

MISSION, GODLINESS, AND REWARD IN 2 PETER 1:5-11

L. E. BROWN

Intentional Interim Pastor

Tucson, Arizona

I. INTRODUCTION

On a recent road trip I happened to tune in to a local talk radio station. The talk show host was reacting to a billboard on which an atheist had posted a sign decrying Christmas and claiming that atheists are good people, too. In his diatribe the host asked a provocative question: “What have the atheists done for society? Have atheist organizations accomplished anything beneficial for their fellow man? If they want to be legitimized in America then let them sponsor soup kitchens like the Salvation Army or fund orphanages like the Christians do. If atheists want to be socially accepted let them do something for others.”

He touched a truth known to people who participate in God’s mission:¹ our effectiveness as witnesses relates directly to the quality of our lives. The Bible calls God’s people to godly lives so they will be productive witnesses. The fruit of our mission will be evaluated and rewarded at the Bema Seat. We are rewarded for missional productivity. Since missional productivity hinges in part on our sanctification, effective mission becomes an incentive to godliness.

Although we enjoy a rich body of literature documenting the Free Grace perspective on the motives for godly living (e.g., love and gratitude, promise of rewards, fear of discipline, present blessings) missional effectiveness as a motive has been

¹ “Mission” and “missional” refer to God’s initiative to restore his creation to the blessedness it enjoyed before the Fall, to the role God has assigned to his people (collectively and individually) within that initiative, and to everything involved in evangelism. In pastoral ministry I find it necessary to use these terms rather than “evangelism” because many misunderstand the disciple-making mission. Missional terms help believers to realize the significance of a Christ-like life and to grasp the overarching biblical narrative.

overlooked. This essay will examine 2 Pet 1:5-11 to illustrate the link between godly living, missional effectiveness and rewards at the Bema Seat.² The objective is to encourage others to develop the connection between virtue, God's mission and rewards at the Bema in order to furnish pastors and ministry leaders with additional tools to motivate believers to godly living.

The catalog of virtues in 2 Pet 1:5-11 exhorts believers to move beyond faith into virtuous Christian living that leads to reward at the Bema Seat.³

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 confirm your calling and election, 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.⁴

Several terms, laden with meaning, invite careful study before settling into conclusions about Peter's intended meaning. The terms "unfruitful" (Gr. *akarpos*) and "election" (Gr. *eklogē*) suggest intimate knowledge of Old Testament texts and themes

² In this essay, consideration will largely be confined to vv 8-11.

³ Hodges has shown that this passage does not support the Reformed doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Reward at the Bema Seat is in view. Entrance into God's kingdom isn't at stake; the *kind* of entrance is. Zane C. Hodges, "Making Your Calling and Election Sure: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:5-11," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Theological Society* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 22-34.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted all English quotations will be of the English Standard Version. *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, Journaling Bible* (Crossway Bibles).

regarding the mission of God. Election is particularly important in texts about God's mission, his covenant with Abraham, and Israel's role among the nations.

II. CHOSEN FOR MISSION

Reformed theology has conditioned many to think of soteriology when we encounter "election" in the Bible. When we examine how the term is used, when we consider Abraham and Israel as God's elect, and when we pay close attention to context in the NT we discover that election is a missional term. It is only rarely soteriological.⁵ Let us turn to the first revelation of God's mission and examine the connection between mission and election.

A. ABRAHAM

The first instance of God's "election at work"⁶ was his choice of Abraham where Abraham was called to go and "be a blessing" (see Gen 12:1-3). No Hebrew term for election appears in Gen 12:1-3 but God's choosing is evident.⁷ Centuries later the Israelites returning from exile gathered to repent and renew covenant obligations. That ceremony included a detailed and lengthy review of God's dealing with them in which they spoke of Abram's election, "You are the Lord, the God who *chose* Abram...and made with him the covenant" (Neh 9:7, emphasis added)⁸.

Mission and election are bound together in this text. This suggests several cautions when considering the doctrine of election.

⁵ Romans 8:33 (*eklektos*) and Eph 1:4 (*eklegomai*) may be rare instances in which election has a soteriological reference. C. Gordon Olson, "Astounding New Greek Discoveries About 'Election,'" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Grace Evangelical Society, Fort Worth, TX, April 19-22, 2011), PDF file, http://www.mediatetheology.org/uploads/Astounding_Discoveries_on_Election.pdf. Last accessed March 8, 2012.

⁶ Wright, 72.

⁷ The primary Hebrew term *baḥar*, "to choose," is a common term with a broad field of meaning: men choosing wives (Gen 6:2) and real estate (Gen 13:11); appointing men to lead (Exod 18:25); selecting men for battle (Josh 8:3) and so forth.

⁸ This verse uses the Hebrew verb *baḥar*. The prayer focuses on the land grant covenant that was part of the Abrahamic covenant to bless all the families.

First, we should check our propensity to automatically think of salvation when we encounter this term.⁹ Second, abandonment or reprobation¹⁰ are not necessarily entailed. Third, God's purpose in election deputized one for the benefit of all. Finally, as will be seen, election does not necessarily imply the selection of one from a pool of potential electees.¹¹

B. ISRAEL

Abraham's descendants inherited the covenant and its responsibility. When Israel's leaders,¹² prophets¹³ and poets¹⁴ contemplated their relationship with the Lord they used the verb "choose" (Heb. *baḥar*) liberally. "Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and *chose* their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day" (Deut 10:15). "Because he loved your fathers and *chose* their offspring after them..." (Deut 4:37).

For Israel responsibility accompanied election: the duty of holy living by obedience to the covenant. This is seen, for example, in Moses' justification for restrictive dietary laws. "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has *chosen* you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 14:2). The demand for sanctified living stems from their election as God's mission to the nations. Israel was chosen to declare that there is no god or savior other than the Lord (Isa 43:8-13, 44:1-8). The connection between election, mission and godly living were clear.

