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

We believers may be productive in a lot of ways. We may be productive employees, productive students, productive investors, productive homemakers, productive educators, productive leaders, and even productive philanthropists. We may be all these things, but if we’re not growing in our relationship with Christ, if we’re not growing more and more like Him, all our activity is unproductive from God’s point of view. Our activity may be temporarily helpful to some, but in the long run, it’s useless apart from a growing relationship with Christ. It doesn’t count.

This is a harsh reality. But it’s not my idea, and it’s corroborated elsewhere in Scripture. You may recall that love is the capstone or climax in the list of areas in which Peter says we are responsible to grow. Listen to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, which makes the case that seemingly good activity without love is worthless. It ► says,

^{NKJ} 1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ► 2 And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ► 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*; and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. [Emphasis mine]

³ BDAG, s.v., “ἄκαρπος.”

⁴ E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), 155; Fred Chay, “Making Your Calling and Election Sure: An Aspect of Assurance, 2 Peter 1:5-11,” (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Seminary, 2006), 8.

⁵ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, unabridged ed., s.v. “knowledge, ἐπίγνωσις,” (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.).

⁶ Peter says in 2 Peter 1:1 that his readers have “like precious faith.”

There's a lot at stake here. Do you want your life to truly count for something? Something that lasts forever? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our productivity is at stake.

II. There is ► a second thing also at stake in the grow-or-no-grow decision. Our maturity is at stake. I get this from Verse 9, where Peter says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

- A. When used figuratively, the Greek term for ► “shortsighted” describes a person who fails to consider or understand the long-term implications of things.⁷
- B. The term, ► “blindness” refers to a mental or spiritual impairment that renders a person incapable of understanding the true nature of things.⁸
- C. For the no-grow person ► to have forgotten that “he was cleansed from his old sins” implies at least two things.
 1. First, it confirms that Peter has in mind a *believer* who is not growing. This person has been forgiven. He cannot forget what he has never experienced.
 2. Second, the term “forgotten” does not necessarily mean that all memory of forgiveness has been erased from the mind of the stunted believer. It simply means that the stunted believer disregards or neglects⁹ or is out of touch with the reality of who he is: a sinner cleansed and forgiven by Christ.
- D. When we collect all these descriptions from Verse 9 we see that our maturity is very much at stake in the grow-or-no-grow decision. If I choose *not* to grow as a believer, then Peter describes my level of maturity this way: I am unable to consider or understand the long-term implications of my choices; I am incapable of comprehending the true nature of things; and I am out of touch with the reality of who I am. Simply put, if I don't grow up, I will remain a child. As such, I can fully expect to make childish, foolish, immature decisions.

There's a lot at stake here. Do you want to lead a life full of good judgment, insight, and wisdom? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our maturity is at stake.

III. And here's ► the third thing at stake in our grow-or-no-grow decision. Our reputation is at stake. I get this from Verse 10, where Peter says,

⁷ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “μωπάζω,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

⁸ BDAG, s.v. “τυφλός.”

⁹ Chay, 10.

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble

- A. What is our ► “call and election?” Elsewhere in the Bible, it says that God chooses or elects people, and then calls them to believe in Jesus for eternal life.¹⁰ It’s the way God adopts us into His forever family. He elects and calls us. Our part is to believe.
- B. Well then, what does it mean to make our call and election ► sure?¹¹
1. Some have suggested that Peter is commanding those of us who profess to be Christians to make sure we’re true Christians because we just might be counterfeits. The idea is that we make sure we’re Christians by doing good works. In this way of thinking, our assurance of eternal salvation is based on our own performance.

But this does not seem to fit the context. The position of Peter’s readers as eternally saved believers in Christ is not at all in question. Remember in Verse 9, Peter assumes his readers are cleansed from their sins. And all the way back in Verse 1, he describes them as having “like precious faith” with him and the rest of the apostles.

Moreover, the idea that assurance of eternal salvation is based on our own performance lacks support elsewhere in the Bible. Our assurance of eternal salvation is not based on our performance, but on something Peter has already mentioned in Verse 4: God’s “exceedingly great and precious promises.”

2. Well then, what is Peter talking about here? The Greek word for “sure” can describe something that is verified or shown to be true.¹² It can mean to certify, to confirm, to attest.¹³

As such, I think Peter is commanding us to prove to others, by our good works, that we are indeed called and chosen by God. It’s not about our assurance; it’s about our reputation or testimony. A life that is growing in Christlikeness, including love, demonstrates to unbelievers the legitimacy of our call and election. Our reputation as representatives of Jesus is at stake. That’s precisely the point Jesus makes in John 13:35:

¹⁰ E.g. Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:4-5.

¹¹ Some scholars (e.g. Chay, 13-15 and Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works*, (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 73-80) have argued well that the call and election to which Peter refers are not directly related to eternal salvation at all; rather, this is a call to good works which God will one day elect to reward. In the end, whether or not this call and election relates to eternal salvation makes little difference in Peter’s overall argument.

¹² Louw-Nida lexicon, s.v. “βεβαίως,”

¹³ J.B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of Saint Peter*, 107, quoted by Chay, 12.

