

LESSON 6

Knowledge

“[add] to virtue knowledge”

In the context of pursuing participation in the *“divine nature”* (2 Peter 1:4), Peter emphasized the necessary means in apprehending this goal to be the *“divine power”* (2 Peter 1:3). In the gospel – *“the power of God to salvation”* (Romans 1:16) – God reveals *“all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:3). Specifically, the knowledge of Jesus, especially His *“glory and virtue”* (2 Peter 1:3), draw us in and enlighten us concerning the *“divine nature.”*

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Our response to Jesus’ call *“by His own glory and excellence”* (2 Peter 1:3, NASB) is faith. Our initial faith that obeys in baptism (cf. Colossians 2:12) leads to our escape from the corrupt world (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) by God’s grace. This faith is the beginning of a new life in the heavenly places in Christ – a life which includes good works God prepared for us to walk in (cf. Ephesians 2:4-10). These prepared good works guide us in the way of the divine nature. This new life where we walk by faith is characterized by daily renewal of the inward man (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16) – spiritual growth. Growing *“in the grace and*

knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) is about faith taking us to spiritual heights God has created us for in Christ Jesus. So, faith does not stand alone, but is built upon.

The first thing Peter instructs us to add to our faith is *“virtue.”* If the point of growth in grace is partaking in the divine nature, then our start should be fixing our focus upon that goal. We are called to share in the excellence of Christ, not to rest on His laurels. However, the path to this goal is described by Jesus as being narrow and difficult (cf. Matthew 7:13-14). Therefore, we add virtuous courage, and manly valor to our faith.

Yet, a general goal of partaking in the divine nature, and the addition of courage is not enough. The very idea of a goal implies knowledge. We cannot aim for something we know nothing about. Also, courage for the sake of courage is not virtuous in the least. It is the courageous stand for what is true and good that is praised. Thus, Peter instructs, *“to virtue [add] knowledge.”*

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) DEFINED

- “knowing (the act), i.e. (by implication) knowledge” (STRONG)
- “primarily ‘a seeking to know, an enquiry, investigation,’ denotes, in the NT, ‘knowledge,’ especially of spiritual truth” (VINE)

- “(1) comprehension or intellectual grasp of something, knowledge; (2) the content of what is known, knowledge, what is known” (BDAG)
- “(1) knowledge signifies in general intelligence, understanding; (1d) moral wisdom, such as is seen in right living, 2 Peter 1:5” (THAYER)

These definitions show dimensions that are important in understanding Peter’s emphasis of “*knowledge*” as an addition to “*virtue*.” It is not mere “fact knowledge” he wishes us to add. *Gnōsis* connotes the comprehension and grasp of what is known. There are those with good memory who know a fact, but do not comprehend the principles of the fact, nor the effects it may have in any given situation. *Gnōsis* involves utility; it is not trivial. Also, as noted in BDAG’s second entry, knowledge of any sort has an object, and therefore a source. The knowledge Peter instructs Christians to add is not general but is a comprehension of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-3; 3:18) – His life, character, and revealed will. What we seek to know is far more important than the mere act of knowing itself.

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OF VIRTUE (ARETE)

As stated before, one cannot achieve the goal of Christ’s virtue without knowing what it amounts to. People throughout history have painted portraits of the Savior without any possible accuracy due to a lack of knowledge concerning His features. However, the gospel is the true portrait of Christ, and if we are to look like Him, we must come to know it.

Paul began the practical portion of his epistle to the Ephesians with a call to unity of the faith and of the knowledge of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:1-

16). This unity would be achieved by the body growing into the maturity of Christ through the growth and share of each individual member (cf. Ephesians 4:16). The section is followed by the corresponding call to rid ourselves of the old man, be renewed in our mind, and to put on the new man as we have learned Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:17-24). Ephesians 5 elaborates on the character of the new man by beginning with the call to “*be imitators of God as dear children*” (v. 1). In a brief, yet profound and potent sentence, John described God – “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5). Therefore, in being “*imitators of God as dear children*,” we are “*children of light*” (Ephesians 5:8). Paul instructs the Ephesians to walk according to their identity by having no fellowship with darkness, but rather exposing it (cf. Ephesians 5:8-14).

Putting on the new man, imitating God, being children of light, and exposing darkness are all dependent on knowledge of God’s will in Christ. Thus, Paul penned, “*See then that you walk*

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circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). We must be careful to walk exactly in the way of Christ and redeem each opportunity to do His will. However, we must come to an understanding of His will to do this.