The same was true of individuals and groups in Israel. Being chosen for service imposed a duty. God chose the Levites for spiritual and civil leadership, thereby making them responsible

⁹ Abraham's spiritual status before the Lord is settled in Genesis 15 where terms of election are absent.

¹⁰ In fact Abraham's election has the blessing of others in view.

¹¹ Olson offers persuasive evidence that election in certain NT contexts concerns the qualifications of the one chosen rather than the act of choosing. This is particularly true when the text has Christ in view as the object of election.

¹² Moses used *baḥar* 38 times in the Pentateuch. Most describe the Lord choosing a place for his name to dwell. E.g., Deut 12:11, 14:23, 15:20.

¹³ *Baḥar* is used 28 times in the prophets, 20 of those appear in Isaiah.

¹⁴ *Baḥar* is used 7 times in Job, 13 times in the Psalms, 4 times in Proverbs and 1 each in Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

for adjudicating disputes (Deut 21:5), carrying the ark of the Lord (1 Chr 15:2), and performing tasks required to facilitate temple worship (2 Chr 29:3-11).¹⁵ David was the chosen king, making him responsible for Israel's political and military governance.

And David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will celebrate before the Lord" (2 Sam 6:21).¹⁶

C. MESSIAH

The Servant who figures prominently in Isaiah is God's elect. The Lord promised that the Servant, despised and abhorred, would receive obeisance from kings and princes "because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has *chosen* you" (Isa 49:7, emphasis added). As God's elect the Servant will fulfill Israel's mission to the nations: "I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6). The Lord extols the elect Servant saying, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my *chosen*, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1, emphasis added) and establish justice in the earth (Isa 42:4) Paul confirms Christ's mission to the nations; "Therefore I will praise you among the nations" (Rom 15:9 quoting Ps 18:49) and "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people" (Rom 15:10 quoting Deut 32:43 from the LXX).

D. SUMMARY

The Old Testament texts that speak of God electing are missional rather than soteriological. Abraham was elected to be the

¹⁵ At the end of the list of duties *baḥar* is used in v 11.

¹⁶ Election implies duty in some contexts as seen in the term "appoint" (Heb. *tsavah*). The Piel stem connotes "ordain, give charge, i.e. assign a role or function for a task or office with a focus on the authority of the one who appointed the leader." James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997). s.v. *tsavah*. See also Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 845-846.

channel of blessing for humanity. Israel was elected to attract the nations to worship Him whom Israel serves in holiness. The Servant was elected to redeem Israel from its sin and to illuminate the nations with the glory and justice of God.

Election needs to be seen within the doctrine of mission, not only as a component of salvation. If we speak of being chosen, of being God's elect, it is to say that we are chosen for the sake of God's plan that the nations of the world come to enjoy the blessing of Abraham (which is exactly how Paul describes the effect of God's redemption of Israel through Christ in Gal 3:14).¹⁷

God's mission began with his promise to bless the nations through Abraham, his elect agent. The promise and its responsibility passed to his son Isaac (Gen 26:2-5), to his grandson Jacob (Gen 28:13-14), and eventually became the provenance of the nation of Israel (Deut 4:5-8).¹⁸ An important pattern is established: God chooses people to participate in his mission. With that choice comes responsibility.

III. GODLY LIVING AND MISSIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

God's dealing with Abraham establishes another pattern: missional effectiveness is bound to godly living. A remarkable soliloquy in Genesis 18 finds the Lord himself articulating that link.

A. KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD

Shortly before bringing destruction on Sodom and Gomorrah the Lord visited Abraham. Sandwiched between the remarkable promise that Sarah would bear a son within the year¹⁹ and Abraham's intercession for the righteous in Sodom²⁰ the Lord converses with himself.

¹⁷ Wright, 72.

¹⁸ Psalm 105:6-11 celebrates God's blessing and delivering the nation as he had promised Abraham (v 42). They were redeemed from Egypt that they might keep his statutes (v 45).

¹⁹ Isaac's miraculous birth was critical to the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the nations.

²⁰ Abraham participated in God's mission by interceding for a nation about to be removed from the possibility of blessing. Arnold G.

“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen 18:17-19).

Verse 19 links election (“I have chosen him”), godly living (“keep the way of the Lord”) and missional effectiveness (“bring to Abraham what he has promised”).²¹ The godly lives of Abraham’s heirs were required to fulfill the mission and promise. The logic is simple:

1. God’s Mission: bless the nations.
2. God’s Means: people who keep the way of the Lord.
3. God’s Method: elect Abraham to be father and teacher of that people.²²

Gentile believers in the Church are now heirs of God’s promise to Abraham and of the responsibility that comes with it (Rom 4:13-17; Gal 3:7-9, 29). Our effectiveness is in part determined by our obedience to the way of the Lord. Though spoken in a different context, Jesus’ admonition to Jews resting comfortably in their lineage is fitting: “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did” (John 8:39).

B. GODLINESS AND MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The NT fortifies the link between godly living and missional effectiveness. Jesus’ declaration that “you are my witnesses” (Acts 1:8 cf. John 15:27) echoes Israel’s mission: “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen...’” (Isa 43:10). We have been appointed to the same mission. Our mission effectiveness depends on our godly living as in Israel’s case. Many NT texts urge godly living for the sake

Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*. 1st Ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 315.

²¹ Wright, 82.

²² Wright, 93.

of effective witness. The most that we can accomplish within the modest confines of this essay is to note a few such texts.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus explicitly linked effective mission to godly living: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). This alluded to Isaiah’s prophecy of Israel’s future glory:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isa 60:1-3).

The good works Jesus mentioned are likely those found in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-10).²³

Paul referred to the persuasive power of godly living (1 Thess 1:5).²⁴ He urged bondservants to live honorably so God’s name and teaching would be held in high regard (1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:9-10).²⁵ He urged young wives to virtuous conduct for the same reason (Titus 2:4-5). Peter held that a godly life is often sufficient to silence foolish unbelievers (1 Pet 2:15). Indeed, a woman’s godly life may be so persuasive that her unbelieving husband will embrace the faith (1 Pet 3:1). Luke may have hinted at the importance of godly living for the mission of the church in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 4:32–5:16).²⁶

²³ Philippians 2:14-16 alludes to Jesus’ admonition and the Isaiah passage.

