

“The Divine Life” Part 2B

Holiness

2 Peter 1:1-11

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Bruce: Gracious and merciful Lord, as we come into the Advent season, which we call Christmas, we need to be reminded that Christmas is every day of our lives.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because of the gift of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, we pray, Lord, that You would uplift our spirits, that You would teach us this morning. Guide us into all truth. And may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen and Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: I invite you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 1. The verses we have for our contemplation this morning will be found in verses 1-11, although we'll be speaking primarily and directly from verses 5-11. But I want you to understand the context of what we're reading and what we're studying. This is what I'm calling the divine life, and how we have the balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work within us and wills us to have the willingness to utilize all the things that He gives us. So let's listen to the word of the Lord.

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in this world because of sinful desire.

"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen and Amen. We've touched on this passage before, dealing with what we call the divine life. We now want to look primarily at verses 5-11 in your handout, your outline.

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We've talked about the believer's privileges. And that is the divine implantation of the life of God in verses 1-4.

We're going to be exploring and contemplating in our discussion this morning on verses 5-11, which is the human utilization. When God implants His life of grace into us, we don't cooperate with Him as much as we utilize the resources that He gives us. There is a difference.

A lot of times people talk about cooperating with God. Now I understand what they mean. I'm not sure that's the best expression of it. I think there is a better expression, in which I use the term *utilization*. In other words, God gives us the resources and we use the resources that He gives. It's not so much cooperating with Him, because how in the world can I cooperate with Him? He's so divine! I can't do that! But what I can do is that I can utilize the resources that He gives us. Hence I call this the divine implantation of the graces of God. And then we humanly utilize those graces that God gives us. That's our responsibility. Our responsibility is to utilize the resources that God gives us. The emphasis is on utilization of the resources.

Who gives us the resources? God does that through the divine implantation. That is verses 1-4. When you and I come along now, we utilize all those things that God gives us—His very great and precious promises. He gives us those things that we looked at. We utilize those by our human capabilities. We work out our salvation with fear and trembling. There is a good balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

So now we want to look at the aspect of this. How do we utilize the graces that God gives us through the divine implantation?

Oftentimes when people get together on vacation, one of the primary subjects we talk about is how to be successful. We're always talking about success. That's why coaches have coaches' clinics, because they want to copy somebody else's success. They want to learn what has made someone else successful. How can we copy that? How can we emulate that? That's why there are business seminars, to learn techniques within a given spear of business life, that you may improve your productivity and become more successful.

Success is a great business in America. There are all kinds of tapes to motivate you to become successful. It's big business. Success is big business.

There are all kinds of books which reveal steps to be successful in whatever you want. I've even seen the Christian bookstores. *The Successful Bible*. (*Laughter.*) Well, no kidding! (*Laughter.*) You know, there is *The Businessman's Bible*. There is *The Coach's Bible*. There is *The Teenager's Bible*. It's all built upon this idea of generating some degree of success. Has somebody captured something that is going to help me become more successful? Success, friends, is big business.

But the problem with success is this. It's usually portrayed as an immediate, short range achievement that can be passed on or duplicated by repeating what someone else has already done. That's why coaches try to run the West Coast offense, because if it works in California, it's going to work in Pennsylvania.

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That's why we read a book. Somebody did this in their church. I'm going to do the same thing in my church because the church wants to become more successful. What is it that pastors talk about when we get together at a pastor's conference? We talk about how you can have a more successful youth program. How can you have a more successful musical program? How can you have a more successful evangelistic program? The whole thing is geared to success. It's basically designed to be a short term immediate fix based upon what somebody else has learned that I can emulate. And I don't have to spend all my time working on it because somebody has already proven it to be successful. I'm just going to copy it.

You see, that's the danger with success. Please think about that. The same mindset often works within the Christian church, because pastors talk about how they can become more successful.

Men, do you realize—and I'm sure that you're aware of this—that a pastor can buy a full supply of sermon outlines on the Internet. And they are usually already written by somebody else, with space provided for you to make your own applications so that you can say, "It's mine." You can buy a whole series of sermons. What happened to studying the Scripture?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: What happened to laboring in word and doctrine? Now you see, people are so oriented to being successful. How can I get a quick fix to be successful? I can buy a whole series of sermons. And all I have to do is plug in an illustration and say that it's mine. Somebody else is doing all the work.

You see, the whole design is this. If somebody else has proved his works, maybe I need to do the same thing to be successful. You see, the attraction is successful preaching.