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) IS NECESSARY TO AVOID THE WRONG PATH

Paul wrote to the young evangelist, Timothy, to charge him to wage the good warfare using the very word which brought him to faith in Christ (cf. 1 Timothy 1:18-20). This charge came to Timothy because some were teaching perverted doctrines and giving heed to useless and harmful discussions (cf. 1 Timothy 1:2-4). Timothy was to *"instruct the brethren in these things"* (1 Timothy 4:6) – the truth, the present and impending error, and the apostasy to which it leads. He was not to give heed to useless information, but to godliness (cf. 1 Timothy 4:7-11). Only if he was careful to conduct himself according to the doctrine of Christ, and to teach only that doctrine, would he *"save both [himself] and those who [heard him]"* (1 Timothy 4:16).

Paul's concluding words in his first epistle to Timothy shows the concern he had for the gospel in a time when it was being threatened, and the young evangelist to whom it was entrusted. He wrote, *"O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen"* (1 Timothy 6:20-21). He spoke of *"what is falsely called knowledge."* It was profane (unholy), idle (useless, vain), contradictory (to the faith), and therefore false. Those who professed it and lived by it *"strayed concerning the faith."*

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Not all knowledge is good knowledge, and not all knowledge is true. Paul described some as *"always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Timothy 3:7). We must avoid false knowledge and grow in what is true. Growing in knowledge fortifies us against false teachers and their error (cf. 2 Peter 3:14-18). Only the true knowledge of Christ can guard us against wandering down the wide path leading to destruction (cf. Matthew 7:13-14).

KNOWLEDGE (GNOSIS) IS NECESSARY TO AVOID DESTRUCTION

There is no true vacuum in the spiritual realm. Some would like to believe that ignorance is bliss. However, the void in one's mind due to the ignorance of a matter will only be filled with something different – for better or worse (usually the latter) (cf. Matthew 12:43-45).

Understanding the nature of God's word will impress us with the danger of ignorance. For example, Moses told the Israelites he set before them blessing and cursing, each conditioned upon their obedience or disobedience to the revealed commands of God (cf. Deuteronomy

11:26-28). Their ignorance of God's word would not simply lead to missing out on a blessing but would secure the cursing. Nobody stumbles into God's favor on accident, but plenty of people stumble down the path to destruction. Ignorance of God's word is a leading cause.

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There are some who would have you believe that ignorance is a mitigating factor in God's judgment. Do not be deceived! God plainly stated, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). Ignorance was the impetus for the unnerving cycle of disobedience and apostasy in the book of Judges (cf. Judges 2:10-11). Ignorance means sure destruction. The solution is obtaining knowledge.

HOW TO OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE

1. **Expect to understand:** There is a sad and unsettling trend in the church today concerning the belief in an inability to understand God's word. Like any error, it sits on ulterior motives known to be at odds with scripture – in this case, an extended boundary of fellowship. Regardless, it completely undermines scripture's internal claim to be understandable (cf. Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13). If we do not expect to understand God's word, we will not.
2. **Desire to do God's will:** For some, the problem is not the thought that they cannot understand, but the lack of desire to understand. God told Ezekiel that those who inquired of God with idols in their heart would be given an answer according to their idols (cf. Ezekiel 14:1-5). They did not want to know God's will, so God would give them the answer they were truly seeking. We will not be able to know God's will if we have ulterior motives. Jesus said His doctrine would be known as the Father's will if the Jews willed to do the Father's will (cf. John 7:16-18). They did not desire God's will, so they rejected the word of His Son.
3. **Apply mental industry:** Nothing can replace the effort God requires of us individually. As Peter wrote, "*giving all diligence, add to your faith...knowledge*" (2 Peter 1:5). We must put our minds to work if we are to understand. God revealed Himself just enough that we would have to seek Him and grope for Him to find Him (cf. Acts 17:26-27). To understand His word, we must be diligent in study (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15).
4. **Seek the blessing of God:** The reason we can know God is due to His desire for us to know Him. Knowledge of Him is itself a part of His grace (cf. Titus 2:11-14). If we wish to know, then we must seek His blessing. If we ask, seek, and knock we will receive, find, and it will be opened to us (cf. Matthew 7:7-11). God gives liberally and without reproach to those who ask (cf. James 1:5). He wants us to know, so we should seek His blessing of knowledge in faith.

LESSON 6 QUESTIONS

1. Why does “*knowledge*” follow “*virtue*” in Peter’s list?
2. Define “*knowledge*.” What are some important aspects of the term noted by the supplied definitions?
3. We are called to the “*virtue*” of Christ and are to add the goal of that “*virtue*” to our faith. What is a fundamental necessity for reaching the goal of Christ’s “*virtue*?”
4. As an evangelist, what was Timothy instructed by Paul to pursue, and to avoid, to be a good minister?
5. Explain Paul’s description of “*what is falsely called knowledge*” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).
6. How is ignorance destructive?
7. Does ignorance lessen the severity of an offense before God?
8. What are some necessary factors in obtaining knowledge?