²⁴ Paul notes that the Holy Spirit was the source of persuasion but adds that “the kind of men we proved to be among you” complemented the Spirit’s work, resulting in their belief in the truth of the gospel. The Thessalonians were chosen (v. 4) and imitated the godly lives of Paul and his cohort (v. 6). They then became a sterling example for others in Macedonia, Achaia and the rest of the world (v. 6-8). Their example still persuades to this day, having been enshrined in Paul’s letter.

²⁵ The latter suggests that godly living beautifies (Gr. *kosmeo*) the doctrine of God. J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 Volume Set), 2nd ed. (United Bible Societies, 1999-05), 1:694.

²⁶ More work is needed to establish this point. Here I simply offer the observation that deceit and hypocrisy were purged from the Church with the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. This event is preceded by mention of the believers’ sacrificial generosity (Acts 4:32-37) and the apostles’ power (4:33)

C. HISTORY'S TESTIMONY

Extra-biblical evidence from the first centuries of the church confirms the persuasive power of the godly lives of the saints. Stark adduces many examples.²⁷ One powerful example is the Christians' response to plague in the ancient city. In the centuries before Christ plague was a source of dread terror. In his *History of the Peloponnesian War* Thucydides' reports a deadly plague that hit Athens in 431 BC.

The doctors were quite incapable of treating the disease because of their ignorance of the right methods... Equally useless were prayers made in the temples, consultation of the oracles, and so forth; indeed, in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things.

They died with no one to look after them; indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any attention... The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets or flocking around the fountains in their desire for water. The temples in which they took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them. For the catastrophe was so overwhelming that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion or of law... No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether

and followed by a description of the apostolic miracles (5:12-16). Nestled in this is notice that people held the believers (5:14, note the antecedent "all" in v 13) in high esteem. The net result is that the church continued to swell with "multitudes". The persuasive power of the miracles is in view but that alone does not account for Luke's editorial decision to place the Ananias and Sapphira story in this context. Perhaps Luke is instructing us that both miracles and the godly lives of the believers are persuasive elements of the mission.

²⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal, Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1997).

one worshipped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately.”²⁸

Dread fear of plague would, centuries later, be the bleak setting against which the selfless deeds of Christians were displayed. In contrast to the indifference and deliberate neglect shown by the wealthy and powerful, Christians provided humanitarian relief in the ancient city, housing the homeless, feeding the poor, caring for orphans and widows, and nursing the victims of epidemics.²⁹ Stark recounts examples of how Christians responded to plague in the Church’s early centuries:

To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.³⁰

The Old and New Testaments, supported by history, teach that godly living is vital for fruitful mission.

D. SUMMARY

When God chooses he obligates the chosen one to a godly life that results in greater missional fruitfulness. A pattern was established in God’s dealing with Abraham and Israel and holds true for us today: Election leads to mission, which leads to duty, which leads to godliness, which leads to effective witness.

²⁸ Stark, 84-85.

²⁹ This echoes the Lord’s intention that Abraham’s descendants should do just and righteous deeds.

³⁰ Stark, 161.

IV. THE CALL TO FRUITFULNESS IN 2 PETER 1:8-11

A. EDITORIAL PURPOSE

Peter's second letter,³¹ written to the same audience as his first, reveals his editorial purpose by its vocabulary and contents.³² Careful word choice illuminates the moral laxity of false prophets threatening the believers' sanctity.³³ Arrogant (2 Pet 2:9) false teachers (2 Pet 2:1) motivated by sinful desires rationalized their sin by rejecting accountability and judgment (2 Pet 3:3-4). Mention of sensuality, blasphemy, greed, deception, and denying the Master reveal the threat (2 Pet 2:2).

His argument opens (1:3-4) by reminding his readers that the plentitude of divine resources provides everything needed to conduct a godly life worthy of the Lord.³⁴ The catalog of virtues (5-7) bracketed by the admonition to "make every effort"³⁵ leads into the purpose statement.

³¹ Second Peter 3:1. Scholarly opinion notwithstanding it is best to take the author's word for it.

³² Regarding the genre and structure of 2 Peter, Green notes that "the body opening is the place where the principal occasion for the letter is usually indicated...The opening of the letter body in 2 Peter is somewhat unusual in that it is neither a thanksgiving nor a blessing, yet it serves this common function [the function served by the body opening in Greek epistolary literature of this period] of introducing the fundamental themes that the author will subsequently address." Gene Green, *Jude and 2 Peter* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 179, 191.

³³ J. Daryl Charles, *Virtue Amidst Vice: The Catalog of Virtues in 2 Peter 1* (JSNT Supplement Series, 150) (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 86.

³⁴ The datives in the phrase "to his own glory and excellence" (Gr. *tou kalesantos hemas idiā doxē kai arete*) (v 3) could mean we are called to become like him in his glory and virtue or that his glory and virtue are the means by which we are called to a godly life. In view of "become partakers of the divine nature" (v 4) and the rhetorical "what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?" (3:11), they refer to our objective: to become like Christ.

³⁵ The phrase "make every effort" (v 5) employs the noun *spoudē* while the phrase "be all the more diligent" (v 10) uses the cognate *spoudazō*. The verb is used again in v 15 to describe Peter's efforts. This threefold use of these terms underscores the gravity of the situation.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things (2 Pet 1:12-15).

His argument closes with a question that had been answered earlier. In view of certain judgment “what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness” (2 Pet 3:11). This leads to a final exhortation: “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability” (2 Pet 3:17).³⁶

Peter wrote to provide a continual reminder of the Bema judgment lest they be seduced by the moral laxity of false prophets. Steadfast godliness will result in a fruitful life that will be rewarded with a rich welcome into the kingdom.

