

## 2 Peter 1:3

### Introduction

Nineteen of the twenty-one NT epistles—all except Hebrews and John—begin with a greeting. And these greetings aren't just formalities, as they might have been in many other letters, so it's important that we not skim over them too quickly. In fact, sometimes it's in the greeting that the author is already laying the foundation for the rest of the letter. So this was Peter's greeting:

Simeon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

And now Peter begins the main body of his letter with these words:

**I, 2 Peter 1:3a** — His divine power has granted to us all things **pertaining to life and godliness...**

How's that for an opening statement? That sure is saying a whole lot isn't it? So why does Peter come right out of the gate with these words? What's his agenda? On the one hand, you could say that these words are really deeply convicting. His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness" – so what's our excuse for anything less than *godly* living,<sup>1</sup> *ever*? On the other hand, these words are wonderfully encouraging. "His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness" – so we should be filled with a complete confidence and hope as we keep on striving to live godly lives.

But what is godly living? The *idea* of godliness is found all throughout the Old and New Testaments, but the actual word for "godliness" is very uncommon in the Bible. In the New Testament, it appears only in the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus [10x's]) and just a couple of times in Acts. It appears only four times in the entire Greek translation of the Old Testament. On the other hand, this word for godliness was extremely common among the Jewish writers of Peter's day who had been heavily influenced by pagan Greek philosophy (Hellenism). It appears 47 times in the book of 4<sup>th</sup> Maccabees, and it's also common in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish writings of Philo and Josephus. In other words, this word is far more common in Greek philosophy than it is in the Scriptures. And yet, as we're about to see, Peter uses it quite often. So why is this? Apparently, Peter's writing to Christians who were living in a very pervasively Greek (Hellenistic) culture and so he writes to these Christians using language they could very easily identify with.

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<sup>1</sup> I believe that "life and godliness" is a hendiadys (where two separate words are joined together to express a single idea/concept ["godly living"]).

The Greek word for “godliness” (*eusebeia*) is actually a word that the Greeks and Romans used to describe the kind of life they valued most highly *as pagans*. The Latin equivalent is “*pieta*” from which we get our English word “piety,” and both words have this basic idea of duty, of devout loyalty, and careful devotion. One commentator says that for the Greeks and Romans “godliness” or “piety” had to do with showing reverence and loyalty to those to whom it is due,” particularly to the gods (Green). So, of course, for the OT Jew or the NT Christian, piety is showing a proper reverence and loyalty to the one and only true God.

- Proverbs 1:7 (LXX) — **Piety towards God** is the beginning of discernment; but the **ungodly** will set at nought wisdom and instruction.
- Isaiah 33:6 (LXX) — Wisdom and knowledge and **piety toward the Lord** [Heb. “the fear of the Lord”]; these are the treasures of righteousness.

We see that godliness (or piety) has first of all a Godward direction. Do we have piety toward the Lord? Is our life characterized by an attitude of careful reverence, and loyalty, and devotion to the Lord? Is our living characterized by the fear of the Lord?

Peter joins “godliness” together with “life” (“life and godliness”) so he’s not just talking about an attitude, but a whole way of living that this attitude toward God results in – a pious, and a devout, and a godly life. I think there’s a sense in which “piety” might be a better translation than “godliness” because it emphasizes more the sense of duty, and devoutness, and loyal devotion, and a “religious” or a scrupulous faithfulness that even the pagan Greeks and Romans valued so highly. One person says that what was prized by the Romans was “dogged determination and an unflinching devotion to duty” (Shelton; quoted in Green). That was their piety. So we hear of devout Muslims and devout Hindus and devout Buddhists, but what about devout Christians? What about a devout and pious Christian? Today, I think this is less and less the norm so that many times it’s the pagans who are putting us Christians to shame. When we hear the words “devout” and “pious”, we might associate them with a “goody-two-shoes,” “better-than-thou” attitude – and that would be wrong. But does that mean we should throw these words out entirely as I think many today have done in practice? I’m not sure anymore if “godliness” really captures the full meaning of this Greek word or of this biblical teaching. I wonder if somehow we’ve “tamed” the word “godliness” and made it more “safe.”

