

2 Peter Chapter 1:1-11

The Value, Virtues and Verification of Knowledge

Hymns: #23 Praise My Soul the King of Heaven #415 I Love to tell the Story

Within the FBI exists a department that is devoted to combating the counterfeiting of currency. Though today technology plays a significant role, in days gone by, the identification of fake currency was a human skill. To train agents for this department, the FBI would place before them real currency to study rather than counterfeits. Agents would spend an enormous amount of time studying and learning every detail of what a true \$100 bill looked like. Their training strategy makes perfect sense; there are a million ways to counterfeit something, but if you are certain of what the real deal looks like you don't have to worry about learning the million counterfeits. You will instantly pick the counterfeit because you are so familiar with the real thing.

I believe we are moving into days ahead where the spiritual application of this going to be increasingly called for amongst believers. It's not deception by the outright evil in the world that is the concern, but the million ways the evil one can go about counterfeiting the truth within the professing church. Remember he can appear even as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Sadly, many people are being duped by this angel of light and are departing from the truth and ignorantly following the god of this age. The only safeguard against religious counterfeit teachers and the growing doctrinal apostasy we see around us is to know the truth; to pay attention to the details of Him who is the real deal; then compare the truth against the counterfeit and take appropriate and obedient action.

Having just spent an intense couple of months steeped in the truth of Romans, we are now going to focus on several letters in the NT that will help equip us to spot the counterfeits in our day. We begin in 2 Peter this morning and over the weeks ahead we will focus on 2 and 3 John and finally the book of Jude. Taken together, alongside 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3, they provide us with a solid course on counterfeit identification and what to do about it.

First, a bit of back ground on 2 Peter. Written sometime between 64 AD and 67 AD most likely from Rome, this letter is Peter's last and his "swan song" appeal to Christians. There are some noteworthy similarities between 2 Peter with Paul's last letter of 2 Timothy. Two main similarities appear. Peter and Paul both know they're awaiting martyrdom (2 Pet. 1:14/ 2 Tim. 4:6) and they both foresee and warn of the apostasy and departure from the faith in the last days (2 Pet 2/ 2 Tim 3).

"Peter was both a concerned pastor and a champion of theological orthodoxy. This final impassioned plea to grow in Christian maturity and guard against false teachers was precipitated by the fact that his time was short (1:13-15) and that these congregations faced immediate danger (2:1-3). He desired to refresh their memories (1:13) and stimulate their thinking (3:1-2) so that they would remember his

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teaching. He carefully described the characteristics of mature believers and challenged them to make every effort to grow in grace and knowledge (1:3-11). Credentials of true teachers were given to help the readers be discerning students of God's Word (1:12-21). Peter cautioned them against false teachers and exposed their evil characteristics (Ch.2). And he encouraged his readers with the certainty of Christ's return (3:1-16). The purpose of 2 Peter is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat apostasy as they look forward to the Lord's return"¹

THE VALUE, VIRTUES AND VERIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE (CH. 1:1-11)

"In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the dying Duke of Lancaster tells the Duke of York: "O, but they say the tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony: Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain, for they breathe their words in pain." ²

The tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony; they carry extreme gravitas both for the speaker and the hearer. They are often the most important thing a dying person wants you to remember. Peter was just such a dying man. He knew that his time was short for the Lord Jesus had made this clear to him (1:15). So what were Peter's last words?

Turn to 1 Pet. 3:18 "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, Peter's last words were study and know the real \$100 bill.

The word knowledge or know is used at least thirteen times in this epistle. It's hard to miss. But it's not just an intellectual knowledge, though that is certainly required, rather it is the kind of knowing and knowledge that comes from personal participation and growth experiences with Jesus who is the Truth. Jesus referred to this kind of knowledge as eternal life in John 17:3 when he prayed "Now this is eternal life: that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". There is clearly an infinite value in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE (V.1-4)

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our **knowledge** of him who called us by his own

¹ Kenneth O. Gangel; *2 Peter; The Bible Knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty; 1983; SP Publications (p. 862)*

² Michael P. Green; *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching; 1982; Baker Books; (p.95)*

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glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

In these opening verses we find that there are at least seven values to be gained through our knowledge of Jesus Christ:

1. **Grace**- “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense”; “God giving us that which we do not deserve”; this includes our salvation, our redemption from sin and our reconciliation to the Father. John 1:16-17 tells us “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

2. **Peace**- Rom. 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”; Phil 3:7 “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

3. **Life**- This is a new life; a life of spiritual vitality. John 10:10 “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

4. **Godliness**- this refers to our obligation and demonstrable attitude of reverence towards God; a word that is not used much anymore, but one which perfectly describes godliness is “piety”. It’s the opposite of a sloppy, casual, “grunge factor” and irreverent attitude toward the things of God.

