

Part 16: The Fruit of Knowing Jesus

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If you've been watching the news, or using social media lately, you've noticed the rise of the phenomenon of what is being called, "Cancel Culture."

The premise of cancel culture is this: there is a certain kind of worldview you must have, and if you don't have that worldview, or if you act outside of that worldview, you deserve to be cancelled. Cancellation in today's world looks like being turned over to the Twitter and Facebook mobs, shamed, boycotted and banished without any hope of restoration.

Cancel culture assumes a sort of orthodoxy of thought and practice, and punishes those who do not conform to it. But what's interesting is you are seeing almost daily some pundit who was leading the charge of cancelling some other pundit, who now themselves are being cancelled by the same mob they once cancelled others with.

This cannibalization is often what advances the totally outlandish claims and positions being talked about today because what really drives it is fear. Fear that perhaps you won't do enough to earn a standing. It raises the question, can I ever know enough to be validated by this ever changing cultural orthodoxy? Is there ever a safe place to stand when the rule book to acceptance is always changing?

We started the book of 2 Peter last week, and Peter is writing to his churches encouraging them to both know and act in light of gospel orthodoxy. But contrary to any other world view, the good news of the gospel calls for conformity without paranoia. It challenges, but it also provides grace.

In a world of competing positions, Peter wants the church to see that the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ is the safest place to be. It provides the transformation you need not to be spared from culture's judgement, but to be spared from God's judgment.

Our big point today is that the knowledge of Jesus leads to Christian conduct and Christian hope. We are going to see this in three ways today. First we are going to see **The subject of Christian knowledge, The fruit of Christian knowledge and The hope of Christian knowledge.**

Let's start by reading the first part of our text today: **2 Peter 1:3-4.**

I mentioned last week that Peter is writing to the knowers and the feelers. Last week in verses 1-2, Peter called the feelers to check their emotions in light of Christ's righteousness. And this week he is leaning into the knowers calling them to check their knowledge in light of their conversion.

This is our first point today: **The Subject of Christian Knowledge.** We saw this last week, Peter wants the church to know more about Jesus.

Fourteen times in this short three chapter letter Peter writes to the church calling them to interact in some way with, or to grow in their knowledge.

While feelers might bristle at such language as this, knowers tend to start salivating. Verse three says that it is through this knowledge that God grants all things pertaining to life and godliness to the believer.

This knowledge Peter is after is an immensely powerful knowledge. It's in this knowledge that you find everything you need to live as godly in the moment and make it into the threshold of eternal life.

Wouldn't you want that knowledge?

But unfortunately just as feelers need to learn to examine their emotions, knowers need to learn to examine their knowledge. This hits home for me because as I said, I'm a knower, and as a knower I know I'm prone to approach such information from one of three errors.

If I were to summarize these three wrong views of knowledge I would call them: exhaustive confession, studious reflection and self-affirmation. I wonder which ones you might be prone towards.

Exhaustive confession thinks that in understanding the confession of Christianity, "Christ died for my sins," you have exhausted all you need to know about God. They know what they need to know to pass the doctrinal exam at heaven's door. For these people there's no reason to know anything more, or act any different because they have found the secret code words which God must accept when they get to heaven.

Then there is my own camp: Studious reflection. In contrast to the exhaustive confession camp, these are the people who want to dive deeply into the depths of theology. We read this text we just read and we see words like "divine power and nature," "calling and election," "corruption and life," "glory and power," "knowledge and promise." And we want to analyze, observe, and study the mechanisms and history of redemption. We can become the master and scripture the subject of our analytical gaze.

And then there's those who equate knowledge to self-affirmation. They want to have a simple confession, they might even dabble into the depths of theology. But they do so because simply put, they want to be right. The more we arm ourselves with what is right, the easier it is to tell others that they are wrong. The more right truths we know, the more weapons we have at our disposal.

Now here is the hard thing about each of these camps, they aren't all that off base. Paul himself affirms the simplicity of the gospel when he says in **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**. But there is a difference between knowing that this confession of faith is the exclusive and key piece of knowledge and thinking that this confession is the exhaustion of all the knowledge of God.

The Bible is also the only right view of the world because it's the only perspective written by the God who created the world. But the simple doctrine of the gospel is essentially humbling because it doesn't assume our innate wisdom, but the way in which we were bamboozled and held captive by sin's lies.

As Christians we ought to realize that God deserves a sort of studious reflection. In Romans 11, Paul says, "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God." And yet, it's often easy to miss the forest through the trees, to become so caught up in the analysis of theology that we lose the God of theology.

But this is where Peter offers a helpful corrective to the knowers and an encouragement to the feelers when he defines what we are to know: **2 Peter 1:3**.

We are called to know him who called us to his own glory and excellence. The source of knowledge for the Christian is the person of Jesus himself. If we miss Jesus, we miss everything about the nature of our faith and conversion. The only way conversion makes sense, the only way broken sinners can be justified by God is because Jesus was everything that we were not.

