

The God Life p.7: “Holding On To The Eternal Ticket” 05.20.12

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:10-11

Video: “Charlie Gets The Golden Ticket” [3:00] from Willy Wonka

Fundamental Question: Been debated for 2,000 years - *is our salvation assured or do we work to receive our salvation?* Many today - including many Christians believe that they must do more good things than bad things so that they earn their way into Heaven. Our teaching today from 2 Peter tells us that this is not so! Many others believe that it doesn't matter what I do because God does all the work in my salvation. I can go ahead and live any way I want. Our teaching today from 2 Peter tells us that this ALSO is not so! How do we balance (1) that my salvation comes entirely from God and His grace and mercy and yet OTOH (2) that what I do - how I live my life matters? Today we find out that to live the good life, which is to live the God life, I will BOTH know that I can do nothing on my own to enter into Heaven AND do everything I can to enter into Heaven! Like Charlie in the Willy Wonka movie, as a Christ-follower with a golden ticket to Heaven, I want to hold on to my ticket!

To fully understand this balance we'll examine 4 “because” ...

Because of God's grace, I possess ___FAITH___ in God.

To make sure we grasp the full importance of what Peter is writing, we must understand that he is writing to Christ followers. Notice verse 1 - these are people *who have already received their Christian faith.*

“To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” 2 Peter 1:1 NIV

We learn from Paul's writings that this faith is not something we can earn or deserve. It is quite literally a gift of God to those who receive it.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8,9 NIV

Here's where our way as Christians can become muddled. If we receive our faith as a gift from God... and indeed if because of this faith nothing could ever separate us from the love of God (**Rom. 8:28**), then what's the point of working on our character? God did not save us just to bring us to Heaven; *He has work for us to do.* He loves us as we are, but *He doesn't want to leave us as we are.* This whole God Life series we've been learning that we should make every effort to grow...

Because I possess faith in God, I ___GROW___ in Christ-like character.

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith [goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, love.]” 2 Peter 1:5-7 NIV

Everything in creation that has life *GROWS*. We would be greatly concerned if we had a new baby born to us and it didn't grow. *We are thrilled to learn that little Lincoln has grown from 2 pounds to 4 pounds 9 1/2 ounces.* How do they know that he has grown? *Because they measure!* In the same way we have learned from Peter that we should be measuring our growth too. (*“increasing measure” v. 8*)

Because I grow in Christ-like character... (4 results)

(First two from last weekend...)

1. I become more effective and productive as a Christ-follower. (v.8)
2. I never forget Christ's change in me - as a Christ-follower. (v. 9)

3. I CONFIRM my calling and election as a Christ-follower.

We see another "make every effort" statement in verse 10:

"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election." 2 Peter 1:10a NIV

Let's talk a little bit about what this "to confirm" means... "to make sure" (NIV84) "to prove" (NLT) "to confirm your invitation" (MSG) In addition to these other 7 qualities of our character that we should be working on, we should also be working on our sureness, our assurance that we indeed are Christ-followers and that we have been both called by God and chosen (elected) by God for salvation.

Illustration: In the stock brokerage business, a new registered representative learns about the importance of the confirmation. A client places an order to buy or to sell. He may give instructions to do it at the market price, or to wait until the price has reached a particular level. Between the time the order was placed and the time the confirmation comes back, the investor is left unsure of whether his order has been filled or not. Last week the Facebook IPO took hours to confirm - and people panicked to sell! The security of the entire stock market is based on the broker immediately notifying the client of his confirmation that the order has been filled.

How do we Christians receive such confirmation? *By the change in our lives.* We look back at the way we lived before we became a Christian and we look now and we see that by God's grace and power - our desires have changed and our lives have changed. When we see growth in goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love, we know this could not just be our own effort. Rather it is the sign of God's work in and through us.

