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The Second Epistle of Peter

Do You Know Christ?

July 30, 2017

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1:3-11

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 2

2 Peter 1:3-11 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him** who called us to his own glory and excellence, (4) by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

(5) For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with **virtue,**

and virtue with **knowledge,**

(6) and knowledge with **self-control,**

and self-control with **steadfastness,**
and steadfastness with **godliness,**
(7) and godliness with **brotherly affection,**
and brotherly affection with **love.**

(8) 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.

(9) For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

(10) Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. (11) For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It will take more time than we have this morning to unpack everything Peter says in this first chapter, but

what we want to do today is to make some general observations and specifically note that Peter continues to emphasize this theme of the *knowledge of God* which he opened the chapter with:

2 Peter 1:2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you **in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**

The reason Peter is addressing this matter of the knowledge of God is because the enemy had introduced a false “knowledge” of the Lord which was really a false gospel. That is why we read chapter 2 for our Scripture reading this morning –

2 Peter 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) **And many will follow their sensuality,** and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

See it? Their “gospel” is a “sensual” one. It appeals to the flesh.

2 Peter 2:14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts

trained in greed. Accursed children!
And again –

2 Peter 2:18-19 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, **they entice by sensual passions of the flesh** those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. (19) They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

You have the same kind of descriptions given by Jude (remember that Jude and 2 Peter are quite parallel) –

Jude 1:3-4 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (4) For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, **who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

This same kind of threat is among us today. I believe the most common example is the widespread teaching and practice by so many who claim to be Christians that because of the grace

of Christ, because of His love and mercy and forgiveness, it really doesn't matter if we live holy lives or not. In fact, such teaching arrogantly boasts of licentiousness and immorality as evidence of the "rich and wide grace of God." This is one of the fundamental reasons the mega "churches" exist today, though even smaller groups are infected with such thinking and practice.

So Peter opens His letter here with this chain of qualities that characterizes *true faith*. Qualities that *always* are evident in Christ's true people. In other words, Peter is opening up with a description of *the genuine knowledge of God* in order to expose, right at the start, the evils being spread among these believers by these creeps who have crept in among them.

With that background, listen to Peter once again:

2 Peter 1:3-11 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him** who called us to his own glory and excellence, (4) by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

(5) For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with **virtue**,

and virtue with **knowledge**,

(6) and knowledge with **self-control**, and self-control with **steadfastness**,

and steadfastness with **godliness**,

(7) and godliness with **brotherly affection**,

and brotherly affection with **love**.

(8) 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.

(9) For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

(10) Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. (11) For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the Wednesday women's study we have been reading through the very valuable biography of George Whitefield by Arnold Dallimore. This is a must read for every Christian! Whitefield, of course, worked with

John and Charles Wesley and there is another very good biography of John Wesley available, written by Iain Murray. [Wesley and Men Who Followed, Iain Murray, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003]. Here are some excerpts from it which apply directly to what Peter is saying here about true faith and true knowledge of God:

“Upholding the beliefs of the Reformation was not the priority of the late 17th century divines of the Church of England, several of whom were ambitious to find a way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. As a result, evangelical views went into eclipse. They were certainly not preached at Epworth in Samuel Wesley’s day. [John’s father was an Anglican priest].

The ministry of the Church of England had come to be marked by high views of the efficacy of the sacraments, and clergy praised Christian virtues on the assumption that their baptized hearers were all already Christians. It was an Anglican of a later generation who summarized the position after 1662 with the words: ‘When the Puritans were expelled, they carried with them the spiritual light of the Church of England; and yet even amongst themselves the light had become dim and the glory had departed.’

Thus John Wesley was born into a rectory where ‘High Church’ beliefs prevailed. ‘I believed, till I was about 10 years old I had not sinned away that “washing of the Holy Ghost” which was given me in baptism. I am an High Churchman, the son of an High Churchman.’ The authors he heard praised were certainly not those whom his grandparents had esteemed. And while religion was taken seriously, it was not a religion that interfered with such things as card playing, dancing, and the theatre.”

It was, as many of you know, John Wesley’s contact with the Moravian Christians onboard a ship sailing for America that was one of the crucial steps in him finally coming to true faith in Christ. In a conversation with August Spangenberg, John states:

“I asked Mr. Spangenberg’s advice with regard to myself – to my conduct. He told me he could say nothing till he had asked me two or three questions. ‘Do you know yourself? Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?’ I was surprised and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, ‘Do you know Jesus Christ?’ I paused, and said, ‘I know He is the Savior of the world.’ ‘True,’ replied he: ‘but do

you know He has saved you?’ I answered, ‘I hope He has died to save me.’