There can be no such thing as a Christ-less Christianity because there's no such thing as a Christ-less Christian.

If we miss Jesus, we can't know God because it's only through Jesus that we are converted and given access to God. Look at how Peter's logic unfolds: **2 Peter 1:3-4**. Peter wants us to know Jesus and he wants us to know how Jesus converts us.

Don't miss out what Peter is doing in this text. He is calling us to understand the nature of our conversion. He says we are saved because we have been called by glory and excellence. We have been granted God's precious and great promises. We have been given access to divine nature and delivered from the lust of sin.

Wonderful, transformative truths! But did you notice how each of those truths are rooted relationally in Jesus? It is Jesus who has called us to his glory and excellence. It is Jesus who grants us his precious and very great promises. It is Jesus who invites us to partake of his divine nature instead of the nature of sin.

I had a neighbor growing up who had a Playstation. At my house didn't have any video games, so I saw this as an opportunity. If I were able to befriend this kid, he would inevitably invite me over to his house and I could play video games. So I did. But soon it became apparent to me, and perhaps even to him, that this was no relationship at all. Whether he was there or not, I really didn't care, I wanted the reward.

I wonder how many of us treat Jesus the same way. We want what he can give to us, but if it were possible, it would be just the same to get access to his living room if he weren't there. But to lose Jesus is to lose the reward itself. It is Jesus who gives unrighteous people his righteous excellence. It is Jesus who takes those who have earned wrath and given them promises which they did not qualify for. It is Jesus who saves us from futility of heart and draws us into divine affection.

Look at how Paul speaks of this in **Colossians 3:1-4**. Do you know Jesus like this?

J.I. Packer wrote a wonderful book called, "The Knowing God." In it he makes the point that the sum of the Christian life is knowing God. He says, "What were we made for? To know God...What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God...What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight and contentment than anything else? Knowing God."

Imagine if you were on a plane and all of a sudden someone passed out, and you heard someone cry out the cliché line, "Is there a doctor in the house." Then suddenly someone raises their hand and comes forward and begins to assess the situation with an obvious sort of perplexity. They start randomly poking at the person, and it quickly becomes clear to the people observing that something is wrong

here. So they ask the good Samaritan, "Aren't you a doctor?" And the person responded, "Yes, I have a doctorate in linguistic theory."

We would find that while this person certainly knows a lot, his knowledge was wonderfully impractical and unfruitful given the context.

You might be one who understands that for salvation there's nothing more important than knowing God through Jesus. But on a practical note you might wonder if this knowledge is ineffective to what is actually going on in our world. Or to ask the question Packer does in his book: "What do I intend to do with my knowledge about God now that I have it?"

This is where we see our second point today: **The fruit of Christian knowledge.**

Read with me: **2 Peter 1:5-8.**

Peter gives a command here to his readers that they ought to "supplement" their faith with this string of qualities that follows. In verse 10 he's going to give another command to believers to confirm their calling and election by practicing these qualities.

Make no mistake that Peter is asking Christians to live in a distinct way. And yet the root of what he's asking goes back to what he just spoke of. He opens this by saying, "For this very reason." For what reason?

For the reason that God's power has been made manifest in you, for the reason that you have been called to Jesus' glory and surpassing goodness, for the reason that you have been granted the reward of God's precious and full promises, for the reason that you now share in the divine desires of God and are no longer held captive to the world's sinful desires.

In other words everything that Peter is about to command finds its possibility in the conversion he just described. In summary he's saying because you have been saved, changed and delivered by Jesus, live as a person saved, changed and delivered by Jesus.

Paul makes a similar point in **1 Corinthians 1:4-7**. In your salvation you have been given all the gifts of grace needed to live a Christian life. That's the same point Peter made when he said that in this knowledge of gospel conversion you have everything you need for life and godliness.

In other words Peter is saying that knowledge is power. Knowing Jesus allows you to live in the strength that Jesus provides you.

Peter gives this cascade of qualities which we are to supplement our faith with. Another way you can put it is that that you ought to furnish your faith. When you buy a house, or move into an apartment you have been provided with a room. But for most of us the first thing we want to do in that empty space is furnish it. We want to personalize it and make it hospitable. That's the idea that Peter is getting at here: God has granted you through Jesus a new home, and now you get to spend the rest of our life furnishing it with the budget he generously supplies.

What should we learn to put in our rooms? Peter here gives eight qualities, which begin with faith and end with love.

There is a sort of internal to external flow of what is going on here. You can lump these qualities into three categories: qualities that show a right understanding of God, qualities that show up in your own heart, and qualities that care for others. Each step causes the knowledge and conversion of the Christian to become more visible to the world around it.

Christians are called to supplement their faith with virtue (which is the same word translated as excellence in verse 3 in reference to Jesus) and knowledge. We ought to understand that Jesus is excellent beyond measure and that excellence and goodness calls us to those standards as well.

