

What is knowledge? What do you know? Is knowledge something you get reading a bunch of books in a library? Is it what you learn by doing? Is it being able to answer all the trivia questions that follow cafe church? How does what you know about life, the universe and everything affect you?

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Dictionary.com defines knowledge as ‘acquaintance with facts, truths or principles, as from study or investigation. Francis Bacon once wrote “Knowledge is Power.” Do you agree with that statement?

I think that most of us would, but there would have to be some clarification on what we were talking about. For instance, knowing how many Tim-tams in a packet seems pretty useless. But what if I where to offer the first person to tell me correctly the number of Tim-tams in this packet, can have it? (11) What made that information, knowing how many Tim-tams in a packet more useful? Using it! So really, knowledge is only powerful when you use it.

Another, slightly different example perhaps is that famous quote “The pen is mightier than the sword” I think if we were talking about getting into one-on-one combat, I’d rather have the sword. But if we are talking about using the pen as a tool that can potentially order an army to fight for me, then I think it’s obviously better. So knowing something can be good, but you have to know how to use it properly for maximum effect.

Perhaps a more elegant way of putting all this is how a British clergyman by the name of Thomas Fuller put it, saying, “Knowledge is a treasure, but practice is the key to it.”

What I want to talk about tonight is how the knowledge we have should affect us, and particularly for Christians, what this knowledge of ‘God and Jesus our Lord’ should mean to us in our daily lives. I think too many of us just accumulate knowledge like a bunch of books on shelves without ever taking the time to read them and apply them.

So, we are looking at 2 Peter 1:1-11 and the word knowledge is mentioned a number of times so it’s obviously important to Peter. To help understand the passage better, I think it’s best that I start by setting the context for the entire book, as it’s always dangerous to take anything out of context, let alone bible verses. One of the main reasons for Peter’s letter is shown in chapter 2 where he says:

“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves.”

The problem was that some people in the area were bringing false knowledge and leading people astray. Basically they had taken a Christian truth – that they are free in Christ - out of context and changed that to mean that there was not going to be a final judgement for them and they could indulge in whatever they want now.

Peter plainly says they are wrong and that those people will be judged. He backs up that statement in Chapter 2 verses 4-9 where it says If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, there is no way those people will escape judgement.

So Peter starts out his letter by demonstrating what a true knowledge of God and Jesus is, and what that really means.

It's probably helpful to know that in the Greek there are 2 definitions of knowledge, one being stuff that is learnt academically and the other being a more intimate knowledge. More than knowing about someone and actually knowing *them*. It's the difference between knowing about a celebrity; say Brad Pitt who you see in movies and TV and how you know your family.

Peter wants his readers to grow in this intimate knowledge of the Lord and to live in ways that are pleasing to him, that is a godly manner. It's not about having about the "facts and figures" of Jesus but understanding who Jesus is, getting to know him. So how did Peter view Jesus?

Within the opening of this letter he states 4 titles of Jesus and each one has a distinct purpose. He calls him "our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" as well as a little later on "Jesus our Lord" 4 descriptions – God, Christ, Saviour and Lord.

You may think that it's being picky of me to break down the names of Jesus here, but it's important and I want to briefly go through the different parts of his name. I think we can easily say "Jesus Christ" or "the Lord Jesus" without spending too much time thinking about what they mean since it gets used so often in church creeds and songs and we even here it as a swear word regularly. It almost becomes Jesus 'full' name – like my full name is David Andrew Carpenter.

In reality it's more of a title than a name, and each part of Jesus title has a very distinct meaning about who he is. Like when a queen is introduced at a function as "Her Royal Highness". It's not her name but a symbol of her status, it lets you know that she is royalty in her country.

If knowing Jesus is important to being Christian, it's good to understand what is meant by each title that Peter uses.

So the first part, by calling Jesus "God" Peter is talking about how Gods words and works are irrevocable. As Christians we believe God is the creator of existence, and what he says and does happens. In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. He said let there be light, and there was. So calling Jesus "God" he means that his words and works are powerful and unalterable.

The second part, calling Jesus the Christ. Christ literally meant 'anointed'. Basically it meant that Jesus was the one to fulfil the Old Testament promises and prophecies. Jesus was part of the on-going plan of salvation that had been set in motion from the beginning of creation throughout history.

This brings us into the next part of his title – Saviour. Jesus is the saviour – past, present and future. He is the only way that we can have a relationship with God, because he saves us from the depravity of our situation through his death and resurrection.

Finally, 'Jesus our Lord' by calling Jesus Lord, Peter is reminding his readers that if they profess that Jesus is their lord, then Jesus has the right to their love and obedience. They should be submitting their lives to him.

Knowing Jesus means having a close relationship with him and also having an understanding of who he is, with all its implications. If you want to be an effective Christian living a life that is pleasing to God means having an awareness of him in every part of your day-to-day lives. It means you seeking to grow in that knowledge, of having a closer relationship.

Why should we get to know Jesus? Well there is a very great and precious promise attached to knowing Jesus in this close and personal way, when we accept him as our Lord and Saviour. Verse 3 says

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 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.”

