

LESSON 2

*Growing in Grace*GRACE MULTIPLIED THROUGH
THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

The call of Peter to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18) acts as a bookend with his introductory thought, “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Peter 1:2). The thrust of the entire epistle is the imperative growth as a preventative measure against apostasy (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-2; 3:17-18), and the preparatory means for the coming day of the Lord (cf. 2 Peter 3:14).

The link between his call for growth in grace and knowledge and his introductory greeting for the multiplying of grace and peace manifests the nature of his greeting, and even that of others (cf. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; etc.). Peter’s desire is for their benefit of grace and peace through their increase in them. However, as noted previously, this does not form a thought of passivity, but proactivity. In all the epistles, the introductory greeting marking a desire for the recipients to receive grace and peace (with mercy sometimes included – cf. 1 Timothy 1:2; etc.) is not merely formulaic language, but an earnest exhortation to growth in spiritual matters.

The fact that this greeting for the multiplication of grace and peace requires effort on the part of the recipient is emphasized by the medium and process of this increase – “*in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” The King James Version highlights the idea with the translation, “*Grace and*

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peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” For one to increase in grace and peace, they must increase in knowledge, for it is “*through*” knowledge that these are multiplied. This requires intensely focused effort, yet, still in total dependence on God.

THE SUPPLY OF GRACE

Again, the grace and peace are supplied, thus multiplied, “*through the knowledge*” (2 Peter 1:3, KJV). Peter continues this thought in the next verse noting the way the grace and peace proceed to be multiplied through such knowledge – “*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Peter 1:3) (“*as,*” *hōs* – “a comparative particle, marking the manner in which something proceeds,” BDAG).

The “*divine power*” of God is instrumental in dispensing to us “*all things that pertain to life and godliness.*” These enable us to lead the life characterized by, and abounding in, God’s grace. This

power which is inseparable from the knowledge of Christ was identified by Paul when he wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). One cannot grow in the knowledge of Jesus without the gospel. If one is to know about things pertaining to life and godliness, he cannot do so separate from the gospel. Ergo, one cannot grow in grace separate from the gospel message.

Through the saving power of the gospel message God reveals to us things which pertain to the new spiritual life in Christ (cf. Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) marked by godliness (cf. 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:6-8). Through the eyes of faith, we see Christ in the gospel. It is Him that we imitate to abound in this new spiritual life. Christ demonstrates what true godward piety is in His own life. If the “things” which pertain to life and godliness are added to our faith, and we abound in them, we will grow in grace.

But why would we? What would lead us to desire that growth in practical spiritual knowledge? Peter says, he “called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). This call is not some dry obligation communicated to us through the gospel. God does not simply command but gives incentive – “it is God who works in you both to **will** and to do” (Philippians 2:13). His calling is one which involves hope (cf. Ephesians 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). Peter highlights some of the divine incentives that attracted us to Christ – “glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3) – “His own glory and excellence” (NASB). These divine attributes displayed in the life of Christ through the gospel message have drawn us to Him (cf. John 6:44-45).

In the prologue of his gospel, John records that the divine Word came in the flesh, “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The “glory” possessed by Christ which attracted us to Him was not that of any material nature, but that “pertaining to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind)” (BDAG, “only begotten,” *monogenēs*) in relation to God the Father. “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3, NASB). This glory is especially reflected in His full possession and display of “grace and truth” in His life (cf. Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7).

In relation to His divine glory, His “virtue” has also attracted us to Him. The word Peter uses to describe Jesus is *aretē*, something which he also prescribes the readers to add to their faith (cf. 2 Peter 1:5). It is “intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue” (VINE); “uncommon character worthy of praise” (BDAG). Thayer notes that this broad term concerns “any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity.” Jesus displayed moral excellence. He was without sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15).

JESUS REVEALED HIS
GLORY AND VIRTUE THAT
WE MIGHT COME TO SHARE
IN HIS GLORY AND VIRTUE.

While His own “glory and virtue” was instrumental in calling us, it also reflects the objects in which we are invited to have a share. “Who called us **by** glory and virtue” (NKJV) is accurate, though, the idea expressed in, “called us **to** glory and virtue” (KJV), is implicit in the context. Peter wrote, “By which,” that is the “glory and virtue” instrumental in our call, “have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4). The promises given by the call of “glory and virtue” are not difficult to uncover, for Peter explains, “that through these,” the promises given through “His own glory and excellence” (NASB), “you may be partakers of the divine nature.” Thus, He called us “**by** His own

glory and excellence” (NASB), “*to His own glory and excellence*” (ESV). Jesus revealed His glory and virtue that we might come to share in His glory and virtue (“*partakers,*” *koinōnos*, “a sharer, i.e. associate,” STRONG; cf. John 17:22, 24). God does not promise that through the knowledge of Jesus we can become deity, but He does promise that we can share in His divine attributes. We can be in intimate fellowship with Him through the practical knowledge of Jesus.

THE ACCESS OF GRACE

Knowing the call to grow is not a mundane, intellectual exercise, but an invitation to bask in the grace of God by being transformed into the image of His Son should fill us with excitement and urgency to submit to that call. We should not be dragged to bible study, worship services, or any other spiritual activity. We should go of our own accord, knowing that such is “*working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

If we desire God’s grace, it is imperative we understand that it must be accessed (cf. Romans 5:2). No amount of work we do will ever earn anything God gives us by grace. However, grace is conditional, and we must meet such conditions to receive it. The process whereby we access God’s grace, then, should not be begrudgingly viewed, but joyfully.