B. CATALOG OF VIRTUES

Mention of “these qualities” (v 12) in Peter’s purpose statement refers back to the catalog of virtues found in vv 5-7.

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.

Peter adjured his readers to make special effort to develop these virtues in ever increasing measure. Verse 5 “make every effort” uses the noun *spoudē* where v 10 “be all the more diligent”

³⁶ “Stability” (Gr. *sterigmos*) occurs only here in the NT, but a related verb (Gr. *sterizō*) occurs in 2 Pet 1:12. The antonym “unstable” or “unsteady” (Gr. *asteriktos*) is found in 2:14 and 3:16. By use of this word Peter challenged his audience to remain firm and fixed in the truth. Davids suggests that Barnabas was “carried away” when he joined Peter in refusing to eat the fellowship meal with the Galatian Gentiles (Gal 2:13). Davids, p. 311.

uses the cognate verb *spoudazō*, bracketing the passage with an urgent plea for diligence in cultivating Christian character. But the virtues are not an end in themselves; they serve a higher purpose. The reason Peter urged diligence in this matter is introduced next.

C. EFFECTIVE AND FRUITFUL

Verse eight employs antenantiosis to illuminate the phrase “keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful (Gr. *argous oude akarpous*).”³⁷ Effectiveness and fruitfulness will be evaluated at the Bema Seat.³⁸ What are effectiveness and fruitfulness? What will the Lord look for in this judgment? What did Peter mean by using these terms and this figure?

Peter used a seldom-employed adjective *ineffective* (Gr. *argos*).³⁹ In the NT it signals “unemployed” (= unable to find work [Matt 20:3, 6]), “idle” (= “unwilling to work” [1 Tim 5:13, Titus 1:12]), “careless” (Matt 12:36) and “useless” or “worthless” (Jas 2:20).

Likewise *akarpous* often wraps “not at work” in disapproval. Here it means “without fruit”, perhaps as an allusion to Jesus cursing the fig tree (a metaphor for Israel) for its failure to produce.⁴⁰ To convey the positive sense of the figure of speech some form of superlative such as “a lavish harvest” is appropriate. Hodges’ comment is apt: “Conversely, a believer who is vigorous

³⁷ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible. Explained and Illustrated*. electronic ed. (London, England: Eyre & Spottiswoode; New York: NY: E. & J. B. Young & Co., 1898), 159. Antenantiosis employs a negative assertion to express the superlative. This differs from meiosis (also known as litotes), which diminishes one thing in order to elevate something else. Bullinger, 155. Some commentators treat this as hendiadys. Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 50, 2 Peter, Jude*. electronic ed. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983-02-15), 188.

³⁸ For the moment I am presupposing that the text has the Bema Seat judgment in view, a point that will be established momentarily by reference back to Hodges’ paper and his commentary.

³⁹ The adjective *argos* appears eight times in the NT and the related verb, *argeō* appears once. The related verb (Gr. *argeō*) means “stop doing something, slack off, become idle.” William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. electronic ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 128. (BDAG hereafter).

⁴⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude (The NIV Application Commentary)*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 47. See also Mark 12:12-14, 20-26.

in his service for God will most assuredly be fruitful.”⁴¹ This brings us to the question of what Peter meant by *unfruitful*.

D. FRUITFUL/UNFRUITFUL

Peter’s lexicon isn’t much help as this is his only use of the adjective and the related noun (Gr. *karpos*) is also solo in Peter’s lexicon.⁴² This invites consideration of the term’s use elsewhere in the NT.

1. *The universe of meanings*

Unfruitful is relatively infrequent, occurring seven times in the NT (Matt 13:22; Mark 4:19; 1 Cor 14:14; Eph 5:11; Titus 3:14; 2 Pet 1:8; Jude 12), but several meanings are discernible: (1) the product of a stunted spiritual life (Matt 13:22, Mark 4:19), (2) the intellectual value of praying in a tongue (1 Cor 14:14), (3) deeds of those who walk in darkness (Eph 5:11, Jude 12), (4) and, by way of contrast, the opposite of merciful deeds. Five of the six non-Petrine occurrences relate to the believer’s meritorious behavior or lack thereof.⁴³

The related noun, *karpos*, occurs sixty-six times in material and spiritual senses. The material sense applies to (1) agricultural products and (2) the offspring of livestock and humans. The spiritual sense includes (1) Christ-like character (e.g., Gal 5:22-23, Eph 5:8-11, Heb 12:11, Jas 3:17-18), (2) charity for the poor (Rom 1:13),⁴⁴ and (3) ministry results⁴⁵ including new

⁴¹ Zane C. Hodges, “The Second Epistle of Peter,” *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: The Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1173.

⁴² In Acts 2:30 the noun refers to Christ as David’s offspring and heir to his throne.

⁴³ The Septuagint adds little additional information about this term using it three times: 4 Maccabees 16:7 (fruit of the womb), Wisdom 15:4 (the toil of those who paint idols), and Jer 2:6. This last translates the Hebrew noun *šalmāwet*, the deep darkness encountered in the wilderness during the Exodus.

⁴⁴ M. A. Kruger, “Tina Karpon, “Some Fruit” in Romans 1:13,” *Westminster Theological Journal*. electronic ed. 49, no. 1, (1987): 168-73.

⁴⁵ Philippians 1:22 presents an interesting question: what is the force of *karpos ergou*? The ESV, NASB and NIV translate “fruitful labor” as if the noun *karpos* carried adjectival force. Since *karpos* is nominative this is not the best understanding of the syntax. The AV, KJV and NKJV offer a better solution, rendering this as “fruit of (or “from” NKJV) my labor.” This genitive of source, rare in the NT, identifies whence the fruit derives. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics—Exegetical Syntax*

believers (e.g., John 4:31-36, 15:16; Col 1:6) and verbal praise to God (Heb 13:15).