Men, there are two kinds of ministries today in the church. There is one that sells. And it's based upon duplication of success. It's sellable. It's buyable. It worked over here; it's going to work over there.

One ministry is one that sells. And the other one is the one that releases life. And it's based upon giving away what God has given to you and given to me. There is a huge difference between that which sells and that which releases life.

We cannot duplicate what we did not create. We did not create our faith. That's the divine implantation that God gave us. God did that. The divine life cannot be sold. It can only be released. It can only be given away. God is the only one who can duplicate it. We can't do that. And we shouldn't even try to do it. And woe upon us if we think that we can duplicate the divine life, because we cannot duplicate something that we did not create. All we can learn to do is to live it and give it away. Two ministries occur in the church—one that sells, and one that releases life.

Now these verses picture for us, in my mind, one of the closest experiences and clearest expressions of what we would call successful living. I think it's one of the most effective expressions of successful living you'll ever find. If I were teaching a seminar on successful anything, this is what I would teach.

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But I would change the wording of this. I would change it to *being excellent*, not being successful. One of the seminars I do teach is not on pursuing success, but pursuing excellence.

There is a difference between success and excellence. You see, success is something that somebody else has already proven that works. And now I'm just going to duplicate that and apply it, and put my own application on it and copy somebody else's success. You see, that's why success is such a big business.

But there is a difference between success and excellence. Excellence is internal. Success is external. What is it that makes somebody successful? It's their personal excellence. So we should not be pursuing success. We should be pursuing excellence.

And that is what Peter is teaching us. He's teaching us about how to live an excellent life so that you can release something. You're not selling something. You can't duplicate the divine life. That is something that only God can create within you. All we can do is live an excellent life and give it away and release it.

You see, the problem with success, as George Patton said after World War II, is that the only thing it leads to is failure, because once you reach the apex of success, all you can do is go down.

I would add this. The real test of the height of your success is not how high you achieve. It's how quickly you rebound when you fail, because, you see, all of us are going to fail. And the real test of your excellence and your success, if you want to use that word, is not how high you reach. It's how quickly you rebound when you fail.

You see, success is like chasing a cat up a tree. You just don't know which definition you're going to get, because remember this. Success is based upon what somebody else has already achieved, or what somebody else wants to achieve. And we're just saying that we want to follow what they want to do and duplicate what they've already done. Success is based upon what somebody wants to achieve.

Excellence is a personal attribute that really sets the stage for being successful. It's a cause and effect relationship. When you and I pursue excellence in life, we release the life giving regeneration work of the Holy Spirit. We release that and give that away. And that produces success.

But success is determined in a different way Biblically than it is in the world system. If you would go to the CEO of a company and ask him, "What is your definition of success?", you will get one expression of that. The CEO would say this, because that is what he wants to achieve.

You ask the division head in your same company. "What is your definition of success?" You're likely to get a different one, because this person has a different application of success and what they want to achieve.

And then you ask a department head. You might get a third definition. And finally, you ask your boss what it is to be successful. You're going to get a different answer four different ways, because it's all based upon what that person wants to achieve. There is no standard of excellence. You see, success is like chasing a cat up a tree. You just don't know which limb it's going to go out on.

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So who do you follow? Do I follow the CEO? Do I follow the division head? Do I follow the department head? Or do I follow my boss? And so the employee has a difficult time trying to determine what success is, because there are four different dimensions of it—four different expressions of it, because it's all based upon what the individual person wants to achieve.

So what we're going to talk about today, men, is not successful living. It's excellent living. Peter is going to give us the best description of what it means to be excellent in life. And the result of your personal excellence will be that you will be successful.

Now notice how he defines success. He defines it by saying, *"You will never fall."* He defines it by your never falling.

Notice in our verses. *"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you practice these qualities."* What qualities? These seven qualities that he is going to outline for us. If you practice these seven qualities, you will never—

Participant: Fall.

Bruce: Fall. Now what is the definition of falling? It's falling in the knowledge of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It's not some political attainment, not some business-like activity. He's saying that you're never going to fall in the knowledge of the Person and work of Christ. That's his definition of not falling. It is that you will have a true knowledge of Christ. You will grow in the knowledge of Christ. And when you practice these seven qualities, you're never going to fall from that. That's what Peter has already told us about—the divine implantation and discovering the divine life, no longer being corrupted by the system of this world.

