

The Evidence of Spiritual Life, Part 3 | Excellence

I. What is Moral Excellence?

- Excellence refers to anything that is known for being *excellent* and having intrinsic *eminence* or *goodness*. Its excellency is indisputable. II Peter 1:3
 - Have you ever wondered why this very high standard for our living comes so early in the list? Many people who have studied this passage find the order of the character traits to be very interesting.
 - Once we understand the preeminence of faith, it's easy to understand why it's first on the list. It's absolutely, foundationally, seminally necessary to all spiritual life. But why is moral excellence listed before things like knowledge?
 - This is not merely a random list. This list is deliberate, and when we understand it, we will definitely appreciate the fact that moral excellence is the next evidence of spiritual life.
 - When a person is unsaved, they are dead in their trespasses and sins. They are living in darkness, and the Bible makes it clear that an unbeliever can't be righteous. Isaiah 64:6; Ecclesiastes 10:3; Proverbs 12:10, 21:4; Titus 1:15; Romans 8:8
 - If someone does not have spiritual life, it is 100% impossible for him or her to do anything good. They are completely in sin, and even their best attempts at righteousness can't please God. So, based off those observations alone, it's clear to see why moral excellence is the necessary byproduct of life-giving faith. When a person is born again, two miraculous things happen.
 - **God positionally gives us the righteousness of Christ.** As Jesus took our sin on Him at the cross, so too the Father places Jesus' righteousness on us.
 - **God practically gives us the righteousness of Christ.** Moral excellence is the direct result of being born again. Matthew 5 reveals that a humble sinner who turns to God will hunger and thirst after righteousness because they've been righteousness-starved their entire life. When God makes someone alive, their behaviors *are going to change* because they now have access to spiritual strength and righteousness even if they don't yet know a lot about the Bible.
- But what does this moral excellence practically look like in a believer's life?
 - **God is the standard of this excellence.** II Peter 1:3; I Peter 2:9— These passages further confirm that the excellencies God expects for our lives are intrinsically tied to *His* excellency, and we see that our virtue will be lived out in the light of God and not the darkness of sin. Therefore, it should be easy for us to recognize that moral excellence is simply conformity to God's will and character, and that the opposite is sin.
 - What does it mean for a believer to be part of the chosen race, the royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own possession? Each of these categories is unique in that they are required to be unique. They have expectations on them that make them "peculiar" in the world. Of course, this makes perfect sense because the World is dark and lost, but believers have and are commanded to live in the light of God's righteous excellence.
- Because He has chosen us to offer sacrifices of spiritual obedience and to be holy as a unique possession of the all-perfect God, all Christians must *grow* in obedience and put off sin in our lives.

II. How do we live morally excellent lives?

- The only other passage in the New Testament where the Greek word translated “moral excellence” appears is in Philippians 4:8.
- According to Philippians 4:4, we will only be able to love others and release our anxiety to God when we rejoice in Him. Rejoicing is a conscious decision to value the *excellency* of something.
- And then in verses 8-9 Paul demonstrates that before we can ever hope to do the things we’ve learned and received and heard and seen, we must think right.
 - **We must think morally excellent thoughts.**
 - Romans 12:12; Colossians 3:1-5; II Corinthians 10:5; I Corinthians 3; Philippians 2:1-16
 - In order for us to lay aside immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, and idolatry, we must set our mind—think—on Christ.
 - We must literally imprison our thoughts to the obedience of Christ.
 - First, all of our doing will inevitably come from our thinking, so the only way to change our doing will be to change our thinking.
 - But the second thing I wanted us to see came from verse 13: “*for it is God who is at work in you, both to **will** and to **work** for His good pleasure.*”
- Moral excellence is the standard God sets.
- Until we submit to Him in faith, we will never be able to do anything good or pleasing to Him.
- Once we’re born again, God gives us positional moral excellence. But it’s not limited to that.
- Once we’re born again, God also gives us practical moral excellence. He empowers our sanctifying faith that will result in a growing moral virtue. But . . .
- Moral behavior starts first with moral thinking. We need to have the same mind that Jesus had if we hope to live the same life He lived.

II. Personal Application

- In order to know we have spiritual life, there should be an evidence of practical moral excellence which is specifically revealed in how we think and then which moves out into how we speak and act. In order to rightly judge this moral excellence as being from God and not just the spirit of the age, it must be empowered by God, come from God, and conform to God.
- We mustn’t just try to *do* things.
 - Yes, I need to be kind to you, but God wants me to be kind to you because He commands me to love you, and He commands me to love you because that is what’s required of me to be holy as He is holy, and I need to be holy as He is holy because God deserves to be glorified by my perpetual sacrifice of obedience.
 - Therefore, I love you not to impress you or garner favor. I love you not to make anyone feel good—myself included. I love you not because of you at all. I love you not because of me at all. I love you because my mind has been taken captive to the obedience of Christ. I love you because I want nothing more than to give God what He deserves.
- This is the thinking that produces the moral excellence which is the evidence of our spiritual life. Is this evidence in your life?
- Perhaps you have concluded that saving faith is evidenced in your life, but perhaps it’s harder for you to point to genuine instances of morally excellent thinking, but a nebulous “faith” doesn’t save. Our faith needs to be alive and active. We need to be living out the fruits of our faith, and one of the first is moral excellence—Christian virtue. A faith that is not actively growing in Christ-honoring thinking is a weak evidence at best and an evidence for not being born again at worst.