

## Living a Fruitful Life The Fruit of Moral Excellence

**Intro:** In our lesson last week, we looked at God's plan for spiritual fruitfulness. We learned that spiritual fruitfulness requires cooperation with God. God has supplied the information we need; he has supplied the motivation we need. But we also must supply faith and diligence in becoming the person God wants us to be, in order to bear the fruit God seeks from us.

To help us identify what this fruit looks like, Peter identifies seven features of a fruitful life. I want to consider each of them so that we can understand what a fruitful life looks like, and how we can live this kind of life. Let's take a look at Peter's list:

*Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; (2 Peter 1:5, NASV)*

*But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, (2 Peter 1:5, KJV, NKJV)*

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; (2 Peter 1:5, NIV)*

**Though all of these translations seem to be aiming at some general idea of proper living, they do differ; and it is important that we try to know what idea Peter may have had in mind when he wrote this list.**

### Pinpointing the meaning of "arete"

In classical Greek "arete" referred to the excellent quality of something. It would refer to that feature that would be most important for a particular person or thing to be called excellent. So the excellence quality of a horse might be its speed; the excellence of a weapon might be its sharpness or strength. The excellence of a soldier or man might be his courage. The ancient Greek philosophers devoted themselves in particular to what made people excellent. They made lists of virtue lists in order to encourage others to excellence.

According to Plato, the "arete" of a man was wisdom, courage, prudence, and justice.

In this tradition the NT contains similar lists of vices and virtues; but the Greek word "arete" rarely occurs among them, except here in 2 Pet. 1:5.

So what did Peter have in mind by using the term "arete"?

It's doubtful that Peter read the classics; but we can be certain that he read his OT and in his first letter he quotes from the Greek OT a passage about God.

*This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.  
(Isaiah 43:21)*

In this passage in the Greek OT “*arete*” translates the Hebrew word meaning “praises” or “praiseworthy deeds.”

In other words, God’s people would make known to others the things he has done that make Him worthy of praise—His praiseworthy deeds!

Peter mentions this quality of God in his introduction:

*...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. (2 Peter 1:3)*

Since Peter’s goal is to encourage us to be like God (partakers of the divine nature), then “*arete*” would probably then refer to the “excellent behavior” or “praiseworthy deeds” that accompany our faith.

If it helps, Paul also uses this term in Phil. 4:8:

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Phil. 4:8)*

So “*arete*” refers to that excellence of living that makes us praiseworthy to God and winsome to others. The Dictionary of NT Theology suggests that “*arete*” is a general term for “good and correct behavior in Christians.”

### **Living out the fruit of “*arete*”**

*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12)*

For Peter excellence was demonstrated in a hostile world by being the best in every relationship of life. For him “*arete*” is “moral excellence”. It is first of all:

#### Abstaining from fleshly lusts

For Peter being virtuous is first all abstain from vice. It is cleaning up our lives and putting behind us the sins of the past. Later in the book Peter gives a detailed list of things he had in mind:

*For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. (1 Peter 4:3)*

This vice list is really a generalized description of how unbelievers lived in the Greco-Roman world. Disciples show “*arete*” by abstaining from such things. Thus, it is reasonable then to translate “*arete*” with “moral excellence” since that is surely a part of what it means to be virtuous; but it is more than that.

Living with excellence in our relationships

Showing respect for those in authority over us

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, (1 Peter 2:13)*

*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. (1 Peter 2:18)*

*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, (1 Peter 3:1)*

In these illustrations we from the ancient world we may find an important principle of excellence. The Christians shows “arete” by respecting those in authority over us. It is by this that he

Showing love to those who need us

Another theme in this section is not only to show respect, but also to show love.

*To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9)*

Showing patience toward those who might mistreat us

One of the themes that runs through Peter's discussion is that Christians may find themselves in a hostile environment. They must not let the evil of others cause them to do evil. Christians may be slandered as evil doers; but Peter urges them not to “return evil for evil, insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.”

*To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9)*

A harsh master was not a rationale for desertion; instead Peter urges the slave to endure and remember Jesus who suffered in innocence.

*For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. (1 Peter 2:19-20)*

Dealing with mistreatment by others is a complicated subject; and we should remember that Peter writes to those who had little recourse in many cases against the mistreatment. But the

principle that comes out of these texts is that to some degree we may have to endure the difficulty that our relationships place upon us, trusting in God for ultimate justice. And that too is a part of how we show “arete.”

**Conclusion: As we think about these qualities we should not forget the incentives to practice them:**

*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:8-11)*

**These are great reasons to be fruitful. Are you living in moral excellence?**