There is a cause and effect relationship. Excellence is the cause. Success is the consequence. We've reversed that in our culture. We talk about the result because all we try to do is copy what somebody else has done.

Peter is saying, "Look!" When you work on these seven character qualities, you are never going to be amiss or be erroneous in your knowledge of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. And you will never fall. It has to do with excellence, not about success.

Basically, Biblically, excellence is learning to love sacrificially. That's what Peter is going to teach us. Excellence is learning to love sacrificially.

Look at the last of these seven qualities. What is it? It's love.

Now the way these fit together, the first one leads to the second one. The second one completes the first one. The second one leads to the third one. The third one completes the second one. The third one leads to the fourth one. The fourth one completes the third one. The fourth one leads to the fifth one. The fifth one completes the fourth one, and so on. And the end result is this. The end result is the last one, which is what?

Participant: Love.

Bruce: Love. Peter is basically saying this. If you're going to be excellent in life, you need to learn to love sacrificially because you will have the greatest knowledge of the Person and work of Christ, because you will have something to give away because He

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has reproduced that life within you. There are two kinds of life, men—one that sells and one that releases life.

Peter is saying this. When you understand how to love Biblically, how to love sacrificially,—and that is a process. That is not something that can be copied. It can't be sold. It cannot be put on tapes to tell you how to do it. It's something you must experience by the divine implantation of God's holy life. As a result of that, you work on these things. We make every effort that we can. We add to our faith these things that we utilize, because God has given us the resources. The resources are by His divine implantation—precious and great promises. You utilize those. And you make every effort to express those resources.

The issue is this. It's a matter of resources. Who gives you the resources? You do that in the divine implantation. You and I don't cooperate with God. You and I utilize the resources that He gives us in His own life. And when you and I perfect those, we will learn how to love sacrificially. And when you do that, you will never—

Participant: Fall.

Bruce: Fall, because you will be releasing the life of God through the divine implantation of His resources. Do you understand how that works?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: So let's examine these seven character qualities. Peter instructs us to "*make every effort.*" He instructs us to add more than is required.

Last time we were together, we looked at how we are to fulfill that as a duty with God's gift of the divine life. We don't cooperate with Him. We utilize the resources that He gives us in the divine life. How do I utilize those resources? That's what we're going to talk about.

Today we're going to look at what it means to "*make every effort*" in what we are to add—more than is required, these seven Christian graces that become our responsibility to work at by the human utilization of the divine implantation of God's life. And we develop a faith that God gives us.

Now let me give you a little grammar lesson here. I'll just touch on how these seven graces work together. Literally, it means this—to develop one grace in the exercise of another. Each new character quality springs out of the one before it, while the one following perfects the one before it.

Here is how one Greek historian describes the use of lists in the Scripture. "Let us look at the list of the virtues which have to be added one to another, like the cog of a wheel. It is worth noting that in the ancient world such lists were very common. It was a world in which books were not nearly so common, so cheap, and so readily available as they are today. Instruction, therefore, had for the most part to be carried out in the pupil's head. And easily memorized lists were one of the commonest ways of inculcating instruction.

"One of the most ingenious ways of teaching the child the names of these virtues was by means of a game played with counters which would be won or lost. And each of the counters had on it's name one of these virtues.

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"Lists of virtues are common in the New Testament. Paul gives us the fruit of the Spirit—'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control.' Galatians chapter 5.

"In the pastoral epistles, the man of God is bidden to follow after 'righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.' 1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 1-11."

Now the point that I'm trying to illustrate, men, is this. This is not some random throwing together of words. This is the divinely inspired instruction to teach us how to release the life that God has given us in the divine implantation. And the way that we learn to do that is that we learn to love sacrificially. That cannot be duplicated or sold. That can only be experienced and then given away and released.

And Peter says this. You need to make every effort, men, to take that which God has given you—the divine implantation—and you need to humanly utilize those resources that God gave you to perfect these seven character qualities so that, at the end of the day, you will know how to biblically and sacrificially love, because that is the greatest demonstration of the character of God.

What is it that we want to do in life? We want to demonstrate a reason for people to love God. That means that you and I need to learn to live excellent lives in perfecting these seven character qualities so that the end result will be this. We will be able to release sacrificial love.