The synonym “first fruits” (Gr. *aparche*) contributes to our understanding. As Rosscup notes, “though he uses the word *aparche*, and not *karpos*, his figure is drawn from the farmer’s ‘first fruits,’ the first token fruits representative of the full harvest he is yet to reap.”⁴⁶ Paul (1 Cor 16:15, Rom 16:5, 2 Thess 2:13), John (Rev 14:4), and James (Jas 1:18) use the term thus. Clement reported the apostles “preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons...”⁴⁷

2. *Narrowing the field*

From a lexical standpoint a broad universe of meanings for *unfruitful* was available to Peter. We can’t consult Peter’s lexicon to close in on his meaning but we can narrow the field by considering the influence others may have had on his use of the word.

In this regard we find that Jesus used the term *karpos* forty-one times both literally and figuratively. He used it to refer to agricultural products (Matt 21:19, 26:29; Mark 11:14, 14:25; Luke 22:18), to the false prophet’s teaching (Matt 7:16-20), to careless words of judgment spoken against Christ (Matt 12:33) or others (Luke 6:43-44), to the product of a believer’s new life, to his resurrection (John 12:24), and to new converts (John 4:35-36, 15:16 and possibly John 15:2-5, 8). In the parable of the tenants, fruit refers to Israel’s disbelief under the Pharisees’ stewardship (Matt 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-11),⁴⁸ much as the

of the New Testament. electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI:Zondervan, 1999), 109 on the genitive of source.

⁴⁶ James E. Rosscup, “Fruit in the New Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125, no. 497 (January 1968): 65.

⁴⁷ First Clement 42:4. See J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, “The Epistle of S. Clement to the Corinthians” *The Apostolic Fathers*, Second Edition, electronic ed. (London, England: Macmillan and Co., 1893).

⁴⁸ The parable is reminiscent of Isaiah 5:1-7 in which the Lord made every possible provision for Israel, expecting a harvest of justice (Heb. *mišpāt*) and righteousness (Heb. *šedāqa*). Precisely the same terms appear in Gen 18:18-19. The Isaiah text treats justice and righteousness as ends in themselves while the Genesis text views them as a missional means to bless the nations. We cannot press the parable in Matthew 21 too hard for a definition of the fruit the vineyard owner sought since Jesus’ point, as in the parable before it (Matt 21:28-32), concerns the Jews’ rejecting him.

barren fig tree symbolized Israel's failure to produce anything of value (Luke 13:6-9).

Four instances (all in the parable of the soils) are oblique references to spiritual productivity.⁴⁹ Jesus explained the parable with the verb "bears fruit" (Gr. *karpaphoreō*) to denote the results produced by believers who persevere in the faith despite opposition⁵⁰ and resist the seduction of wealth.⁵¹ "Fruit" refers to what grain that has sprouted and grown produces: more seed to sow.⁵² The verb tenses describe sustained increases in the number of believers.⁵³ Character plays a role since productivity rests on persevering under duress, being circumspect about riches and pleasure, having honest and good hearts, and refusing to allow "cares" to distract from the mission. So although the fruit in this parable are new believers, spiritual maturity is in the background. As Rosscup states, "fruit as character and fruit as witness do not exist in an either/or relationship but rather in a both/and unity."⁵⁴ Christian character is "mission critical" to our role in God's mission, but the parable of the soils portrays new believers as the fruit.

Now we come to a verse of particular interest, John 15:16. "You did not choose (Gr. *eklegomai*) me, but I chose (Gr. *eklegomai*) you and appointed (Gr. *tithēmi*) you that you should go and bear fruit (Gr. *karpos*) and that your fruit (Gr. *karpos*) should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." Jesus joined *karpos* and *eklegomai* for a reason that is identified in the purpose clause: "that you should go and

⁴⁹ Matt 13:8; Mark 4:7-8; Luke 8:8.

⁵⁰ Mark 4:16-17; Matt 13:20-21.

⁵¹ Mark 4:18-19; Matt 13:22.

⁵² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament), electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 726. Blomberg differs, arguing that the fruit is "consistent obedience to God's call." Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 218. The emphasis on quantity (thirty, sixty, one hundred) favors the notion that multiplication of additional seed is in view rather than spiritual transformation of the seed that sprouted. Seed sown in good soil produces more seed, which is then sown in other good soil.

⁵³ The imperfect *edidou* suggests that seed sown once (aorist *epesen*) continues to reproduce. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 337, n.22.

⁵⁴ Rosscup, 65.

bear fruit.”⁵⁵ Although using a different verb *go* this is similar to Matt 28:18-20.⁵⁶ Missional emphasis is reinforced by the word *appointed* (Gr. *tithēmi*), a term often referring to “being set apart” for ministry.⁵⁷

Kostenberger writes:

The term “appoint” (τιθημι, *tithēmi*) probably reflects Semitic usage (Barrett 1978: 478). The same or a similar expression is used in the OT for God’s appointment of Abraham as father of many nations (Gen. 17:5; cf. Rom. 4:17), the ordination of Levites (Num. 8:10), and Moses’ commissioning of Joshua (Num. 27:18). In the NT, the term refers to being “set apart” for a particular ministry, such as Paul’s apostolic work (e.g., Acts 13:47, citing Isa 49:6; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11), the role of pastor (Acts 20:28), or a great number of other callings in the church (1 Cor. 12:28); in Heb. 1:2, the expression even refers to Jesus’ being made heir.⁵⁸

Carson adds:

The best Greek texts record that Jesus chose them and set them apart (*ethēka*) that they might go and bear fruit. This verb also occurs in v 13: Jesus ‘sets apart’ or ‘sets aside’ (NIV ‘lays down’) his life for others. The verb commonly occurs, with a personal object, in contexts where people are being ‘set apart’ for particular ministry.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ The syntax is typical of NT purpose clauses, *hina* plus a subjunctive verb.

⁵⁶ The verses use two different but synonymous terms for “go.” John 15:16 uses *hupagō* and Matthew 28:18 *proserchomai*. The first has the sense of “going away” (BDAG, 1028) while the second conveys the sense of “moving toward” (BDAG, 878).