Do you begin to understand how this relates to what Peter is writing? *Do YOU know that Christ has died for YOU? Do you KNOW Him? Does He know YOU?* This is the thing Peter is talking about when he says:

(10) Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Ultimately of course, John Wesley did come to genuine faith in Christ and was greatly used by the Lord as he preached Christ crucified in truth. Now, listen once more to the new man Wesley as he speaks again on the very thing Peter is bringing before us here in chapter 1. Iain Murray describes it-

“In the first place it is relevant to understand that Wesley had grown up impatient with any theological thinking that was merely theoretical or over-dogmatic. He was convinced that Christianity is pre-eminently intended to be practical, it is meant to change lives.

Wesley saw that Christianity may exist in forms of critical learning, and in

precise theological formulations, yet make no impact upon the world. Its sphere is only that of intellect and theory. Oxford illustrated this for him. For all its religion there was little or no living knowledge of God. The propensity to reduce Christianity to words, instead of power.

The Bible, Wesley would insist, is given us for our salvation and for our holiness.

And Murray also tells us about men who followed Wesley in the old Methodism that still believed the Bible. One such pastor was Thomas Collins who was born in 1810 in England, into an early Methodist home. Listen to what Collins says in this quote:

“Wesleyan theological tutors [translate that into today’s ‘seminary professors’] have all been pastors. May it never be otherwise! Theory, unsobered by necessity of practical application, is a great source of German skepticism [ie, higher criticism]. Who would trust the therapeutics of one who never healed? Medical professors reach their chairs through hospital wards. According to Wesleyan usage our ‘masters in Israel’ have to do the same.”

These are the things Paul meant when he wrote:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.**

There it is. Wesley was raised in the Church of England, a “church” that had the appearance of godliness but which in fact denied the very essence and power of true Christianity – the work of the Spirit of God in regenerating the heart of the sinner. This is why Jesus went straight at it when Nicodemus the Pharisee came to him –

John 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

And Nicodemus as we know did not

have a clue even though he was a leader in “the church.” At the root of false religion and a false church and a false Christian is this – the inward word of the Holy Spirit in making us a new creation is denied, neglected, and even hated. You can be sure that nothing has changed and that myriads of churches and professing Christians today are exactly where Wesley once was – unconverted, unchanged, still under God’s condemnation, haters of His truth. Recognition of this is where real revival always begins.

Continuing our overview of these verses, before we go into the details, look once more at this chain or list. He instructs to *supplement* our faith with:

- Virtue
- Knowledge
- Self-control
- Steadfastness
- Godliness
- Brotherly affection
- Love

Confirm your calling and election with diligence. Be certain that you do indeed know Christ, that you are in Him, that you are saved. How? Well, work out your faith. Look to see if the fruit of faith is evident in your life. Because genuine faith, as Wesley discovered, is not mere knowledge.

Yes, knowledge is in Peter's list. Yes, the Christian knows certain incredibly important things. The doctrines of our faith are vital and necessary. You cannot be a Christian if you don't know what the gospel is, or what justification is, and so on. So we should be increasing in our knowledge of these things. *But the error so many fall into is in stopping at this knowledge and making it the chief measure of religion.* Let's think this through carefully.

When a church, for example, is searching for a pastor, or is considering someone for church membership, what is the primary thing they most typically look for? *I am not asking "what is the primary thing they SHOULD be looking for."* No, what is it that inevitably in most cases is made to be the chief qualification? I can tell you –

Knowledge

Not the knowledge of God that Peter is emphasizing here, but knowledge of data, of dogmatics, the knowledge of academia. I am not exaggerating the case. Recently I was looking over a new study Bible. Like most study Bibles, it contained not only commentary footnotes, but also quite a number of articles on various topics. And it also included a comprehensive

list of all of the people who wrote those articles, instructing us supposedly in biblical truth. As I went down the list, what did I notice? Every single one of them had their academic degrees listed, most all of them doctorate degrees, and the prestigious universities they obtained those degrees from.

Think this through very carefully now. Listen to Peter again:

2 Peter 1:3-11 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, **through the knowledge of him** who called us to his own glory and excellence, (4) by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Are these men (and one woman) who are alleged to be so eminently wise in divinity and who are presented to us as teachers of Christ...are they people of

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- Virtue
- Self-control
- Steadfastness
- Godliness
- Brotherly affection
- Love

??? No mention is made of these qualities. Just knowledge. Just intelligentsia. Study the history of the church and see where this unbalanced emphasis always leads. It leads to the same sorry condition of the church that reigned in Wesley's day. A form of godliness, but devoid of the real power and presence of Christ.

Listen to the Apostle Paul speak about the very same thing in his prayer for Christians:

Ephesians 1:15-19 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, (16) I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, (17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, (18) having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know** what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (19) and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

And again:

Colossians 1:9-10 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, (10) 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.

THAT is the knowledge Peter would have us know. It is the faith that is supplemented by the fruits of the Spirit, without which no one can be certain of their calling and election by God.