

Driving the Highway or the Speedway  
II Peter 1:8-9

Let's begin the message this morning by reading our passage. For context I would like to go back and include vs. 3-7. This will help shape our understating of the truth Peter is conveying to his readers, which includes us.

II Peter 1:3-9

Essentially Peter is saying that God has given to us everything we need to know Him and to grow in Him as we understand what it means to be saved, but not just saved, what it also means to become more like Him in character. *Salvation isn't just about something that happens to us in the future through a translation into His kingdom, it is also about a transformation that happens each day as we yield our will to His will allowing His Spirit to change our old character into His character.*

Paul describes it to the Galatians as developing the fruit of the Spirit. Peter then adds that as we grow in Christ-likeness we grow less fond of the world. By the world, I'm referring to the conduct of the world, which has to do, according to Peter, with evil or sinful desires or what Paul calls the old nature. As we grow in Christ we become more detached from them, they are less appealing.

Godly living then has both a divine and human component.

The divine component is God giving to us what we need to mature in Christ: His Word, His Spirit, His people, His availability through prayer.

The human component is what we do with what He has given to us. While His Spirit will help us to mature in faith through prayer and God's Word, He won't force spiritual growth on us. A farmer who buys seed can't expect to grow a crop if he leaves it in the barn in a sack. He needs to plant it, cultivate it and make sure it is watered. The farmer has work to do to get a crop. So it is with spiritual growth.

We can't expect to grow in faith if we leave our Bible on the coffee table or on the book shelf or neglect to go to our prayer room to speak with God on a regular basis or even when we neglect getting together with believers for worship, fellowship and study. The Holy Spirit only uses the tools God has given us if we get them out and put them to use letting Him challenge us and change us and convict us and conform us and correct us.

I compared Christian growth with the analogy of gas stations 40 years ago vs. gas stations today. Back then you drove into a gas station and up to a pump and someone came out to fill your tank, check your oil, tire pressure and water level. You didn't have to get out of the car. Now when you pull into a gas station everything has been provided for you to fill your tank, check your oil, tire pressure, and water level, but you have to do the work.

There are Christians who think that spiritual growth is like the old gas station. They expect God to do it all, when in reality spiritual growth is like today's gas station. It is a cooperative effort between what God has provided and what man is to do. This is not a works based approach to salvation, which only God can do and what we receive by faith.

So when we focus on the two verses in our message today it boils down to this question: Do you love God? Genuine spiritual growth essentially comes down to that question: Do you truly love God?

I want to recommend a book I am reading. The author is Jerry Bridges. He's written some great books:

*The Pursuit of Holiness*

*Respectable Sins*

*Trusting God*

*Transforming Grace*

The book I'm currently reading is *The Discipline of Grace*. Last week I was reading about obeying the Great Commandment. What is it class? Love God.

In Matthew 22 Jesus taught about the wedding banquet that awaits those who are invited to His kingdom. The religious leaders left wondering how they could set a trap for Him in what He taught so they came with a question on whether or not a Jew should pay taxes to Caesar. Our tax day was this last week. Jesus said give to God what belongs to God and give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Jesus sprung the trap, but the Pharisees were the ones who were caught.

The other branch of the religious leaders, called the Sadducees, thought they would try their luck at trapping Jesus. They referred back to His earlier teaching on the wedding feast. Even though they didn't believe in heaven they asked if there would be marriage in heaven. Jesus told them they erred in their understanding of both heaven and marriage.

We pick up the narrative in verse 34. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together in a huddle. I picture this like the game show Family Feud. There are the Sadducees on one side and the Pharisees on the other side. While the Sadducees were trying to get the answers to the survey question, the Pharisees were on the other side huddled up trying to get something that would catch Jesus in His words. They broke their huddle and an expert in the law was ready with a response.

According to the law, which is the greatest commandment? Since he took Jesus to the law, Jesus responded by going to law with His answer. He took him to Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment.

Now as I have said before and will continue to repeat: *All means all that's all all means.* The word love used here is the strongest Greek term and refers to a commitment of devotion that is directed by the will.

In essence the Great Commandment is about loving God with your whole being, with everything you have. There are no exceptions or excuses or exclusions.

That doesn't mean only when you're in church. That doesn't mean only when you're with other Christians.

This doesn't mean only when you feel like it or when it's convenient.