It means this, men. Love can be taught. Love can be learned. You and I can teach people how to love one another, and this is the process of how to do that. You make every effort to add to your faith these seven character qualities. It's the combination, men, of this—of the divine implantation, of God giving us the resources. And now it becomes our human utilization to use those resources—not to cooperate with God, but to utilize the resources that God gives us. And make every effort to do that. And you add more than is required, because that is our responsibility because of the divine implantation of God giving us His resources.

And at the end of the day, this is not going to be a ministry that sells. It's going to be a ministry that releases life. Men, that's excellent living. So let's explore those wonderful character qualities.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: I agree very much with what you're saying about cooperation versus utilization. What's the difference between those two?

Bruce: Well, Ted, I think it means this. Cooperation means that I have the resources to start with. I've got some resources that I'm going to bring to the table. God is going to have some resources that He is going to bring to the table. And the two of us are going to cooperate to make that happen.

I don't bring any resources at all!

Participant: That's right.

Bruce: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" You see, I'm a spiritual beggar. I have no resources at all to live the divine life. The only thing I can do is utilize the resources that God gives us. That's the difference. I don't bring anything to the table.

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That's what regeneration is about—verses 1-4. God gives us a faith that is equal to the apostles. He gave us that faith. Those are the resources that we have. We now utilize those resources because I bring no resources myself. I can't cooperate with Him. That would mean that I would be on an equal stage and bring some resources which I don't have. I'm a spiritual beggar. All I can do is be dependent upon the resources that God gives and learn how to polish that and learn how to refine that.

And the end result will be this. You will release life and learn how to love Biblically. Yes, Thomas?

Tom: I think that we often gloss over the word *implantation*, because these seven characteristics are not normal for us. They're not natural. They are outside of us, and God brings them in to us.

Bruce: Absolutely. And you know, to grow in grace, what is required for somebody to grow?

Participant: Life.

Bruce: Life! You cannot grow in grace unless you've had the divine implantation. You see, if somebody is not in Christ today, this word makes no sense at all, because you can't do anything with it. You don't have the resources. You have not had the divine implantation of God's regenerating life.

And we often talk about the church. Oh, we just want to grow in grace!—when half the people sitting there are not alive! And when you falsely deceive them and defraud them into believing that they can do something they cannot do, growth implies life. Without that divine implantation and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit there is no growth. Growth is critical for life. But life must occur before growth can occur.

Let's take a look at these verses and these virtues. The first one that I find very interesting is the word *virtue*, sometimes translated *goodness*, or sometimes *moral excellence*. I like the words *moral excellence* because of the meaning of the word.

The first one is this. There are two shades to this definition of the words *goodness*, *virtue*, or *moral excellence*. It means this—that which makes a person an expert in the actual art and technique of living well. It means excellence. That is where I get the idea of pursuing excellence, not success, men. It comes from that very first quality. It's perfecting the art of living excellently.

Now why is it, do you think, that the very first of these things that we're to add on to starts with moral excellence? Why doesn't it say "love?" Why doesn't it say "faith?" Why doesn't it say "perseverance?" Why is it that it starts off with moral excellence?

Why does it start with this? What do you think? Look at it logically. If you say you're a follower of Christ, what do people expect?

Participant: Moral excellence.

Bruce: Moral excellence! In other words, you don't just talk your talk; you walk your walk. In other words, if you say that you're a follower of Christ, show me! It starts right there, living life excellently. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes, Bruce. When you say "moral excellence," can you expand on that a little bit, because some people think that moral excellence is in the sexual realm. But it's a lot more than that, isn't it?

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Bruce: Oh, absolutely. It really means the actual art and technique of living well. That's what it means. Morality is the actual art and technique of living well.

Now how is that defined as a follower of Christ? Through the Scripture. The Scripture defines that. So it's the actual technique and art of living well.

Now that leads us to the next question. What follows right after that?

Participant: Knowledge.

Bruce: Knowledge! You need to know how to live morally! So Don's question leads up to the very next question. The reason knowledge comes next is because what are you going to need to have to live morally? You're going to need more knowledge. And where does that knowledge come from? That comes from the Scripture.

So logically, you see—and understandably,—the thing that I need to know in order to live morally—the technique and art of living excellently—I need knowledge of that. That's why knowledge follows second. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. So, in other words,—and maybe you'll be talking about this,—but a Christian should be a man of his word.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: A Christian should be one who says that he'll get the job done and do it. The Christian is one who does any number of these things.

Bruce: Absolutely. We'll get to that in a moment about knowledge.

Don: Okay.