^{NKJ} John 13:35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- C. What about the part where Peter says “if you do these things you will ► never stumble”? Clearly, it cannot mean that we’ll never sin. In 1 John 1:8, we’re told:

^{NKJ} 1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The Greek word for “stumble” does not normally describe a small thing; it’s something disastrous.¹⁴ It means to be ruined or lost.¹⁵

But what exactly is ruined or lost? What is at stake?

Some have concluded that our eternal salvation is at stake. But this doesn’t seem to fit the context. I made the case earlier that Peter isn’t calling into question the eternal salvation of his readers.

What can be ruined or lost is our reputation as representatives of Christ. That’s what’s at stake. If we are diligent to grow in Christ, we won’t lose our reputation. We won’t fall so badly that our testimony is ruined. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, we are warned:

^{NKJ} 1 Corinthians 10:12 . . . let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

There’s a lot at stake here. Do you want to enjoy a good reputation? Do you want to make a name for yourself in Christ? Do you want to represent Christ well? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our reputation is at stake.

- IV. Here’s ► the fourth thing at stake in our grow-or-no-grow decision. Our rewards are at stake. I get this from Verse 11, where Peter says,

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I believe entering ► the everlasting kingdom means going to heaven. But the focus is not on *whether* we believers enter the kingdom; the focus is on *how* we enter. As believers, what’s at stake is not the *certainty* of our entrance, but the *manner* of our entrance.

- A. The word order in Greek makes it clear that the emphasis of Verse 11 is on the word, ► “abundantly.”¹⁶ It means plentifully or richly.¹⁷ The idea is that some will enter the everlasting kingdom abundantly; others will enter barely.

¹⁴ BDAG, s.v. “παλίω.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ It is positioned near the beginning of the clause.

¹⁷ BDAG, s.v. “πλουσίως.”

This is corroborated elsewhere in the Bible. For example, in Matthew 6:19-20, Jesus says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth . . . 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . .”

The command is to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, which would include growing more and more like Christ on earth. It seems perfectly reasonable to conclude that some will lay up more than others, and that they will be rewarded with a richer entrance into heaven as a result.

- B. In Verse 11 of our text, I want you to notice something significant that’s very easy to miss. It’s the word, ► “supplied.” God supplies an abundant entrance. It’s a translation of the Greek word, *epi-core-eh-GEH-o*.¹⁸

Peter used this word before, back in Verse 5, where he challenges us to work hard to *add or supply* to our faith the good works of virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. He says in Verse 5:

^{NKJ} 2 Peter 1:5 . . . giving all diligence, add to your faith . . .

“Add” comes from the very same Greek word, *epi-core-eh-GEH-o*. The use of the same word in Verses 5 and 11 points to an important parallel: When we add works to our faith on earth, God adds abundance to our entrance in heaven. This is the crescendo of Peter’s argument. And it’s the ► big idea of my message: When we add works to our faith on earth, God adds abundance to our entrance in heaven.

Notice Peter assumes that his readers have faith and that they *will* enter the everlasting kingdom; his focus is on what will be *added* to their faith and to their entrance. So, in the grow-or-no-grow choice, our eternal rewards in heaven are at stake. As such, our Characteristic of Completeness for the week is ► Eternity. Peter is encouraging us to live today with eternity in mind, recognizing that eternal rewards are at stake.

- C. In ► 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, the Apostle Paul presents a contrast between one who enters heaven abundantly and one who enters barely. Like Peter, Paul speaks of the importance of adding good works to our faith. He uses a metaphor of building good works upon a foundation of faith in Christ to make the point. He ► says,

^{NKJ} 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ► 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ► 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire;

¹⁸ ἐπιχορηγέω.

and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ► 14 If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The believer who builds with wood, hay, and straw is in a way productive, but not in his relationship with Christ. What he's got to show for his life on earth is not growth in Christlikeness. Maybe he grew in position or possessions or popularity or power. But these are things that do not last. They are ► burned up. So he suffers ► loss of reward. But notice, he's still ► saved. He enters *barely*.

In ► contrast, there is the believer who adds good works to his faith. The gold, silver, and precious stones symbolize his work to become more and more like Christ. This work ► endures. So he receives ► a reward. He enters *abundantly*.

- D. We are ► left to wonder about the exact nature of the reward or abundance. Peter does not elaborate in our text. But based on other places in the Bible, I think that the everlasting kingdom will include positions of reigning and responsibility for believers. And the responsibility and joy of reigning in the kingdom will be more abundant for those who follow Jesus faithfully on earth.

In explaining the kingdom in Matthew 25, Jesus uses a parable of a master entrusting his servants with certain resources and responsibilities on earth. To the servant who serves faithfully, adding good works to his faith, Jesus ► says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 25:21 . . . "Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

Summary:

So, ► what'll it be? Grow or no-grow? You decide. But know what's at stake.

Do ► you want your life to truly count for something? Something that lasts forever? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our productivity is at stake.

Do ► you want to lead a life full of good judgment, insight, and wisdom? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our maturity is at stake.

Do ► you want to enjoy a good reputation? Do you want to make a name for yourself in Christ? Do you want to represent Christ well? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our reputation is at stake.

Do ► you want to be rewarded by God with an abundant entrance into heaven? An entrance you'll enjoy for eternity? You decide. Grow or no grow. Our rewards are at stake.

When we add works to our faith on earth, God adds abundance to our entrance in heaven. An abundance we'll enjoy in eternity.