Did you catch the first part of that? He has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him.

It is important to understand what is meant by “everything we need for life” particularly from a Christian and a non-Christian view. A non-Christian might say that all that is needed to live is food, water and a place to sleep. Now while these are important and they might keep the body alive for a time, as Christians we know that for eternity, the only perspective is God’s and if we want to have God’s perspective on life than nothing is more important than knowing Jesus and our commitment to Him as Lord.

Now a commitment to God is a commitment to change, a commitment to growth. It’s a movement from self image to mirroring Christ. But sometimes it’s hard to make those changes - to see that picture of Christ in our lives and keep a godly perspective.

I find it really easy to forget these things sometimes. It starts getting hard to make decisions about what to do and what I should be doing while I’m on this earth. And you know what? I think that it’s fine to say that it is hard because it means I’m thinking about it more carefully – BUT I need to be reminded of the eternal perspective. Of God’s perspective.

This passage in Peter reminds us that it is God’s divine power that has given us everything we need for life – for growth. It is not in our own strength that we strive or find security. It’s in God’s precious promises we have certainty both now and for the future. It’s a certainty that helps us persevere in living a life for Christ. In God’s strength and power we make a commitment to live a godly life. Through His power we make our knowledge of Christ effective by putting into practice in our own lives what we know of Christ and how He lived.

If we are living our lives here as Christians it means that we have a different perspective to the world. This idea of having everything we need for life and godliness is based off the idea that Christ is real, his teachings are true, and what we are striving for and hoping for, the best thing for us is a restored relationship with God in heaven.

So how do we know if are being effective in our knowledge making sure that we are developing a deeper relationship with Jesus?

Peter lists a whole bunch of characteristics that a Christian should have “in increasing measure” to be effective in our knowledge. The style in which he wrote it is not so much as a progressive list, as though you had to have one characteristic before moving on to the next. It’s more like an ingredients list for godly living. Without one of them something is incomplete. I’m not going to go through them all one by one now, but spend some time looking at them when you get a chance and see if the knowledge you have of Jesus is impacting you in any of these areas.

Working on these characteristics, possessing them in ‘increasing measure’ should change the Christian and impact the world. Being a Christian does start with Christ reaching out to us. We receive a faith from God, through his grace. But Christians need to grow. We shouldn’t be content with living on spiritual milk like babies all our lives. We need to strive to become mature Christians. Somebody wrote that Christian maturity sometimes can be marked by dissatisfaction with our Godliness – and it shouldn’t result in despair and doing nothing, but it should spur us on to Christ. Faith that is firmly rooted in Christ MUST make a radical difference to the way we behave.

Another way of saying it is that an effective faith is one that is foundational and functional. A commitment to Christ as our Lord, if it is authentic must work itself out in public and practical ways. As it says in James Chapter 1:22, we need to not merely listen to the word and so deceive ourselves. We need to do what it says. Like when someone yells fire! You tend to respond to that word...There is a warning here also about being short sighted and blind. If you think that you don’t really need to have these qualities, and we can sit and do nothing, well then Peter says that you are like those who are near sighted and blind. The very people who he speaks out against later in the book.

People who don’t work on these qualities can’t see beyond themselves, they get stuck on their self-image and have lost the eternal perspective. They have forgotten the sacrifice that Christ made for them to have a relationship with God and the sacrificial love that they are called to have.

I also want to make note here that having an eternal perspective doesn’t mean that’s all Christians should look at – staring into the clouds waiting for Jesus to return. It does mean thinking ahead of the promises he made but also of the challenges he gave for us to live as his followers in the meantime. As it says in verse 10 you should be ‘all the more eager to make your calling election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’

Would you want that? To have Jesus welcome you in to heaven and say well done my good and faithful servant? Well the first step is accepting who he is. God, Christ, Saviour and Lord. Accept his promises and strive to obey his commands. The focus here is on the doing. On being practical with the knowledge we have. Peter reminds us of the power of the promises Jesus made to give us perspective on our eternal place before God. For those who are false teachers, he points out that they are in big trouble. They fail to take seriously their responsibility to live Christian lives and think they’ll get away without being punished... but God knows. He is a just judge and will not take lightly those who bring the way of truth into disrepute.

Let me finish with a summary made in a commentary that I found encouraging:

Peter calls Christians to live out the new relationship with Jesus Christ in practical obedience today, while still keeping hold of the fact that much, much more remains in store. We do not pretend to be perfect, which would make his promises unnecessary; or say that we do not need to be perfect, and so make his promises cheap. Instead, we can say that we *will be* perfect, and that makes them *very great and precious promises*. God will do all that he has promised to bring us to a position of deep intimacy with him.

The key opening the treasure of knowledge is practicing it. Get to know Jesus – Make sure that relationship is really impacting your life. The promise of Jesus frees us from having to pretend to be perfectly whole people today. We are Christians who are gripped by God's promises for the future, thrilled by them, and motivated to live godly lives *now* in his power.