Bruce: But first of all, we're talking about setting the stage for choosing to add on to the resources that God gives you to polish your life, to start living life excellently. That's why I like the words *moral excellence*.

It really means this. It also means *courage*. The word *virtue* also means courage. And so when you put those two things together, they are both applicable. Faith is the basis for our excellent living, as well as our courageous living. And we polish that by the technique of living morally excellent. We make wise choices. To live an excellent life may take courage in our world.

It's possible because of your calling. Look at verse 3. "*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him.*" What do you think is going to occur next, after moral excellence?

Participant: Knowledge.

Bruce: Knowledge! What is the one thing that I need to know? I need to know how to live morally excellent. It starts with a desire to work at moral excellence. The thing I need to have now is knowledge. I need to know how to figure that out. I need to know how to be a man of my word. I need to know my duty, how to fulfill my responsibilities. Those are the things that Christ gives us, the knowledge of what we need to do.

You know, when you study the Scripture, there are many ways of defining what the Scripture does. But just in summary, it's sort of like this. The knowledge of the Scripture reveals Christ's instructions. The knowledge of the Scripture reveals Christ's love. And the knowledge of the Scripture reveals Christ's beauties.

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Jonathan Edwards' most famous sermon was *Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God*. But do you know what he spent more time preaching on and teaching than anything else? The beauties of Christ.

Do you understand how beautiful Christ is? You see, men, that is what impacts your moral excellence. When you understand that not only does he give me His instructions of how to live life morally—that's why I need knowledge—but also I understand the magnificence of His love. But consider this. Do I see how beautiful Christ is?

Now that may not be a manly term. You know, we don't think of Christ being beautiful. But I want to encourage you to look at the beauties of Christ, to see His character qualities, the twenty-eight attributes of God. See how beautiful those are as they impact our lives. You see, when we understand that, men, we're going to start making wiser choices in how we live our morally excellent lives.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: When you're talking about knowledge here, it's beyond the informational content.

Bruce: Yes. I haven't gotten to that word *knowledge* yet. That's next. Hang on. (*Laughter.*) Hold it right there. I'm still introducing us as to why, logically, knowledge follows moral excellence. What is the one thing that we need after moral excellence? Bill is suggesting that we need the knowledge of how to do that. So let me touch on that.

When you and I live an excellent life, we are demonstrating the very divine life of God. That's why moral excellence starts first. You are giving away what God has given you.

Moral excellence is this. It's the demonstration of the estimation of God's glory. In other words, when you and I choose to live a life of moral excellence, we are reflecting our high esteem for God. Do you understand that? The choices that I make are a reflection of my esteem for God. That's all wrapped up in the term *moral excellence*. It's a high estimation of God.

When you and I talk on the telephone, when we respond to a person, we are basically reflecting our estimation of how God's character is demonstrated. And the way that I choose to live my life morally, meaning the technique and art of living excellently, starting with this, is the first expression of my estimation of the glory of God. It starts right there.

Now what is it that you and I need to do that more effectively? That's where we need knowledge. And as Bill has indicated, this is more than just thinking. It's one of two Greek words for *knowledge*. This is the word *gnosis*.

The two words in the Greek are the words *gnosis* and *sophia*. The word *sophia* means this—of things human, and divine of deeper things. But this word *gnosis* means practical knowledge, not just knowledge that you are gaining that doesn't stay there. It's practical application of knowledge. It's far more than just the awareness of a truth. It's knowing how to take that truth and to apply it.

And how do we apply it? By being morally excellent. This word is the word *gnosis*. It's practical. It's not just lost in your head. It's very applicational—very, very practical.

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It's practical knowledge. It's the ability which enables a person to decide rightly and act honorably and efficiently in the day-to-day situations of life. It's practical knowledge. That's what we get from the knowledge of the Person and work of Christ. It's practical wisdom to deal with life.

To give you an illustration of this, turn to Romans chapter 15 verse 14. Now notice. Paul is writing to the believers at Rome. And this is what he says in Romans 15:14. "*I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.*"

That word *knowledge* there is practical knowledge. It's not just theoretical knowledge. It's not just facts. It's knowing how to take those facts and applying them to the point of living morally excellent. That's the knowledge that we need to have. It's very practical knowledge. Yes, Don?

Don: Go ahead.

Bruce: Please, Bob?