One of the marks of a lot of “millennial Christianity” today is an emphasis on “Christian freedom” as over and against Christian duty and piety. There’s been a minimizing of “holiness” (cf. 3:11) in the sense of “separateness” from the sinful world and separation unto God and an overwhelming emphasis on relevance. We’re throwing off the shackles of “fundamentalism” with its legalistic(?) rules and taboos (don’t drink, dance, go to the movies, get tattoos, or play cards) and replacing it with a “loosey goosey” Christianity where anything goes just so long as I don’t think it’s explicitly forbidden in Scripture and so long as I can justify it in my own mind and so long as I love God (“peripheral” doctrines; worship practice; participation in cultural activities; adoption of cultural norms and standards, etc.). But the fact that Peter is willing to use this particular word even given all of its pagan Greek connotations shows us that he definitely didn’t understand Christian freedom to imply any lack of devout piety or zealous devotion to duty. Could we all be characterized as *religiously* faithful, scrupulously devout, and pious

Christians – as “serious” Christians *visibly marked* by the fear of the Lord, by reverence, devotion, and loyalty to the Lord in all things? We *ought* to be and, furthermore, we can be because Peter says explicitly and clearly:

**II. 2 Peter 1:3a — His divine power has granted to us all things** pertaining to life and godliness...

Now here’s where we see the massive *difference* between Greek and Roman piety towards the gods and Christian piety toward God. The difference is that the Christian’s piety doesn’t start with himself—with his own efforts and strength and “dogged determination,” but rather with a gift that God sovereignly grants. That’s what makes all the difference in the world. That’s what turns Christian duty into Christian freedom – so that duty and freedom are actually one and the same thing, and so that the most scrupulous piety and the deepest joy exist together. Peter uses the language common in Greek philosophy because it accurately describes the devout, pious, and faithful life that *God*, our Creator, requires of us, and yet when Peter plugs this word into the Christian worldview, it’s also radically changed. No longer is my devotion and piety something I can boast about, but rather something for which all of the glory belongs to God.

“His divine power has granted to us all things...” *Whose* divine power? “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. *His* divine power...” I believe Peter is specifically speaking of the divine power of Jesus our Lord. This Greek word for “divine” (*theios*) is another word that’s far more common in Greek philosophy than it is in the Scriptures. Other than two times that it appears here in 2 Peter, it’s used only one other time in the New Testament, and that’s when Paul is addressing the Greek thinkers and philosophers (the Areopagus) in Athens.

➤ Acts 17:29 — Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the **divine being** is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of **man**.

Do you see the emphasis on the contrast between the “divine being” and “man”? We see this same emphasis in 4 Maccabees where this word is used a lot:

4 Maccabees 1:16 — Wisdom... is the knowledge of **divine and human matters** and the causes of these.

4 Maccabees 4:13 (cf. 9:9) — The high priest... prayed... that King Seleucus would not suppose that Apollonius had been overcome by **human treachery** and not by **divine justice**.

4 Maccabees 18:3 — Those who gave over their bodies in suffering for the sake of religion were not only **admired by mortals**, but also were deemed worthy to share in a **divine inheritance**.

In other passages in 4 Maccabees we also hear about divine law (versus human law; 5:18), divine hymns (versus human hymns; 10:21), and divine philosophy (versus human philosophy; 7:9). So embedded in the very definition of the word “divine” is the meaning, “*not* human.” In other words, the point of the word “divine” in Greek philosophy was to highlight the contrast with that which is merely human or mortal. So it wouldn’t make as much sense for Peter to refer to *God’s*

divine power. Obviously, God's power is divine because He's God. But what about "Jesus our Lord," who is truly and fully human just like us? Already, Peter has explicitly referred to Jesus as God ("...by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ"; 1:1b). Already, Peter has placed Jesus on the *same level as* God ("...in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord"; 1:2b). And now Peter tells us that though Jesus our Lord is fully human, the power that he exercises as our Savior is no *mere* human power, but the very power of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16).

"**His**[—Christ's—]**divine power** has **granted** to us all things..." The word for "granted" (*doreomai*) is another rare word in the Bible, used two times here in our passage this morning and only one other time in the New Testament, in Mark chapter 15.

➤ Mark 15:45 — When [Pilate] learned from the centurion that [Jesus] was dead, he **granted** the body to Joseph.

In Esther 8:

➤ Esther 8:1 — King Artaxerxes **granted** to Esther all the property of the persecutor Haman.

And then in 1 Esdras:

1 Esdras 1:7 — To the people who were present Josiah **gave** thirty thousand lambs and kids, and three thousand calves; these were given from the king's possessions, as he promised.

1 Esdras 8:55 (cf. 8:13-14) — I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the holy vessels of the house of our Lord, which the king himself and his counselors and the nobles and all Israel had **given**.