This doesn't mean only when you're reading your Bible, or singing, or praying or teaching a Sunday school class or serving on a Board or committee. It's every person, every day, in every way.

It means loving God when you are at work and includes how you work, even when others gossip about you or malign you or criticize you. It means doing your work with a joyful heart, doing it to the best of your ability.

It means loving God by loving your spouse and your family even when they make decisions you don't approve of or that cause chaos in the family. It means loving God when circumstances are less than favorable – an unwanted diagnosis, an unexpected bill, an unfavorable situation.

It means loving God in every situation throughout your day, every day, all day.

Essentially, loving God with all you have is about obedience, something that begins in the heart.

When you read Deuteronomy 6:5-6 there is a correlation between commands, decrees, and laws and the instruction to observe, keep, and carefully obey them. The essence of our love for God is in our obedience to Him.

So when asked the question: do we love God, can we wholeheartedly and sincerely answer yes, we love God with our whole being, with everything we have and in everything we do, in every way?

Here is a penetrating thought from Jerry Bridges: *"Our love for God will always manifest itself in obedience to Him."*

That hits me like a 2X4 alongside the head. There is a direct correlation between my love for God and the obedience I display.

The next time we sing hymns or choruses like “I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You O my soul, rejoice! Take joy, my King, in what You hear: May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear remember that our love for God is validated by our obedience. If we say we love God with all our heart, soul and mind then we will obey Him with all our heart, and soul and mind.

In his book Jerry Bridges gives an analogy of the Christian life by illustrating it as either a car with cruise control or a race car. He says that many Christians approach love for and obedience to God like driving with cruise-control. He calls it cruise control Christianity.

Most of you will remember back in the day when there was no such thing as cruise-control. I remember when Dad got a cruise control kit that he could add to the steering column that gave him cruise control on his Chevy El Camino. Now cruise-control comes standard.

When you get in your car and you hit the highway, the cruise control feature is nice. You don't have to keep one eye on the speedometer and the other eye on the road. It's really convenient for long drives. It helps with foot fatigue that can occur from having the foot on the accelerator for extended periods of time. But even though it's a convenient feature there can be some inherent risks when you get too comfortable while driving. Without having to pay attention to your speed you can let your mind and eye wander.

The Christian going through life on cruise-control can be risky. That person can lose focus when it comes to obedience. He or she can check out how other Christians are driving the spiritual highway and fall into line with them. You don't want to lag

behind and you don't want to soar ahead. You want to blend in with others. You don't want to be too spiritual, just have enough spirituality to be like everyone else. When we become comfortable with acceptable conduct and commitment we set the spiritual cruise-control. That's Christian cruise-control obedience.

On the other hand, some Christians are like a race car. You never see the race car driver using a cruise control driving a race car because it's not there. Why? It's so he can stay focused on his driving and the others around him. He can't ever get comfortable doing his laps. That's driving with all his heart and soul and mind, from beginning to end.

The writer of Hebrews says we are to make every effort to be holy (12:14). There is no cruise control for such a spiritual endeavor.

Back in verse 5 Peter tells us to make every effort to add to our faith certain godly virtues.

That kind of effort takes discipline and focus.

Comfort is not a luxury an obedient Christian can afford if he or she says they love God with all their heart and soul and mind.

Listen carefully to what Jerry Bridges writes “God is not impressed with our worship on Sunday morning at church if we are practicing cruise-control obedience the rest of the week. You may sing with reverent zest and great emotional fervor, but your worship is only as pleasing to God as the obedience that accompanies it.”

To what degree do we really love God?

To what degree are we obeying God in our pursuit of godly character?

So what does this have to do with our passage?

Let's look at II Peter 1:8-9.

Keep in mind that God has given to us what we need for spiritual life to begin through salvation in Christ and for continued godly living. Peter then

describes seven godly traits that we are to add as part of our spiritual maturity. They are not built one after the other meaning you don't get knowledge until you have learned goodness and you don't get brother kindness until you have learned godliness. Instead they are developed at the same time. One might grow a bit faster than another, but they all grow together as we yield to God's Spirit.

In verses 8-9 we see both positive and negative results from either being a race-car Christian or cruise control Christian. One is committed while the other is comfortable, we might even say his is careless. Consider these two points.

