

It's All Yours!

In **2 Peter 1:3-11**, the apostle Peter does something that Paul often does in his letters – he seems to get side-tracked for a moment! An old friend of ours used to say that, when he preached, it seemed that people got blessed more by the ‘asides’ than by the main message, and maybe something like that is going on here with what Peter is writing!

In his greeting (**v.2**), he writes: “*grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*”, and then it’s as if he says ‘Yes, that reminds me: do you realise what an enormous inheritance we have through knowing him?’ And then develops that thought for another 9 verses!

First of all, that word ‘knowledge’. It turns up several times in this passage, but Peter uses two different Greek words, and the slight difference between them would have been immediately obvious to anyone who read this letter or heard it read out. Not so easy for us, though some translations use ‘true knowledge’ for one and just ‘knowledge’ for the other, so some of the meaning comes across.

Simple ‘knowledge’ is *gnosis* in Greek, and means what it means in English – knowing facts and information – but Paul gives that a ‘health warning’ in **1 Corinthians 8:1** : “*Knowledge makes arrogant* (literally, ‘puffs up’), *but love edifies* (‘builds up’)”. Having a head full of information is not necessarily very useful. (See **John 6:63** and **2 Corinthians 3:6**)

So, what is the ‘knowledge’ that Peter is writing about? The Greek word is *epignosis*. The ‘*epi*’ bit means ‘over’ or ‘upon’ and this word means ‘recognition’ or ‘true knowledge’. The difference is very like when we are asked if we know someone. Perhaps we know who they are, maybe where they live or what they do for a living, but then the next question is ‘how well do you know them?’ and the answer to that reveals whether we really know them. That’s the sort of ‘knowledge’ that Peter is writing about!

2 Peter 1:3 is amazing! Peter says that really knowing the Lord Jesus is the key to all that we need for life and godliness. Everything has been given to us by God’s own power! Progressive real knowing of Jesus is the process by which all those qualities find their way into our practical, day-to-day lives.

Please take note of the tenses here! Peter says that God **has granted** all these things to us. Not that he **might** grant them to us at some time in the future! And who are we getting to know better? The one who **called** us by his own glory and excellence. So these benefits are already given to those who have been called by the Lord Jesus. The calling (and responding!) has already happened and ‘everything pertaining to life and godliness’ has already been granted to us.

It’s all ours! Already!

And the next verse takes us to another level again! We have not just been granted all that we need to live a life that pleases our Father, we have even been given the way to share his nature! Actually sharing the life of God – Wow!

So, what is the way into this life that pleases God? that really has a share in his own nature? Is it something that we can experience in real, everyday life?

Yes, says Peter, it is!

First of all, as we have seen, our Father has already granted to us all that we need for ‘life and godliness’. ‘Godliness’ is not a common word these days. What does it mean? Simply ‘walking with God’. So Father has granted to us all that we need to live and walk with him. Even the

word 'granted' is loaded – it comes from a word meaning a sacrificial gift, and the meaning would have been obvious to Peter's readers.

It is vital for us to see that this sacrificial gift **has been given**, and not to think that it is somehow conditional on how well we might perform. All that we need to live and walk with God – and, amazingly, to share in his own nature – has already been given to us as a free, sacrificial gift, through the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

The next question is obvious: HOW can we take hold of this gift?

In 1869, James Hudson Taylor was a pioneer missionary in China, but he was struggling with the same problem. As he put it in a letter to his sister Amelia: "All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it *out*." (Read the whole letter in *The Exchanged Life*.)

Hudson Taylor found the answer! The Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see that his life had already been joined to the life of Jesus and so all of God's provision for him was **already his**. So he began to take hold of it! Please do read *The Exchanged Life* and you will see the dramatic change in his life that started from that point. There were some very difficult times ahead for him and the fledgling *China Inland Mission*, but this fresh appreciation of union with Christ prepared and strengthened him and many of his fellow-workers. As he wrote to a colleague soon afterwards, "*It is His work, not mine nor yours: and yet it is ours – not because we are engaged in it, but because we are His, and one with Him whose work it is.*" Before this precious time, he had been on the verge of burn-out. Now, though his circumstances were extremely difficult, '*his letters reveal not so much the endless difficulties as the full tide of blessing that carried him through all*'.¹

Most of us will never find ourselves in those dire circumstances, but we still need the same solid basis for our daily lives, and this is what Peter is writing about.

If we read through this whole passage too quickly, we might think that Peter is giving us a list of things that we must really try hard to achieve. They all look ideal and, the more we read, the more it could look like we are heading for failure! The comments in **verses 8 & 9** could easily bring us into condemnation, feeling that we have proved ourselves to be useless and unfruitful as well as blind or at least short-sighted! I am certain that this is NOT what Peter is aiming to say!

This is an expanding list of excellent qualities which Peter says that we can take hold of through the Lord's 'precious and magnificent promises' (**v.4**). Hopefully, we have realised that we have 'escaped the corruption that is in the world', but have we realised that we also have access to all these qualities in our lives which demonstrate the life of God at work in us?

If we look at the list but forget what Peter wrote just before, we will probably get into a mess, so let's look at things in the right order . . .

As we have already seen, our Father has already granted us all that we need to live and walk with him (**v.3**) and the way that those things come into our lives is by really getting to know the Lord Jesus Christ. (**John 17:3**) As those who have been called by God – and have responded to that call – we have the privilege of being able to get to know him better **and** have been given (granted) the promises which enable us to share in God's own nature. We have enormous resources which have been put at our disposal, just as Hudson Taylor discovered.

We need to be really clear about that before we read on into Peter's list . . .

