

# It's In Your Hands

**Introduction.** When Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, she told an intriguing story in her acceptance speech.

There once lived a wise, elderly woman. She had lived in the same house her entire life. Everyday when she woke, she would say, "Good morning" to her beautiful parakeet, Agape. The woman would put Agape in the window so she could enjoy the sun and the fresh air, and the elderly woman would then go about her daily chores. All of the people who lived in the neighborhood knew about the elderly woman and her bird, Agape. One day, two young boys decided that they were going to break into the elderly woman's house while she was away and steal her bird. They decided that when she returned they would approach her and say, "Old woman, we have your bird. Is it dead or alive?" If the old woman replied "dead," the young men decided that they would open their hands and let Agape fly away. If the old woman replied "alive," they would crush Agape and drop her at the feet of the elderly woman."

Just as they had planned, the two boys waited for the elderly woman to leave her house to do her daily chores. When the elderly woman left, they broke into the house and stole Agape. When she returned, she found Agape's empty cage on the floor.

Just as the two boys had planned, they approached the elderly woman and said, "Old woman, we have your bird. Is it dead or alive?" The wise, elderly woman paused a moment and looked at the ground. Then, with caring in her eyes, she looked at the boys and slowly answered, "I don't know ... it's in your hands."

Peter stood before many people in his life and proclaimed the gospel, giving them multiple opportunities to obey. In Acts 4:4, "many" implies that some did not believe. Once Peter had preached the word, it was in the hands of the hearers to make that decision.

The scene is a little different in 2 Peter 1:5-11, for Peter writes to those who were already Christians. His readers had made the decision to obey Christ and be saved. Now, Peter placed another decision before them. Peter gave these instructions in vv. 5-7 to add specific virtues or "graces" in their lives. So what would happen if they added these or neglected them? The two possible results are in vv. 8-11, which is our text of study. This is a truly momentous decision that is directly in our hands.

## ***I. "If These Things Are Yours And Abound" (v. 8)***

- A. "For" explains the value of the graces of vv. 5-7.
  1. Each virtue or grace works in harmony with the others to produce an overall effect. They must all be developed in conjunction with each other. We cannot be selective and pick the ones we like and leave others behind.

- a) Faith — This is the foundation we build on (Hebrews 11:6);. This is loyalty not only to faithful doctrine, but also faithfulness (Jude 3, 5; Luke 7:9).
  - b) Virtue — This word, also translated as “moral excellence,” means a “virtuous course of thought, feeling, and action.”
  - c) Knowledge — Many Christians fail because they they lack knowledge of God’s will (Hosea 4:6). This, in turn, causes them to not be strong.
  - d) Temperance — Temperance, or self-control, is self-discipline. We need to be constantly in control of our thoughts, tongue, temper, and actions.
  - e) Patience — Patience, or perseverance, is endurance, a “bearing up under trials” (Hebrews 10:35-39).
  - f) Godliness — Godliness is piety, respect, and reverence for God. It is a disposition that does what is pleasing toward God.
  - g) Brotherly kindness — Brotherly kindness denotes the warmth of affection that should characterize Christians.
  - h) Charity — Love is the queen of the virtues (cp. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13), denoting self-sacrificing action in behalf of another.
2. Do these qualities really exist in me — or are they just a fleeting display? Are they present and at my disposal — or do they just show up like an irregular muscle spasm? It’s easy to put a meme on Facebook or Instagram, but it’s another thing to really live it.
- B. Am I abounding in these virtues?
- 1. “Abound” means to increase or be augmented (cp. “abundant,” 2 Corinthians 4:15; “increase,” 1 Thessalonians 3:12).
  - 2. Have I practiced these qualities so that they are present in abundance? If I possess the graces in abundance, the assurance is that results will follow.
  - 3. To properly measure if we are abounding, some self-examination is needed (2 Corinthians 13:5). Some practical questions will help.
    - a) Am I active in the Lord’s service?
      - (1) Verse 8 says, “... they make you that ye shall neither be barren” (“ineffective,” ESV; “useless,” NASB).
      - (2) The definition of “barren” is “lazy, shunning the labor which one ought to perform.”
        - (a) Jesus wants His people to be active and working (Matthew 20:3-6).
        - (b) In “Room In God’s Kingdom” (620), a phrase expresses, “There is work that we all can do.” One who has built themselves up in the graces is active in the Lord’s service.
    - b) Am I fruitful in the Lord’s service?
      - (1) God looks for fruit from His people (Luke 20:10).
        - (a) Fruit identifies — apples are always found on apple trees (John 15:9; cp. Matthew 12:33).
        - (b) What kind of fruit should we be bearing? What kind of fruit is found in us?
          - i) We should bear the fruit of repentance (Matthew 3:8). This means resisting the old life of sin (Ephesians 4:24-32; 5:11).