4. I NEVER FALL as a Christ-follower.

"For if you do these things, you will never stumble." 2 Peter 1:10b NIV

This statement has caused no shortage of debate among Christians over the years. Notice the verse says we will never stumble (NIV) or fall (NIV84, ESV, KJV) or fall away (NLT). It does not say we will never FAIL. It does not say we will never SIN. What this is talking about is our ability to live a positive, victorious Christian faith - conquering the traps of sin that used to ensnare us so easily. When I focus on these 7 growth character traits of Christ, it's close to impossible to lose my assurance of my relationship to Christ. **That leads to our greatest assurance and comfort...**

Because I am a Christ-follower, I WILL ENTER Heaven.

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:11 ESV

"For in this way..." NOT "and..." The ESV - I believe - is much more literal a translation here than the NIV. The "and" could lead us down the path

of connecting the “never fall” on the one hand and “enter Heaven” on the other. That’s a problem because then it would lead me to think my entrance to Heaven is based on my never falling. And, as we’ve already seen, that’s not what Peter (or Paul or John) teach us in the NT.

“For in this way” refers to the whole section going back to v. 3 which begins with “His divine power” and v. 4 “He has given us promises.” Then we “make every effort” to add to our faith by growing in Christ-likeness. Do you see? What is “for in this way?” It is the combination of God’s power PLUS our cooperation that gives us assurance.

The question is not ultimately “Will I go to Heaven?” The question is “Am I a Christ-follower?” If I’m a Christ-follower there can be no doubt of my eternal security. There is no such thing as a Christian who doesn’t go to Heaven. That would go directly against God’s great promises to us. “entrance richly provided for you.” So how can I know if I’m a Christian?

It all comes back to this circle of Grace, Faith, Growth, and Confirmation. It’s all part of the pattern of what the new creation looks like. Because that’s what we’re talking about here. **If we are a Christ-follower, then we are quite literally something new...**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV84

I will be confirmed (to myself and others) when I see that I am becoming more like Christ. When I see my characteristics growing beyond my initial faith.

I don’t work to get into Heaven. I “work” because I am God’s new creature... His Masterpiece. I work to cooperate with God to become...

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10 NLT

I would not have the desire nor the power to do these good things if I weren’t authentically a Christ-follower. This is why *we make every effort*. We don’t sit back and say God “zap me” into shape or into Heaven.

Conclusion: (Joke...) A teacher, a garbage collector, and a lawyer wound up together at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter informed them that in order to get into Heaven, they would each have to answer one question. St. Peter addressed the teacher and asked, "What was the name of the ship that crashed into the iceberg? They just made a movie about it." The teacher answered quickly, "That would be the Titanic." St. Peter let him through the gate. St. Peter turned to the garbage man and, figuring Heaven didn't *really* need all the odors that this guy would bring with him, decided to make the question a little harder: "How many people died on the ship?" Fortunately for him, the trash man had just seen the movie. "1,228," he answered. "That's right! You may enter." St. Peter turned to the lawyer. "Name them."

When it comes to jokes, the St. Peter at the Pearly Gates makes for good laughter. But poor theology. The truth is that there is nothing you

can do, nothing you can say, nothing you can promise... there is no "right answer" that will get you into Heaven. Jesus did all the work for you on the cross. God has even provided you with the faith that you might believe on Him. God has given you not only the gift of eternal life, but the gift of eternal life with Him in Heaven! That is good news!

However, that doesn't mean that your life - after you have received this gift - won't change forever. It doesn't mean that you won't change forever. When you become a Christ-follower, you won't love all the things you loved before. Your desires will change. Most of all your desire will be for Christ and for His love. You will want to please Him. You will want to obey Him. You will want to thank Him.

You will enter Heaven someday as a changed forever kind of person. Your life becomes eternal in the here and now. Ultimately death will not be able to hold you because of the eternal life you possess now. You will go to Heaven because that is where Eternal God is... that is where all things eternal are... and as an eternal being, that is where you will be.

You can have that assurance right now... that you are an eternal being. How? By welcoming the Eternal Presence of God's Spirit into your life. If you feel the desire to welcome Him, you will also feel the desire to change, and the desire to live for Him. You begin with a prayer... not words of empty promise from your own mortality, but words of sure promise from His immortality entering and beginning a new life in you.

Let's pray.