In **verse 5**, Peter effectively says: "Right! Now that you know something of the riches that God has already given you in Jesus, it's time to put it into action!" By saying "*applying all diligence*

¹ Quotations from '*Biography of James Hudson Taylor*' by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, 1965

...”, what Peter is really saying is “Get on with it!”. I’m sorry, but the translations that say ‘make every effort’ or ‘try very hard’ are just missing the point. The word *spoude*, translated ‘diligence’, basically means speed, earnestness, eagerness, even haste. ‘Trying hard’ immediately pushes it all back onto our own effort, and that is exactly where Peter says this does NOT come from!

He is simply saying: “You have been given a fortune; now put it into action – eagerly!”

‘In your faith’, he says, ‘supply moral excellence / goodness / virtue / moral character.’

‘OK, where am I going to get that from? I haven’t got any of my own!’

‘But you have been given all this fortune, all that you need for life and walking with God. I think you will find it in there!’ ‘... *through the true knowledge of him who called us by (or to) his own glory and excellence*’ (**v.3**)

‘And then, in your moral excellence, supply knowledge (just ordinary *gnosis* this time)’. What’s my source for that? ‘*all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge (epignosis) of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (gnosis).*’ (**Colossians 2:2-3**)

‘Next, in your knowledge, supply self-control.’ One of the **fruits** of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22,23**), a **result** of the Holy Spirit at work in us. Apparently the Greek word relates to ‘the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.’ (*Thayer’s Greek Definitions*)

‘And in your self-control, perseverance.’ A result of faith applied over a longer time period and often in difficult situations! ‘*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance* (same Greek word). *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*’ (**James 1:2-4**)

‘In your perseverance, godliness.’ We have been already granted ‘everything pertaining to life and godliness’ through knowing the Lord Jesus. (**v.3**)

‘In your godliness, brotherly kindness.’ This word (*philadelphia*) is usually translated ‘brotherly love’, but different here, probably because of the next word! *Phileo* is the word for caring friendship. How can we ‘add’ this brotherly kindness? Once more, the resources are provided for us! ‘*Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*’ (**1 Thessalonians 4:9**)

‘And in your brotherly kindness, love.’ A Greek word that many of us know: *agapé*. This is the last of the list and really sums up all the qualities that Peter has already listed. *Agapé* is often characterised as ‘sacrificial love’, but its more basic meaning is apparently love based in decision-making and the will. Used by Jesus when he speaks about loving your enemies. If they are our enemies, we may not **like** them very much (*phileo*), but we can still choose to love them! In the verse we have just looked at, where Paul says ‘*you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*’, the word he uses here is *agapao*. So this deliberate love goes beyond friendship and is something that we can learn from our Father. It is certainly not something that we can manufacture ourselves!

In **verse 8**, Peter says very clearly that the ‘normal’ situation is that these qualities will be in our lives and increasing, which will make us people who don’t just know Jesus theoretically, but are useful and fruitful as a result of that real and growing relationship. In fact, he says in **verse 9**, the lack of them is a sign of blindness, even wilful shortsightedness and deliberate forgetting of what Jesus has done for us.

So, he says (**v.10**), be eager and earnest to establish the firm basis that the Lord Jesus Christ has called and chosen you because, if you do these things, you will never stumble.

What does he mean by 'do these things'? Let's be clear: Peter is NOT saying that if you make a great effort and manage to produce some moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love in your life, then you will never stumble. Experience tells us that, if we try to do it that way by self-effort, then we shall be certain to stumble sooner or later – probably sooner! We may fool some people and maybe even fool ourselves for a while, but we are sure to fail.

No, 'do these things' means following the process that he has written about and which we have been looking at; finding our resources in God's provision of everything we need for 'life and godliness', drawing on the riches which are already ours in Jesus.

Then, he says, the way into the eternal kingdom of Jesus will be 'abundantly supplied to you'. Wow! That sounds wonderful, and the words are full of overflowing abundance. The word for 'supply', here and in **verse 5**, is a lovely word that actually means to make full provision for a chorus of singers and/or dancers. That's quite a task, involving large and continuing resources. Thinking back to **verse 5**, there is no way that we would be able to 'supply' all these attributes on that scale from our own resources, is there? So that just serves to underline the fact that we need to turn to what our Father has provided for us in Jesus.

Then, in **verse 11**, talking about our entrance into the kingdom of Jesus, he adds 'abundantly'! So, even **more** provision, overflowing and sumptuous! What an inheritance!

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On 9th October 1948, the day after his 21st birthday, Jim Elliot wrote this poem:

What is this, Lord Jesus, that Thou shouldst make an end
Of all that I possess, and give Thyself to me?
So that there is nothing now to call my own
Save Thee; Thyself alone my treasure.
Taking all, Thou givest full measure of Thyself
With all things else eternal –
Things unlike the mouldy pelf by earth possessed.
But **as to life and godliness, all things are mine**,
And in God's garments dressed I am;
With Thee, an heir to riches in the spheres divine.
Strange, I say, that suffering loss,
I have so gained everything in getting
Me a friend who bore a Cross.

Just over a year later, he wrote in his journal these well-known words: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

On January 8th 1956, he and his four companions were killed by the Amazonian tribes people to whom they were bringing the good news of Jesus. In the following years, many of those people themselves became believers and took the gospel to others.

Jim did not make the sacrifice in order to gain anything for himself; he knew that all things were already his in Jesus. He did not give his life in January 1956; he had already given it before he wrote those words in 1948 and 1949. Years before his death, he had begun to discover the truth of **Matthew 16:24-25, Mark 8:34-35 & Luke 9:23-24**. The secret of an exchanged life!

Dave Taylor October 2021

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