⁵⁷ Olson has shown that *eklegomai* carries meaning “much the same as before the New Testament, that is, the appointment or commissioning of qualified people to an office or responsibility *with an obligation to fulfill it well*.” Olson, 3. My emphasis.

⁵⁸ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*. electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 459-460.

⁵⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. electronic ed. (Leicester, England: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 523. Beasley-Murray similarly argues that in John 15:16 the apostles were being sent on a mission. George R.

Although the disciples had become Jesus' friends, privy to his reasoning and motives, they remained accountable for mission results. The gravity of this pronouncement, its mission emphasis and the purpose of their election were important influences on Peter's thinking. It is hard to imagine Peter using "fruitful" and "chosen" together without remembering Jesus' words.

So we see that Peter had a broad universe of possible meanings available for the adjective *unfruitful* or, by virtue of the figure of speech, the positive *fruitful*. The context of 2 Peter rules out agricultural products, human and animal offspring, charity and praise. This narrows the likely meaning to one of two: Christian maturity or new believers.

E. IS CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IN VIEW?

At first glance the catalog of virtues preceding Peter's comments about being fruitful and effective are strong evidence that he had nothing more than Christian character in view. This is prevailing scholarly opinion.⁶⁰ In addition, those who have been conditioned to think first of virtue when they encounter these terms will default to that interpretation.⁶¹ There are, however, good reasons to hold that new converts are in view.

F. PETER'S USE OF "ELECTION"

In his first letter, written to the same audience (2 Pet 3:1), Peter wrote at length about the purpose for which God had chosen them (1 Pet 2:5-11). On this passage Olson observes,

It is significant that in the same context after Peter referred to Christ as the "choice stone" (2:4, 6), he went on to refer to the Church as "a chosen [choice] race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous

Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 36, John* (Second Edition). electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 275.

⁶⁰ Hodges holds this view. Hodges, "Making Your Calling and Election Secure," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring, 1998): 30-31. See also, e.g., Bauckham, 188, Rosscup, 62.

⁶¹ Many will think of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23 here, but it is more likely that Peter was influenced by Jesus than by Paul when he used the term "fruitful."

light.” (2:9 HCSB). Peter borrowed language used of the nation Israel to refer to the Church, thus indicating that the Church’s election, like Israel’s, was corporate and had an obligation attached. Peter indicated in Chapter 1 that election is conditional and in Chapter 2 that it is corporate.⁶²

It is important to note Peter’s admonition in vv 11 and 12: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

He urged them to maintain honorable conduct in the face of powerful temptation so their godly lifestyles would be evident to all, resulting in greater glory to God. The link between God’s elective purposes and their need to maintain sanctified lives is inescapable. In this context godly living is not the goal; it is a means by which the mission is conducted in daily life.⁶³

Peter returned to the theme of missional effectiveness in his second letter to warn the saints, lest indulging in the moral laxity promoted by false teachers would compromise their ministry.⁶⁴ If their sanctification is ruined, their witness will be ruined. If so, their mission will be compromised.

G. ALLUSION TO THE BEMA

The *rich welcome* looks forward to rewards at the Bema Seat judgment, a fact missed by many commentators.⁶⁵ Hodges has shown what is at stake here; it is not entrance into the kingdom but a *rich welcome*.⁶⁶ The phrase “there will be richly provided”

⁶² Olson, 5.

⁶³ Thus Peter urges wives to godly character that their husbands might be won to the faith, 1 Pet 3:1-2. A godly life is of great interest to unbelievers who observe believers suffering unwarranted affliction with dignity, 2 Pet 3:13-15.

⁶⁴ See p. 77 under “Editorial Purpose.”

⁶⁵ Bauckham (p. 190), for example, asserts, “the ethical fruits of Christian conduct are objectively necessary for the attainment of final salvation.” Schreiner (p. 303) adds, “Peter likely meant that they give no evidence that their conversion is genuine.”

⁶⁶ Hodges, “Making Your Calling and Election Secure,” 21.

uses the adverb *plousiōs* (which refers to wealth) and the verb *epichorēgeō*, a term used of generous gifts.

The Scripture attests that we will be rewarded for mission productivity. Paul, for example, asks, “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?” (1 Thess 2:19).⁶⁷ Jesus spoke of rewards for mission productivity. The parable of the talents teaches that Jesus will be looking for *increase*, not merely good intentions (Matt 25:14-30). The theme appears in His story of the nobleman who went afar and returned to receive his kingdom (Luke 19:11-27), and in a warning to be about the master’s work (Luke 12:48). What we are called to is not limited to personal sanctification. We are also called to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20).

Peter’s warning about falling (Gr. *ptaiō*) is germane to the Bema. Most commentators see this as final failure to enter the kingdom. Although Moo asserts that this refers to final failure to enter the kingdom, his comment that “‘stumbling’ here is the opposite of ‘receiving a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’” is in fact correct.⁶⁸ Here “fall” refers to losing one’s footing.⁶⁹ James used the term for an isolated failure to keep the law (Jas 2:10) and avers that all of us make many *mistakes* (Jas 3:2, twice). Gangel’s felicitous translation “to experience a reversal” captures the thought. Peter simply warned of a possible reversal of fortune, a loss of reward that can be averted by cultivating the virtues, thereby insuring that we bear much fruit for which we will be rewarded at the Bema.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ In Phil 4:1 Paul calls the saints, “my brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and crown.” In 2 Tim 4:5 he wrote of the “righteous crown” (genitive of attribute) to be awarded at the Bema for sustained perseverance in ministry.

⁶⁸ Moo, 49. His mistake is in equating receiving a rich reward with entering the kingdom. Stumbling is the opposite of receiving a rich reward in that one who stumbles forfeits the reward to be received at the Bema.

⁶⁹ BDAG cites 2 Pet 1:11 as the lone instance where the term means, “to experience disaster” and offers the formal equivalents *be ruined*, *be lost*. But this is only a secondary meaning. They indicate that the primary meaning of the term is “to lose one’s footing.” BDAG, 894.