5. **Precious Promises**- “precious” was one of Peter’s favourite words. He used it in reference to our “precious faith” (1:1), “precious promises” (1:4), the “precious blood” (1 Pet. 1:19), the “precious stone” (1 Pet. 2:4, 6) and the precious Savior (1 Pet.2:7). Who can count or fully value all the precious promises of God, but perhaps John has best captured a summary when he tells us of God’s own testimony to us as a precious promise. 1 John 5:11-12 “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

6. **Participation in the Divine nature**- that is, to share in the Son’s communion with the Father by the Spirit; to have true koinonia- fellowship within the Divine Circle of the Triune God of Grace. This is what Jesus prayed for us in John 17: 20-23 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23I in them and you in me.”

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Participation in the “divine nature” is also a participation in a “determining nature”. For example, “Nature determines **appetite**. The pig wants slop and the dog will even eat its own vomit, but sheep desire green pastures. Nature also determines **behaviour**. An eagle flies because it has an eagle’s nature and a dolphin swims because that is the nature of a dolphin. Nature determines **environment**: squirrels climb trees, moles burrow underground and trout swim in the water. Nature also determines **association**. Lions travel in prides, sheep in flocks, and fish in schools. If nature determines appetite, and we have God’s nature within, then we ought to have an appetite for that which is pure and holy. Our behaviour ought to be like that of the Father, and we ought to live in the kind of spiritual environment that is suited to our nature. We ought to associate with that which is true to our nature (2 Cor. 6:14ff)”³

7. **Escape from corruption**- this is the moral corruption that comes from lust; it is an organically defiling corruption in the members of our bodies when we allow the world, the flesh and the devil to have ground in us.

VIRTUES OF KNOWLEDGE (V. 5-9)

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your **knowledge** of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

Having shown us the glorious value of our knowledge of Jesus Christ, Peter now makes the point that the kind of knowledge that brings the personal experience of these values is not automatic; we don’t automatically experience the value of our knowing Jesus. We have to cooperate with the indwelling Holy Spirit to develop the virtues that will make our knowledge of Jesus effective and productive. Though such knowledge and virtues have been given to us by grace as a gift, we are responsible to work out that which God has worked in (Phil. 2:12-13).

Eph. 2: 8-10 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

³ Warren Wiersbe; Be Alert; Victor Books; 1987 (p. 13)

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Faith alone is the foundation upon which Peter gives us seven virtues that we are to make every effort to add. We are to be diligent about this. That means taking pains to train ourselves. Really working at it consciously.

These seven virtues are not to be thought of as a spiritual ladder of progression or like seven separate beads strung together. The word “add” in the Greek is the word from which we get the English word “chorus and choreography”. In other words, faith is like the melody line of an orchestra and the virtues are seven different instruments that harmonize together each playing its part; and at other times, each virtue providing a solo performance. A virtuoso performance if you will. Do you know what a virtuoso is? A virtuoso is a person who possesses outstanding technical ability in the playing of a particular instrument. He or she is capable of displaying feats of skill well above the average performer. This is exactly what Peter has in mind; he is calling us to become “virtuosos of virtues”; to be diligent, to practice lots, making every effort to add or choreograph these virtues into our life of faith. We should aim to possess outstanding spiritual and practical prowess in the virtues that are well above those of the average performer.

Peter tells us that if we choreograph and harmonize these virtues with our faith and if we possess these qualities in increasing measure then we will be kept from being ineffective (lit. idle; useless) and unproductive (lit. unfruitful) in our **knowledge** of Him. In other words, the more we practice these virtues the more we experience and enjoy the value and benefits knowing Jesus Christ brings. So what are these seven virtues?

1. **Goodness**- is the strength of moral excellence; it's doing the right thing even when no one else is watching. After President Ronald Regan had been shot and was recovering in hospital he wasn't feeling great and took himself to the bathroom to wash his face. In doing so, he accidentally splashed some water on the floor. President Regan grabbed a handful of paper towels and got down on his hands and knees on the bathroom floor and proceeded to wipe up the water. At that moment one of his presidential aids came in and found down on his hand and knees and exclaimed “Mr. President, what are you doing?” “I'm mopping up some water”, he replied. His aide said “Don't bother about that Sir, the nurses can clean that up.” But Regan replied, “I made the mess, I'll clean it up”. That is the strength of moral excellence; doing the right thing even when no one else is watching, no matter who you are or your privileges.

2. **Knowledge**- that is spiritual knowledge of the Person and Word of God and the Book of the Word of God. This is the knowledge of Jesus gained through both our apophatic disciplines of prayer and contemplation and our kataphatic disciplines of daily study and feeding on the Scriptures, for man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

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3. **Self-control**- this is to have one's passions under control. It means setting a guard at the gates; your eye gate- what you look at, as Job did in 31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."; your ear gate- what you listen to or refuse to listen to, particularly gossip and slander and the rot of godless chatter; and your mouth gate- that is both what goes in and come out; gluttony, cursing and an endless stream of self-justifying or diversionary words that simply fill the air.

4. **Perseverance**- this relates primarily to the pressures and problems of life; it means remaining underneath them and not squirting out the side and running away because we know perseverance produces character or approvedness; we prove God's faithfulness to us and He proves us for rewards.

5. **Godliness**- this refers to our obligation of reverence towards God; a word that is not used much anymore, but one which perfectly describes godliness "piety". It's the opposite of a sloppy, casual, "grunge factor" and irreverent attitude toward the things of God.