The potential of commitment

The problem of carelessness

## I. THE POTENTIAL OF COMMITMENT – v. 8

Notice again in the context that Peter is addressing Christians – “For if YOU...” points back to verse 1 referring “To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.”

There is no question as to who Peter is writing. The unbeliever cannot possess these godly traits because they can only be developed through the indwelling Spirit. Paul is very clear that if you don't have the Spirit you don't belong to God (Romans 8:9), and if you don't belong to God, you can't develop His character. Now I'm not saying that an unbeliever can't be moral or kind or patient or loving. To some degree they may have them, but they aren't godly traits, only human endeavor.

The second thing we notice here that Christians are to “possess these qualities”. The qualities referred to go back to verses 6-7. First of all the assumption is that these qualities are in you. We are to possess them. It means more than just to have or to own. It means to own in an abiding sense. They are ours permanently and something we practice

persistently. It implies an abiding possession meaning that they are living or active in us.

As a church we possess this property and this building. It's where we gather each week to worship together. The word used by Peter implies that this is an active place of worship because we abide or live on this property. A couple miles north of here we own some additional property.

According to the Township Supervisor we own that property but we don't possess it because we don't occupy it. We don't gather there for worship.

Peter says that we possess these seven qualities in the same sense that we possess this property on Hartland Rd. These qualities abide or live in us actively. That means there is some evidence of their nature seen through our character. There is permanence to them visible to others.

What then is the potential of these qualities in the life of an obedient Christian who says they love God with all their heart, soul, and mind?

### A. The Potential to Obediently Increase Character

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure...”

When companies or schools or teams or individuals talk about setting goals, they talk about setting goals that are measurable and visible. It's a way of seeing if what they are doing is working or if they need to make any changes either to how it's being done or whether their goals were achievable to begin with.

A company may want to increase profit share by 15%.

A school may want to increase their math scores by 20%.

A team may want to increase how many games they win this year compared to last year.

A baseball player may want to increase his batting average.

An individual may set a goal of losing 25 pounds. You may set a goal of reading through the Bible in

a year or witnessing to someone once a week.  
Goals should be measurable to show progress.

Peter says a measurable goal for a Christian would be to see each of these seven qualities increase.

Is my life characterized by more goodness today than yesterday or last year?

Is my life characterized by more knowledge about God's Word this year than last year?

Is my life characterized by more self-control today than last month?

You get the picture.

Is godliness increasing? It's a matter of continuous activity, of a determined pursuit, a visible manifestation of God's character being developed by His Spirit in my life. If not, it goes back to the question of how much do I love God? Just like the race car driver pushes himself to win through focused attention, the Christian strives in pursuit of godly living through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

We see the same thing back in verse 5 in the word "add". Whether mathematically it's adding or multiplying, the idea is the same, there is a measurable increase in these godly character traits that is visible to others. They see a difference in our character.

Now, you might ask, how are these increased? Our verse says it's through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It isn't just knowledge about Him, because scripture is clear that knowledge for the sake of knowledge puffs up. That's what the false teachers were promoting. Knowledge that was only available to an elite group of people.

The knowledge Peter is speaking about is this: the more we know about Christ, the more we will strive to be like Christ in character. There is always a practical side to this knowledge of Christ, which will always produce something practical in the believer's life that gives evidence of faith. Simply

put, such knowledge should increase holiness. That is God's will for you.

Colossians 1:9-12

The word "increase" means to possess more than enough of something. It's not being satisfied with where we are but doing what we can to improve. When we increase these virtues in our lives, we will increase our spirituality. That's the difference between driving on cruise-control and driving like a race car driver.

Enoch comes to mind for me. My college Bible teacher used to say that every day Enoch and God would go for a walk and each day they walked further and further until one day God said they were so close to His home Enoch might as well keep walking there instead of going back.

The potential of commitment in our spiritual journey is evident when we obediently increase our character to become more like Christ.

Second, the potential of commitment is seen when we overcome idle character.

#### B. The Potential to Overcome Idle Character

"For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective"

The KJV uses the word "barren". We understand that to mean being unfruitful which is the next thought in the verse. That seems redundant. So what does Peter mean here?

The word in the NIV gives a different perspective to its meaning. It uses the word "ineffective" and means to be idle or useless. It's like sitting in your car with the engine running, but the gear is in park and your foot is off the gas pedal. You're going nowhere because all you're doing is idling with an engine that is not engaged.