Bob: Bruce, I'm struggling a little bit here. My thought process suggests that how can I have moral excellence if I don't first have knowledge to know what the definition of moral excellence is and what is expected of me? It almost sounds to me like moral excellence should first be the *desire* for more excellence, and then the knowledge to understand and apply. I'm a little—

Bruce: That's a very logical question. The difference is this. What comes before human responsibility? The sovereignty of God.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: There's the answer. The answer is this. Through the divine implantation, you have a basic knowledge of your salvation. And we are to work that out with fear and trembling, because God is willing to give us the willingness to do it.

So what we have here is that we have a basic knowledge of our salvation. I understand what regeneration is. God has removed the heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh. And now I have an interest in spiritual things. That's a basic knowledge and an interest in spiritual things.

Peter is saying this. Take that basic knowledge of the divine implantation and utilize that which you have to work on being morally excellent. And the next thing you need to know is to know how to do it more effectively.

So it starts with our basic understanding of our salvation. That's where it starts. I have just enough knowledge to know that I'm no longer a child of wrath. I'm no longer a child of God's wrath. I'm now a child of the King. And I start with that basic knowledge. And then I begin to polish that off. That's why it starts first.

Which comes first? Divine implantation. God breathes His life into you and you have a basic knowledge of that. Something happened in my life. That's a fact. That's the knowledge you have. It's practical knowledge. You understand that something has changed in your life. I no longer think like I used to. I now have a willingness to be willing to do something else. That's the knowledge that God gives you. And that manifests itself first of all in the expression of the desire to live a moral life.

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The thing that you need to do that, to take you to the next level, is what? Knowledge. That's why knowledge comes second. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, this underscores to me the importance of being in the Word.

Bruce: Oh! Absolutely!

Don: Because if you're not, you're not going to have the knowledge, either in your head or practically, to know how to live a morally excellent life.

Bruce: Absolutely. That's the knowledge that is so practical. That's why, when you study the Scripture, you don't go in looking for answers! You go in looking for a—

Participant: Person.

Bruce: Person!

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That's the difference. You don't study the Scripture to find out what job you should have. (*Laughter.*) You study the Scriptures to get to know the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Increase in the knowledge of God, and increase in the knowledge of the Son. That's why you study the Scripture. It's to go in had look at the God behind the Word. You're looking for a Person. You're not looking for a solution. Yes?

Participant: Which gets us back to "think, act, feel."

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: Think with the knowledge that God gives you.

Bruce: It all comes back to the basic things.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Remember this. The Scripture does this. It reveals Christ's instructions. You need to know that. It reveals Christ's love. You need to know that. It reveals Christ's beauties. You need to know that. The degree to which you and I know those three things will be the degree to which you and I will be able to polish our moral excellence with knowledge in a practical way.

It's critical that we understand why we study the Scripture. It's not to find a solution. It's to find a Person. That's what changes your life. Solutions never change anybody's life. The Person and work of Christ changes people's lives. And that's what Peter says. Make every effort to cultivate that. Yes, please?

Participant: Can we have some examples, Bruce, of sacrificial Biblical love? I mean, we all have an idea that we're not going to get to the end of this today. But that's all the culmination of everything, and just something—

Bruce: Sure. I would say that the classical one that comes to my mind is the cross. That's it, the cross of Christ. That's sacrificial love.

Participant: How about for us?

Bruce: The cross of Christ. That's for us. (*Laughter.*) When you asked me for sacrificial love, I could only point to the cross. That's for us. That's for me today.

That means this. How am I going to take that knowledge of the sacrificial love of Christ and apply that to my life? I have no idea. But I'm trusting the Holy Spirit as I go through life. That's where He gives you the willingness to will to do it. The cross of Christ is for us, men. It is the model of our sacrificial love.

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How do I interpret that? That's under the direction of the Holy Spirit. I can't make that happen for you. That's where you have to experience that, men, so that you can release that in your own life. It doesn't sell. It releases it.

It doesn't sell. The cross doesn't sell anything. But what it does is that it releases life in you because you have experienced that. That's sacrificial love.

So whenever you ask me for an illustration of sacrificial love, I'm always going to point to the cross, because that will impact our lives more than anything else. Do you see how beautiful that is?

Think about the beauties of the cross, despite all the horrors of the cross. Contemplate that. Men, when you realize that, that's life changing. Yes, Dick?

Dick: It has really been a struggle for me to contemplate the beauty of Christ. I at times would look at creation and sense the beauty of His creation. And putting it back with what you said earlier, of the character, the nature, the attributes of Christ, to form in my mind what is the beauty of Christ. I mean, that's a difficult concept to grasp, I think, as an individual.