⁷⁰ Hodges, “Making Your Calling and Election Secure,” 21.

H. CONFIRM

We need to take into account the word “confirm” (*bebaian poiēsthai*). The adjective *bebaios* means “something that can be relied on not to cause disappointment.”⁷¹ The related verb *bebaioō* means, “to put something beyond doubt.”⁷² Legal and commercial transactions in the ancient world were often accompanied by the seller’s guarantee to protect the buyer’s rights in the transaction.⁷³

Hodges sees this as similar to James’ doctrine of justification by works before men.⁷⁴ This is unlikely since the *Bema* is an accounting between the believer and the Lord Jesus. The believer is to make certain his calling and election, but to whom? It is offered *to the Lord*. The fruit our lives have produced—new believers—demonstrate that we were faithful in carrying out the mission given to us by Jesus.

I. GODLINESS

Peter uses “godliness” (Gr. *eusebia*) three times in this context at vv 3 (once) and 7 (twice). This is relatively rare in the NT. The NT authors use it to summarize the “behavior expected of Christians who have come to know the God of Scripture.”⁷⁵ Peter’s catalog of virtues is a list of observable behaviors, not just interior conditions of the believer’s spiritual life. “Significantly, all the occurrences of “godliness” are confined to the Pastorals and 2 Peter, where it serves to underscore a particular way of life, that is, the behavior that is worthy of praise.”⁷⁶ This contributes to the missional emphasis in the passage by pointing

⁷¹ BDAG, 172.

⁷² BDAG, 179.

⁷³ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friederich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. *bebaios*. Bauckham backs away from the legal metaphor because he is looking for the Reformed doctrine of Perseverance. But if we retain the commercial or legal meaning of the term and also retain the meaning of *eklogē* that Olson has established, then this text means that the new believers produced by our faithful participation in the mission guarantee that Christ was wise in choosing us to serve in his mission. Our fruit confirms that we are well suited for and apt to complete the mission.

⁷⁴ Hodges, “Making Your Calling and Election Secure,” 30.

⁷⁵ Moo, 41.

⁷⁶ Charles, 144.

to praiseworthy Christian conduct. The praise is probably the praise of other people but praise at the Bema Seat may also be in view.

J. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

Second Peter 1:8 presents an interesting syntactical question that must be answered in order to discover Peter’s intended meaning. How is the phrase ‘in (Gr. *eis*) the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ’ related to the adjectives ineffective and unfruitful? The syntax is somewhat complicated: the adjectives are object-complements for the suppressed object of the verb “keep” (Gr. *kathitēmi*). For clarity’s sake the diagram omits parts of the verse that don’t bear directly on the significance of the prepositional phrase in question.

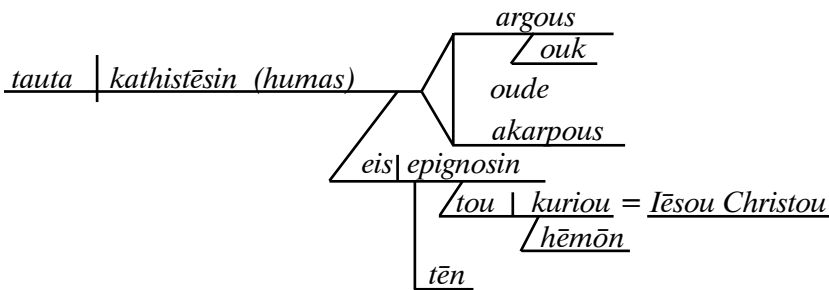


Diagram 1: A portion of 2 Peter 1:8

The lexicons and grammars offer little illumination. The preposition is common and the accusative case covers a broad field so we look to the context to answer the question.⁷⁷ Commentaries that address this tend to favor one of two views. Most see this as indicating the *goal* or *results* of an effective and fruitful life⁷⁸

⁷⁷ BDAG devotes four pages (288-291) to the preposition *eis*. Wallace identifies fourteen distinct uses of the accusative case in NT Greek. Wallace, 176-205.

⁷⁸ G. Green (p. 197) states, “...moral virtue rebounds to their knowledge of Christ (εἰς, *eis*, in or unto, which introduces the goal)” but his conclusion that the possession of ever increasing virtue will “cause them not to be ‘worthless’ in this knowledge of Christ” lacks clarity and precision. Bauckham (p. 188) notes that “Most commentators take this phrase to refer to the goal or product of the virtues: virtuous conduct leads to fuller knowledge of Christ (Plumptre, Mayor, Wand, Chaine, Windisch, Schelkle, Reicke, Spicq, Green, Schrage, Grundmann; also Spicq, *Agape*, 376–77).”

while others see it as the *basis* of spiritual growth.⁷⁹ Both views make good sense of the text and neither adversely affects the thesis that ‘fruit’ refers to new believers rather than spiritual maturity.

If this construct refers to results then the logic would be something like this: the ever increasing presence of virtue in your life enhances your effectiveness in the mission for which you have been chosen, and, in addition to the rich welcome you will receive at the Bema, you will in this life enjoy a greater degree of intimacy with Christ.⁸⁰ A virtuous life—one marked by the catalog of virtues and the fruit of new believers—leads to fuller knowledge of Christ.

More likely, however, is the notion that v 8 looks back to v 2: “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge (Gr. *epignōsis*) of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Here we see that intimacy with the Lord is the sphere in which grace and peace are lavishly supplied.⁸¹ This means that, according to v 8, “knowledge of Christ becomes the root of the virtuous life.”⁸² If we are firmly grounded and deeply rooted in our knowledge of Christ, these commendable virtues will be evident in us and we will be effective in the mission for which we were chosen.

In summary, the word *unfruitful* in 2 Pet 1:8 appears in a context rich with word choices, allusions and literary connections that offer strong evidence that new believers were present in Peter’s mind when he used the term. This is not an either/or situation because godly living is an important element in the believer’s mission success. Because the production of fruit-as-new-believers depends on sanctified living it was natural for Peter to have fruit-as-Christian-conduct in mind while he wrote about mission success. In view of the passage’s strong connections with mission, election, and Bema judgment, new believers are the fruit that confirms we are worthy of the reward.