- ii) We should bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). This means showing physical growth in several areas:
  - (1) Monitoring our words (Matthew 12:33-37).
  - (2) Building up Christians (Romans 1:13, 15).
  - (3) Maintaining holiness of life (Romans 6:22).
  - (4) Helping the needy (Romans 15:28).
  - (5) Winning souls to Christ (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).
  - (6) Helping a preacher with his needs (Philippians 4:17).
  - (7) Manifesting good works (Colossians 1:10).
- (c) A few decades ago, the Boston Movement measured fruit bearing by how many people one was instrumental in converting.
  - i) But bearing fruit is measured more by our own personal growth and development in Christ than by how many have been directly converted by our efforts. Just like a tree, our fruits show our character (Matthew 12:33; cp. Ephesians 5:11).
  - ii) The opportunity with which God has blessed us to “add” the graces is not to be missed. It pictures us as “trees” being given the most favorable conditions to be fruitful.
- c) Am I partaking in what His knowledge teaches me?
  - (1) God has a purpose in giving us His word. In the parable of sower, the seed was sown on all soils, but not all believed and accepted it. However, that word will not return to Him empty (Isaiah 55:10-11).
  - (2) In context of 2 Peter 1:4:
    - (a) Am I seeking to be like God, a “partaker of the divine nature”? Have I escaped “the corruption that is in the world by lust”?
    - (b) Am I better in my language, dress, and entertainment choices than people in the world? Am I enamored with being like the world?
    - (c) People like to throw in our faces, “You think you’re better than me.” Yes, I do — because I follow a righteous standard and deny myself the passing pleasures of sin!

## **II. “He That Lacketh These Things” (v. 9)**

A. Has the problem of nearsightedness.

- 1. The problem of near sightedness:
  - a) Esau was nearsighted (Genesis 25:27-34).
    - (1) He sold his birthright and later wept at losing it (Genesis 27:38; Hebrews 12:17).
    - (2) By being nearsighted he lost the right of the firstborn’s blessings and being in the lineage of Christ.
  - b) The rich fool was nearsighted (Luke 12:16-21).
    - (1) Everything was wrapped up in what he was doing in the immediate, nearsighted future. There were no plans for God..
    - (2) That night, his life was taken back from him, and what he had worked so hard for would be given to someone else.

2. God's people should be farsighted.
  - a) All of us have used cameras, and we understand that when the camera is focused close-up, what is far away is blurry.
  - b) What is near is blurry when the focus is something distant (cp. Colossians 3:1-2; Hebrews 10:32-34; 11:24-27).
  - c) This applies to those reading Peter's words. A lot of emphasis in the world is placed on planning our earthly lives. God's people recognize that the most important planning is beyond life on earth.
- B. Has "forgotten the cleansing from his old sins."
  1. The significance of forgetting? If you can forget the primary blessings of the gospel (Ephesians 2:1-7), you can forget the responsibilities and blessings of being a Christian.
  2. By contrast, if one keeps in memory all that Christ has done for him, he will have a deep sense of gratitude (cp. 1 Timothy 1:12-15).
    - a) Why did Paul bear so much fruit? Maybe because he never forgot!
    - b) The Christian who can forget the cleansing from his old sins forgets one of the greatest gifts, from the greatest giver, at the greatest price.

### **III. Final Exhortation (vv. 10-11)**

- A. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."
  1. Man is not once saved always saved. "Election" speaks of being one of God's chosen. Sadly, "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Making it to the end demands diligence (Mark 13:13).
  2. Consider the problems God's people had with stumbling: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Peter, etc. If we do "these things," we will never fall.
    - a) This does not mean we will never sin (1 John 1:8-10). "Fall" means "to fall into misery, become wretched; cp. the loss of salvation."
    - b) We will not fall short of salvation. Said another way, we will certainly be saved. This is not an absolute statement. It is only true if we are "giving all diligence" to grow in Christ and thereby "making our calling and election sure."
- B. God will do His part if we will do ours.
  1. In v. 5, the KJV and NKJV use the word "add" ("supplement," ESV; "improve," CEV).
  2. This is the same word in v. 11 that is translated "ministered" ("richly provided," NASB; "rich welcome," NIV).
  3. A similar idea is expressed in Acts 2:40 where Peter commanded, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." That is man's part. God's part is that He has chosen us through the Spirit and truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

**Conclusion.** In Revelation 22:17, those who would not take the waters of life missed the opportunity of salvation. It was in the hands of the readers. Every day, people die and leave all they have lived for behind. If they know they are dying, their final days are usually filled with regret. Will that be the case for you? It's in your hands!

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