In all of these cases what we have is a governor or a king granting something in accordance with the *authority* he has to do so and/or the *bounty* and *riches* that he has at his disposal (cf. Bauckham). That's the special nuance or meaning of this special word. So now listen again to Peter: "His[—Christ's—]divine power has granted[—according to His authority to do so, and according to the immeasurable bounty and riches that He has at His disposal—has granted] to us **all things**."

In the Greek, Peter emphasizes the "*all things*" by putting this word first in the sentence. Peter says, literally: "ALL THINGS to us his divine power has granted—the things pertaining to a devout, and a godly, and a pious life." And so once again, we see how for the Christian duty and freedom are one and the same – joy and a scrupulously devout and pious life exist together. Peter's emphasis is on the devout and pious life that *we* are called to live, and yet at the same time he emphasizes not our own resources, but the unlimited resources that have been granted to us by Christ's own divine power. And then he continues:

**III. 2 Peter 1:3b** — His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him who called us** by his own glory and virtue...

The *theme* is still the devout and pious life that we're called to live, but are you seeing, now, how after emphasizing not our own resources, but Christ's, now Peter emphasizes not our own initiative, but Christ's – and not our own virtue or our own praiseworthiness, but Christ's? Christ has granted all things pertaining to a godly and pious life *to whom?*—To us who have come to *know* Him in personal relationship and fellowship. That might not sound like a big deal, but it really is! It's "simply" *through* our knowledge of Christ (cf. 1:8; 2:20; 3:18) that we've gained by faith that all the resources of His divine power have been granted to us; and this tells us that there's no true Christian anywhere in the world who's been granted less of these resources than another. Brothers and sisters, to know Christ by faith *is* to have been granted all the resources of His divine power. To put it the other way around, it's impossible to have any true knowledge of Christ and not have been granted in full all the resources of His divine power.

But lest we start putting the pressure on ourselves again by supposing that this knowledge is something that we attain and must maintain through our own efforts, Peter reminds us that even our knowledge of Him, through which we've been granted all the resources of His divine power, is not the result of our own questioning, or searching, or investigation, but rather wholly the result of *His* divine initiative in *calling* us by His own glory and virtue (cf. Mk. 2:17). This calling isn't just an invitation. It's not a "call" that it was possible for any one of us to refuse (though there is that kind of a "call"). This call was a powerful summons that drew us irresistibly, creating faith in us and guaranteeing to us the true knowledge of Him. It's the call of Christ when he cried out in a loud voice to one who had been four days in the tomb: "Lazarus, come forth" (Jn. 11:43). Paul speaks of the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). This is the call that actually makes effective in time God's sovereign election and choice before the foundation of the world (cf. Gal. 1:15).

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 — God **chose** you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he **called** you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Romans 8:30 — Those whom he **predestined** he also called, and those whom he **called** he also **justified**, and those whom he justified he also **glorified**.

Peter will speak in verse ten of our "calling and election," where our calling is simply the fruit and the application of our election.<sup>2</sup> So powerfully effective and irresistibly compelling is this divine call, that all those who are saved Christians can be referred to simply as the "called."

- Revelation 17:14 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:24) — [The Lamb] is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are **called** and **chosen** and **faithful**."

So now we read again:

**IV. 2 Peter 1:3b** — His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him **who called US by his own glory and virtue...**

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<sup>2</sup> Another hendiadys

The ESV says, “who called us “*to*” His own glory and virtue,” but Peter emphasizes “His own” glory and virtue (something that we can never share in?) so that I don’t think this has anything to do with what we’ve been called to, but rather it has everything to do with the miracle of *how* a sinner like me could be called at all. We’ve been called not because of our own virtue or praiseworthiness, but *because of His own* glory and virtue.