Bruce: It's a difficult concept because we are almost affronted by its unmanliness. I'm going to talk about something that's beautiful. That's not manly! It's not macho macho!

Dick, all I can say is this. Ask the Holy Spirit to begin to reveal to you the beauties of Christ. I can't describe the beauties of Christ to you. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. It would be presumptuous for me to think that I could describe to you the beauties of Christ. I think that as you study the Scripture, ask the Holy Spirit to take you into the deeper depths of the Person and work of Christ. Quit looking for solutions in the Scripture and look for the Person. And the Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth. And He will open our eyes to see the magnificence of His beauty. That's something that only the Holy Spirit can do. I can't do that for you. All I can do is encourage you to do it. Just say, "Lord, let me see the beauties behind the words of the Scripture." What's the beauty behind it? Yes, Don?

Don: Yes, Bruce. You were talking about the cross as the ultimate example of sacrificial love. And that's true. But since it's this time of year and people focus on this, how about the Incarnation itself?

Bruce: Oh, my!

Don: I mean, the utter humiliation that Christ went through. It's something we celebrate. But—His stepping from eternity into time, God becoming man—had to be the most abject humiliation that has ever occurred. And why did He do it? He did it for us. That's just mind boggling to me.

Bruce: Isn't that beautiful? You see, you take that truth of the Person and the work of Christ. You remember all of His Person and all of the work of Christ, and you begin to explore those and you just see all the beauty that is behind it. Don gave us a great illustration of the Incarnation. It's something that is so beautiful. What makes it so beautiful is that, because it was for us, it was so degrading for Him. That's sacrifice.

You see, I can't probe the depths of teaching you the beauties of Christ. Men, all I can say is this. When you explore the Scripture, look for the Person, not a solution.

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Participant: When hearing Dick talking I'm thinking this out as well. And I'm getting from what Don just said that His beauty isn't a physical beauty. This is what I'm thinking too, physical beauty. It's an excellence of character, a perfection of character. It's a character beauty.

Bruce: It's His sinless perfection and perfect obedience. Contemplate that. Sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient. And what happens when you are justified by faith alone? You are given credit for what?

Participant: Christ's perfect righteousness.

Bruce: His sinless perfection and perfect obedience. You're given credit for that! Romans chapter 5 verse 1. *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And we have access into this grace in which we stand."*

You see, you and I are standing in grace because of our justification by faith alone—not by works, but by justification by faith alone.

Men, this is beyond our comprehension. But think about it. Don't look at it logically. Look at the beauty behind it. You get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ.

Go to Romans 8. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Now here is a point of beauty. Oftentimes, men, the beauty comes with the application of the Scripture.

Here's an application—Romans 8. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* It means this—that God is not going to evaluate you on your latest mistake. He's going to look at the tenor of your life.

Two examples. King David. He looked at the whole of his life and said this. "He's a man after My own heart."

But look what he did! God doesn't look at us that way. He looks at us through the whole tenor of our lives, our whole life perspective, not your latest mistake.

How about Samson? Well, look what he did! God looks at his whole life, not his last mistake.

Now men, that's a thing of beauty, that God does not look at me based upon my last mistake or my last failure, because *"there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* You see, men, that's the divine life.

You can't reproduce that. You can't sell it. All you can do is experience it, release it and give it away. That's what Peter is going to tell us—how to live life excellently.

We'll begin to pick this up next week. This may take us a while to go through. *(Laughter.)*

Now let me just ask you this question. We've seen that moral excellence leads to knowledge. Knowledge completes moral excellence. Knowledge has a tendency to puff up.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: What do you need next?

Participant: Self-control.

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Bruce: Self-control. When you and I become so knowledgeable, we need to know how to control that. (*Laughter.*) Logically, it is very, very methodical and practical that self-control follows knowledge because knowledge will puff up. I need to know how to control my knowledge. And we'll talk about that next week.

Well, men, this is going to be a wonderful journey. Quit trying to be successful.

Participant: There you go.

Bruce: Let's pursue excellence for the cause of Christ. Amen?

Men: Amen!

Bruce: Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank You for your word. Thank You for the beauties of Christ, for the beauties that are described behind the pages of those words, behind the words of those Scriptures. Father, may we see Your beauties. May we experience that divine life. And may we learn just to give it away, not to sell it, for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said, "Amen!"