⁷⁹ This is the accusative of reference or respect. Wallace, 203. Again Bauckham’s helpful survey indicates “a few commentators take the knowledge of Christ to be the root from which moral progress proceeds (Spitta, Bigg, Kelly; also Dupont, *Gnosis*, 32–33).” Bauckham, 188.

⁸⁰ The oft cited distinction between *gnōsis* and *epignōsis* as though they were technical terms with precisely delimited meanings finds no support in Peter’s use of the terms. See Strange, 16, Schreiner, 288, Bauckham, 169-70, and Davids, 165-66.

⁸¹ Davids, 166.

⁸² Arichea, 82.

K. PAUL'S CONFIRMATION

Paul also used “fruit” to refer to new believers in a context where holy living is also present in his letter to the Colossian church:⁸³

...the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth...(Col 1:5-6).

The subsequent admonition in Col 1:9-12 hits many of the notes sounded in 2 Pet 1:5-11:

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Col 1:9-12).⁸⁴

The Colossians' character and witness were the focus of Paul's prayer. “Bearing fruit in every good work” clarifies *how* one walks worthy of the Lord. The phrase draws attention to the abundant gospel harvest for which Paul gave thanks.⁸⁵

⁸³ I am not suggesting that this was the only way Paul employed the term. Clearly in texts like Gal 5:22-23 and Eph 5:8-11 we see Paul using it to refer to Christian character.

⁸⁴ While conceivable that Paul used “fruit” in two different ways in vv 6 and 10 the context offers no clear indication that he switched referents in v 10. To switch meanings while reading reveals the reader's predisposition to favor one meaning over the other without contextual hints that this is appropriate. After his exposition of what it means to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (2:6-4:1) Paul returns to the mission by asking prayer for opportunity and clarity (4:2-4) and by reminding them that their “walk” has specific missional responsibility (4:5-6).

⁸⁵ Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 44, Colossians-Philemon*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 24.

The gospel produced plentiful harvest of new believers even in Colossae. “Bearing fruit in every good work” refers to ministry activities that result in the birth and growth of new believers with emphasis on (but not limited to) evangelism.⁸⁶ In this text we are justified in saying that “the results of the missionary are his fruit.”⁸⁷ The accompanying phrase “increasing in the knowledge of God” suggests “obedience to the work of God brings further knowledge of God himself,” thereby linking the fruit of missional activity as being both new believers and growth in Christian character.⁸⁸

Rosscup observes:

First, to speak as though fruit is limited to soul-winning is to be oblivious to other possibilities for fruit. The Christian who discerns the harmony within the varied scope of fruit will rightly desire a life of all-around symmetry in fruit-bearing. Secondly, however, he will see that His Lord placed paramount emphasis upon taking His message to others (Matt 28:19-20; Luke 19:10; Acts 1:8). The book of Acts goes on to record the Spirit’s acts through men with the central thrust of introducing other men to Christ, and the epistles are primarily “follow-up materials.” The Christian should realize that fruit as character

⁸⁶ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1991), 203. In contrast Dunn sees this as nothing more than maturity. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 72. Surprisingly, Dunn argues on one hand that elsewhere in Scripture fruit is thought of in terms of good moral character “but here it could simply denote the success of the gospel in winning more and more to belief in Christ Jesus.” Then, in the midst of his comment on Col 1:6 he argues that the term is unclear. To the contrary, the context is clear that fruit is the abundant harvest of new believers.

⁸⁷ Kittel et al., 3:615. In his comment on John 15:16 Carson states, “[t] his fact, and the emphasis on *going* and bearing fruit, have suggested to many commentators, probably rightly, that the fruit primarily in view in this verse is the fruit that emerges from mission, from specific ministry to which the disciples have been sent. The fruit, in short, is new converts. One purpose of election, then, is that the disciples who have been so blessed with revelation and understanding, should win others to the faith—*fruit that will last*.” Carson, 523, emphasis his.

⁸⁸ Melick, 204.

and fruit as witness do not exist in an either/or relationship but rather in a both/and unity.⁸⁹

Diligent missional activity results in new believers and a closer relationship with God for those chosen to serve the mission.

V. CONCLUSION

God's mission to restore creation to the blessed state it enjoyed before the Fall is a major theme that integrates the vast expanse of the Old and New Testaments. His mission was revealed, in pregnant form, in a promise He made to Abraham that through his seed all the families of earth would be blessed. As time progressed the Lord revealed additional details about the promise, and the promise passed from generation to generation. For a time the nation of Abraham's descendants, Israel, was the center of God's mission on earth. The prophets foretold that the Servant would one day bring about the fullness of the promise; he would be a light to the nations that would stream into Israel to worship the Lord.

God selects humans to be agents of his mission, an act the scriptures signify by use of the Old and New Testament words commonly translated as "election." When God appoints someone to participate in the mission that appointment brings accountability; the one chosen for mission is responsible for living in such a way that attracts unbelievers and directs their attention to God whom they praise. Godly living, then, is a critical component to effective mission service.

Peter wrote his second epistle to warn his readers about the danger of moral laxity that threatened the sanctity of the Church and the effectiveness of her testimony. Their holy lives were important in their task of proclaiming God's excellencies to the world. In this they were like the Israelites whose holiness and covenant obedience were to have attracted the nations to Israel's God.

Peter's second epistle urges them to cultivate godly character for a purpose: so that they would be effective and fruitful. When 2 Pet 1:5-11 is read with a missional hermeneutic, it becomes

⁸⁹ Rosscup, 65.

plausible to understand Peter's use of the term "fruitful" as a metaphor for new believers who believe in Christ through the ministry of Christians who live godly lives. This is especially true bearing in mind Jesus' words in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you."

Second Peter 1:5-11 urges Christian virtue on all believers so that they will be effective witnesses whose lives yield a bountiful harvest of new believers and that they will be richly rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