These Christians aren't growing in their faith because they are idle. Being idle they are ineffective. Paul calls them carnal and immature. James conveys the same idea when he says that faith without works is dead or useless (2:20).

In the parable Jesus taught about a landowner who went looking for workers call those milling around as being idle, doing nothing.

Paul called some young widows were idle gossips and busybodies (I Timothy 5:13).

To Titus Paul wrote that the Cretans were lazy gluttons (Titus 2:12). They are all ineffective.

A person who is measurably increasing these spiritual qualities through the knowledge of Christ won't be idle, sitting around waiting for something spiritually to happen to them. He will instead have the potential to overcome idle character.

Peter adds one more potential, the potential to overcome inefficient character.

### C. The Potential to Overcome Inefficient Character

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This has to do with the lack of productivity or fruitfulness. The bottom line is that there is no growth, no evidence of spiritual activity, no progress in becoming like Christ in character. The person is satisfied with salvation, and makes no effort at any other effort to mature in faith.

I Corinthians 3:1-3 “Brothers, (Christians) I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since

there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?”

Hebrews 5:12-14 “In fact, by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

Reading through the rest of the Hebrews 5 Paul essentially says that if God's Spirit is in you as a believer there ought to be visible evidence in your character.

Allowing God's Spirit to work in you will produce the fruit of godliness – Galatians 5:22-23, and Peter says they will increase. Instead of being unfruitful you will be fruitful.

Peter not only speaks of the potential of commitment, what can happen when we let God's Spirit really work in us, he also speaks about the problem of carelessness.

## II. THE PROBLEM OF CARELESSNESS – v. 9

Peter identifies two problems. The first is this:

### A. There Is A Myopic Problem

The Greek word here is our English word myopia. Another term for myopia is near-sightedness as it is transliterated in the NIV. The term has been used to describe when a person blinks, squints or looks away when seeing a bright light. He tries to avoid it.

Scientists say that a person's diet can affect their vision. It's the same with our spiritual diet. This believer has closed his eyes to the truth of God's Word, or only wants to see what he wants to see to

keep from seeing the truth. Short-sightedness causes us not to see the world around us or the need for additional spiritual growth. This person is unable to discern spiritual things because he has chosen not to see them.

This person is also described as being blind. That was one of the problems for the church in Laodicea. Laodicea was known for a salve that helped with eye problems. The church had a problem with spiritual blindness. They thought one thing about themselves and God had an entirely different perspective about them. He wanted them to use spiritual salve so they could see the truth clearly.

Spiritual growth is a choice and this person has chosen to remain idle and unfruitful by being both spiritually short-sighted and blind. Won't you let God open your eyes to see your spiritual potential?

The second problem is about memory.

#### B. There Is A Memory Problem

“But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and *has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*” (emphasis added)

The word forgotten literally means having received forgetfulness. Time or circumstances have caused them to forget. Their spiritual inactivity has caused spiritual atrophy of their spiritual muscles thus diminishing their memory of the importance of their salvation experience. The word “cleansed” has to do with Christ's atoning sacrifice, which brings us into a right relationship with God.

They have forgotten they have been cleansed from sin, forgotten what Christ has done for them and the price He paid for their sin, forgotten about the change that has taken place when they became new creatures in Christ. The implication is that the person who has forgotten that he has been cleansed

from past sin lapses back into the sins he had been cleansed of.

The person who lacks these qualities forfeits the assurance of his salvation. Please note carefully, he doesn't forfeit his salvation, just assurance of salvation, the peace that he is saved. Instead he has forgotten that he has been cleansed, forgiven, purified from sin. He therefore lacks confidence in his salvation.

When we forget what Christ has done we neglect to grow. Spiritual near-sightedness is always due to unfaithfulness in Christian living.

Bruce Barton writes “Our faith must go beyond what we believe; it must become a dynamic part of all we do, resulting in good fruit and spiritual maturity.”

It all comes back to the question we posed earlier: how much do you love God? A genuine love for Him will result in wholehearted obedience. Wholehearted obedience will result in possessing these qualities in increasing measure.

So is your Christian life on cruise-control or are you in the seat of a race car focused and committed to growing, increasing the character of Christ in your life?

Don't let problems impede your potential.