What is this “glory and virtue”? Notice how we have here another pair of words much like “life and godliness” in the first half of this verse.<sup>3</sup> So just like “life and godliness,” these two words together (“glory and virtue”) are meant to convey a single idea (hendiadys). “Glory” is a common enough word in the Bible, but “virtue” (*arete*) is yet another word that’s far more common in Greek philosophy than it is in Scripture (outside of 2 Peter only two other times in the NT and only 5 times in Greek Old Testament). In Greek culture, “virtue” could refer to courage and valor displayed through a person’s mighty deeds in battle, or to moral uprightness and purity displayed in a contest with evil (Wis. of Sol. 4:1-9; 2 Mac. 6:31; 4 Mac. 7:21-23). So whether we’re talking about physical conflict or moral and spiritual conflict, virtue has to do with praiseworthy deeds of valor and prowess and might. Sometimes, the Greek word for virtue is actually translated “valor” and “courage.” And as it happens, “glory” and “virtue,” paired together, was something not uncommon in Greek writings (Green). So one ancient writer “speaks of someone whose ‘*valour* and *glory*... are famed throughout Greece.’” Another one “honors the brave men who won war ‘by their own *valour*; the *glory* of it would not have been shared with anyone else.’” Someone else tells the story of an Amazon woman and says that “since her *valour* and *fame* [glory] increased, she made war upon people after people of neighboring lands.” This same person also “hails the goddess Athena’s power and the ‘memorial of her *valour* and of her well-merited *fame* [glory].’” (Green) So one commentator sums everything up by saying that this word, “virtue,” “is a way to speak of... acts that invite renown or glory” – of all praiseworthy deeds of might and valor (Green). And now consider these Scriptures:

- Isaiah 63:7 (cf. 43:20-21; Hab. 3:3) — I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the **praises** [LXX, “virtues”] of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
- 1 Peter 2:9 — You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the **virtues [the praiseworthy deeds of renown]** of him who *called* you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- Isaiah 42:8–13 — I am the LORD; that is my name; my **glory** I give to no other, nor my **praise** [LXX, “virtue”] to carved idols... let the habitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give **glory** to the LORD, and declare his **praise** [LXX, “virtue”] in the coastlands. The LORD goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his zeal; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes.

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<sup>3</sup> Other word pairs in 2 Peter are: “Precious and extraordinary” (1:4); “calling and election” (1:10); “power and coming” (1:16); “honor and glory” (1:17); “saw and heard” (2:8); “bold and willful” (2:10); “blots and blemishes” (2:13); “judgment and destruction” (3:7); “holiness and godliness” (3:11); “waiting for and hastening” (3:12); “spotless and blameless” (3:14); “ignorant and unstable” (3:16); “grace and knowledge” (3:18).

So now let's come back again to 2 Peter: "His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to a devout and godly and pious life, **through the knowledge of him who called us by HIS OWN glory and virtue...**" – by His own praiseworthy deeds of valor and renown. Our calling has come on the basis of *His OWN* glory and virtue—revealed in His sinless life, and sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection and ascension into heaven. Our calling has come on the basis of *His OWN* glory and virtue, *and not on any of our own*.

## **Conclusion**

So, brothers and sisters, we have to cut it off right here, right in the middle of Peter's sentence. But already I trust we've seen enough to feed us, and nourish, us and keep us until we can finish the sentence next week. As we move through this letter, we're going to see that Peter is very, *very* concerned with devout and pious and godly living. In chapter one, verses 5-7 Peter says:

- 2 Peter 1:5-7 — 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 **piety**, and **piety** with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

And in chapter three:

- 2 Peter 3:11 — Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and **piety**...

In chapters two and three, Peter also emphasizes the fate of the ungodly and impious:

- 2 Peter 2:5-7, 9 — If [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the **ungodly [impious]**; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the **ungodly [impious]**; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked... then the Lord knows how to rescue the **godly [the devout and pious]** from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.
- 2 Peter 3:7 — But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the **ungodly [impious]**.

And, of course, here in verse three, Peter's very first words, right out of the gate, are these: "His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to a **godly and pious** life.

Why is this such a big deal for Peter? Because there were false teachers in the church promising freedom *in the place* of duty, and liberty *in the place* of piety (2 Pet. 2:19). And so right here, at the very beginning, Peter shows us how Christian duty and piety is different from the duty and piety of the pagans. Christian piety relies not on our own resources, but on all the immeasurable resources of Christ's divine power, not on our own initiative but on the divine initiative of Him who called us, and not on our own virtue and praiseworthiness but on Christ's own praiseworthy

deeds of valor and renown. And so we see how for the Christian duty and freedom are not two mutually exclusive things, but rather one and the same – joy and a scrupulously devout and pious life exist together. In fact, they *must* exist together, Peter says, if we are to be truly sure of our calling and election – if we are to be truly sure of our rescue from judgment and destruction on the final day and our entrance into the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 1:10; 2:5-7, 9; 3:7, 11; 3:13).

How *good* it is, then, to hear and to believe these words: “***His divine power has granted to us all things*** pertaining to a ***devout and godly and pious life, through the knowledge*** of him who called ***US by His OWN glory and virtue...***”