6. **Brotherly kindness**- Philadelphia -this is the practical caring for others and carrying each other's burdens.

7. **Love**- agape- love this is desiring the highest good for others; often its loving in spite of the differences we have. It's both bearing with others through curtailing our liberties but also the courage to speak the truth in love to edify an erring or weak brother.

One of the most practical ways we can begin to put these virtues into practice is to start by memorizing this list of virtues...Goodness, Knowledge, Self-Control, Perseverance, Godliness, Brotherly Kindness, and Love.

Peter tells us not only what we can expect if we possess these qualities in increasing measure, namely an effective and fruitful knowledge of Jesus Christ. But he also tells us what we can expect if we don't have them.

First, we become nearsighted. The Greek word used here is the word from which we get the English word "myopic"; literally we can't see things far away. In other words we only see the things right in front of us and cannot see far back to the Cross and its finality in the cleansing of our sins.

Second, we become blind. The root of the Greek word used here means smoke or to burn. It suggests the dulling of the intellect; like trying to look through smoke or fog; things are not clearly seen or discerned.

The consequence of being nearsighted and blind is that we then forget we have been cleansed from our past sins; we lose the conviction and assurance of our salvation.

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THE VERIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE (V. 10-11)

“Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When Peter says to be all the more eager, he used the same Greek word he used in v. 5 where he said to make every effort. We are to be diligent not only to increasingly possess the virtues that lead to an effective and productive knowledge of Jesus Christ, but we are also to be diligent to make our calling and election sure. In other words we are to make every effort to make sure, lit. to make firm, indeed to confirm our election in grace by faith.

We have seen previously in our study of Romans 9 that Jesus Christ is the sphere of our individual election (Eph. 1:4). There is no other individual election but that which is “in Him”, and no one can change the sovereign choice of God to make the election of Jesus Christ, our own election as well. We, like Pharaoh may choose to cooperate with our election in Jesus Christ or we may choose to resist it and fight against God’s eternal purpose but either way, we CONFIRM our election in Him. Jesus Christ as the God-Man is both the “Electing God” and the “Elected man”. As the Electing God he came to give us the Righteousness of God and take us into Glory in Resurrection and Ascension. As the Elected Man he came take from us the Sin of Adam by suffering rejection, judgement and death upon a cross, taking us down into death with him; a judgement and death he bore for us; one we could not bear without being completely lost. If we receive Him by faith we confirm our election and enjoy that which the God-Man Jesus accomplished as the Electing God. If we resist Him, we still confirm our election, but only do so in the judgement and death which the Elected Man underwent for us and did not want us to experience.

When we confirm our election in grace by faith and diligently choreograph the seven virtues of knowledge into our life, we experience the Verification of Knowledge. This verification of knowledge is both the assurance of past sins forgiven, and also the assurance of future eternal rewards. Peter says that if we do these things we will receive a rich welcome into the eternal Kingdom. Peter is not speaking of salvations by works, but of the rewards that each believer is to look forward to and be motivated by. Each one of us as believers will stand before the judgement seat of Christ after the rapture/resurrection and before the Millennial Kingdom is established on earth. There at the “Bema Seat” judgement, the quality of the materials each believer has used to build with upon the foundation of faith in Jesus will be tested by fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom. 14:10). Some who have built with cheap and flammable materials will have their Christian life’s works burned up and suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as a man escaping from a house on fire. Others who have built with

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costly and quality materials like gold, silver and precious stones will receive rewards. These include at least five crowns spoken of in the NT. These are eternal rewards that we will enjoy as co-reigning responsibilities as well as use in our worship and honour of Jesus Christ throughout eternity. We should be motivated to live and build well now in light of the biblical promise of rewards. This is the rich welcome that Peter holds out and calls us to verify in our own experience and assurance even now.

In summary, though everything has already been given to us by grace and received by faith, the Value of Knowing Jesus Christ is not automatic. However, as we diligently and increasingly pursue the Virtues of Knowledge we increasingly know the Value of Jesus Christ and Verify our past election and demonstrate that we are pilgrims on the way home to a rich welcome and future rewards.

I close with this: "Henry C. Morrison, after serving for forty years on the African mission field, headed home by boat. On that same boat also rode President Theodore Roosevelt. Morrison was quite dejected when, on entering New York harbour, President Roosevelt received a great fanfare as he arrived home. Morrison thought he should have received some recognition for his forty years in the Lord's service. Then a small voice came to Morrison and said, "Henry- you're not home yet".⁴

You and I are not home yet either. So, let us not be dejected when the world pours out its adulations on its own. Rather, let us make every effort to add to our faith the seven virtues; let us become virtuosos of goodness, knowledge, perseverance, self-control, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. We need these in increasing measure if we are to experience and enjoy the values of knowledge in Jesus Christ who is the real \$100 bill. We'll also need them if we are going to recognize the counterfeits all around us. We're not home yet, but even while we're in training to recognize counterfeits, we can have a joyful assurance of sins forgiven and the promise of rewards to come.

Let us pray...

⁴ *Michael P. Green; 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching; 1982; Baker Books; (p.306)*