Initially, the benefits of God’s grace are seen in the justification received by the propitiation in Christ’s blood (cf. Romans 3:23-26). As discussed before, this is the beginning of a new walk characterized by God’s grace. “*Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,*” we increase in the grace of God, becoming “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4).

GRACE DOES NOT ABOUND AS WE PERSIST IN SIN, BUT THE ABOUNDING GRACE OF GOD MEANS WE ARE FURTHER DISTANCED FROM SIN AS WE INCREASE IN HOLINESS.

This describes an increase in God’s grace after the obedience of faith demonstrated in baptism. We must understand the forceful implication – grace does not abound as we persist in sin, but the abounding grace of God means we are further distanced from sin as we increase in holiness (cf. Romans 5:20-21; 6:1-4, 12-14, 18-19). Many in the world boast of benefiting from God’s grace as they continue in the same depraved lifestyle. This is not the true grace of God (cf. 1 Peter 5:12). Barnabas observed the true grace of God in Antioch as new converts had made a complete turn from their sinful life and were eagerly serving the Lord (cf. Acts 11:23).

The grace of God is not experienced passively, nor is it experienced by continuing in sin. It is accessed through spiritual growth in knowledge – “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18). It is multiplied to us “*through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Peter 1:2, KJV). However, this is not merely intellectual or educational. In the verses cited before, Peter uses two distinct words for knowledge – *gnōsis* (2 Peter 3:18), and *epignōsis* (2 Peter 1:2, 3, 8). Thayer says of *gnōsis*, “knowledge signifies in general intelligence, understanding.” However, the grace of God is not multiplied through mere *gnōsis*, but through *epignōsis* – “[epi] must be regarded as intensive, giving to the compound word a greater strength than the simple possessed” (R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*).

Epignōsis is “expressing a fuller or a full ‘knowledge,’ a greater participation by the ‘knower’ in the object ‘known,’ thus more powerfully influencing him” (VINE). It is the difference between knowing the facts and becoming the facts – or applying the facts to self. It is the difference between knowing about Christ, and Christ living in you (cf. Galatians 2:20). The saving knowledge of the gospel is one which has been allowed by its possessor to promote a dramatic change congruent with its content. As Jesus stated, “*If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them*” (John 13:17).

THERE ARE MANY MEN WHO HAVE GROWN IN KNOWLEDGE WHO HAVE NOT KNOWN GOD’S GRACE. BUT TO PARTICIPATE IN WHAT ONE HAS COME TO KNOW BY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS TO TRULY EXPERIENCE GOD’S GRACE.

The exhortation by Peter to grow in *charis* (grace) and *gnōsis* (knowledge) (cf. 2 Peter 3:18) acts as an inspired commentary on the term *epignōsis*. There are many men who have grown in knowledge who

have not known God’s grace. But to participate in what one has come to know by the gospel of Jesus Christ is to truly experience God’s grace. To this end, Peter exhorts his readers to grow in grace by partaking of the divine nature through the addition to their faith of seven ascending virtues. “*For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge (epignōsis) of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:8).

THE DISPOSITION OF GROWING IN GRACE

Considering what growing in grace means, it should be viewed as a privilege. Christians should never feel reluctant to grow in Christ. They should be joyous. Following our previous lesson, BDAG’s final definition of *charis* is “response to generosity or beneficence, thanks, gratitude.” This is our response to God’s grace. We are to “*do all things without complaining and disputing*” (Philippians 2:14). Rather, we should follow God with continual expressions of gratitude (cf. Colossians 3:17). Paul was thankful to God that He was entrusted with the stewardship of the gospel (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12). In his second letter to Corinth, Paul expressed thanks for the grace of participating in benevolence for needy saints which promoted unity between Jew and Gentile (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, 7; 9:15). So also, “*let us show gratitude (charis), by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe*” (Hebrews 12:28, NASB).

LESSON 2 QUESTIONS

1. What conclusions can be reached by the wording of the bookends of Peter's epistle (cf. 2 Peter 1:2; 3:18)?
2. How is grace multiplied through the knowledge of Jesus (cf. 2 Peter 1:3)?
3. How did Christ call us (cf. 2 Peter 1:3)?
4. What else was given to us through this call by glory and virtue (cf. 2 Peter 1:4)? What do these promises include?
5. What does it mean to be "*partakers of the divine nature*?"
6. What is an initial benefit of God's grace which Peter notes precedes our coming to be "*partakers of the divine nature*" (cf. 2 Peter 1:4)?
7. Do we increase in grace if we continue in sin (cf. Romans 5:20-21; 6:1-4, 12-14, 18-19)? How does this scriptural idea of increasing in grace contrast with how the world views God's grace?
8. Explain the difference between the words for "knowledge" used by Peter in the bookends of his epistle. (cf. 2 Peter 1:2 – *epignōsis*; 3:18 – *gnōsis*)
9. Explain the relationship between grace and knowledge (*gnōsis*) in the final words of Peter's epistle. (cf. 2 Peter 3:18)