To do this believers must be self-controlled, steadfast, and godly. That is you personally must learn to say no to sin and yes to Jesus.

And lastly this fruit manifests itself in brotherly affection and love.

Why is this so important? Because to not have these things is to show you that you are ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus.

Peter is making a very clear point here: to know Jesus in a saving way is to be saved by Jesus in a life changing way. If you claim to know Jesus but your attitude towards God is apathetic, you might not really know him. To claim to know Jesus but to have a habitual pattern of sin and a lack of self-control might mean that you don't know Jesus. To claim to know Jesus but do not love others might mean that you don't know Jesus.

There's a wonderful implication in this text and that is that Jesus saved you for the purpose of effectiveness and fruitfulness. He saved you so that others might see his saving work and the wonder of his love.

My family went to Hawaii once when I was in college and I remember hiking back to this wonderful pool in the jungle. Way up high beyond our view was a stream that fell and cascaded beautifully down the rock wall into a pool that was so incredibly clear and so deep that you could jump off the rocks into it.

There is a very real way in which Peter's cascade of qualities is like that jungle oasis. The fountain from which everything else flows is the faith we have in a God which the world cannot see. But what they do see is the cascading effect of Christians who live life differently.

These are the Christians who are wise witnesses on social media, who don't cave to the vices of the world and yet maintain a level of joy which is fascinating for all who see it.

But then at the bottom of this cascade is a pool deep enough for others to swim in. This pool for Peter is the love which flows out of everything which precedes it.

The world might not see the source of your pure conduct which often can refresh others like the delightful mist of a waterfall. But the world ought to be able to swim deeply in the love that flows from that source.

True knowledge of Jesus provides a pool that blesses others. To claim to know Jesus but to present no visible fruit in your life is to be in a dangerous place. Look at how John puts this in **1 John 4:20**.

To not love others, to not have brotherly affection, to not have any sort of visible pool to which you might point to is to perhaps come to the conclusion that you do not actually love God.

But here is the wonderful hope in this. Look at what precedes John's words here: **1 John 4:19-20**. Just like Peter did in verses 3-4, John emphasizes that if you are a Christian, if you do know Jesus, if you are loved by the King of the cross, then you will be able to do these things. There is a wonderful promise for effectiveness in the gospel of Jesus.

You see, a knower like me knows the anxiety and paranoia which can often accompany my disposition. I know that there are times where I look at the immense glory of God, I see the call to make disciples from the nations, I see that there is heaven and hell at stake. And sometimes in the weight of this I look at my own limitations and I wonder, "Do I really matter? Do I really make a difference?"

I understand the doctrine of hell. I see the punishment that awaits the branch which bears no fruit. And I feel often crushed under the weight of it. I wonder if in striving for acceptance I might find one day my own cancellation from Jesus himself.

But this text reaches into us with both comfort and challenge and says: Look. Are you loving others? Are you growing in holiness? If so, you are not unfruitful, you are not ineffective. Because to do these things is a sign that Jesus himself has saved you for his purpose and glory.

This is Peter's conclusion today: **The hope of Christian knowledge.**

Now before we get into the hope, Peter again provides a clear challenge to anyone who claims to be Christian. We read this in **2 Peter 1:9**. To not have a life which increases in affection for God, personal holiness, and love for others is to show that you might not be converted.

To blindly think that your knowledge of Jesus saves you even when your life remains unchanged by him is by Peter's logic no knowledge at all. It is forgetfulness. Because while Jesus does save us from hell in the end, he also saves us from sin right now. That's what conversion does. Conversion shows us that the wages of sin is brokenness but the gift of obedience is joy.

To truly know Jesus is to not forget that he has changed you. To see Jesus is to not be blind to the call to holiness.

But where Peter ultimately lands the plane is the confidence that lies only in the gospel of Jesus. Look at how he continues: **2 Peter 1:10-11**.

It is unmistakable in this text that Peter is after the conduct of the Christian. Peter's point is that true knowledge of Jesus conforms you to be more like him and less like the world.

But this is where the gospel brings a wonderful relief to our souls.

What does Peter call Christians to confirm? Their calling and election. Who has called them and elected them?

Look back at **2 Peter 1:3**. Remember what Peter said in his first letter in **1 Peter 2:9-10**.

Yes Peter is after our actions, yes our actions provide us hope that we will not be cancelled. But ultimately as the root of our actions Peter shows us the work of Jesus and his call to save us.

In verse 4 Peter says that it is Jesus who gives us the power to escape sin, and in verse 11 it is Jesus who provides for us an entrance into his kingdom. Jesus gives us the power to both escape sin and enter into his Kingdom.

Because Jesus has delivered you from sin, you have been empowered by him to live in obedience to him. Because Jesus has covered you in his glory and excellence, you have the ability to furnish your faith in a way that will not fall.

Which means this: When you assess your life and you do not see the fruit of your conversion, Peter is calling you to look back at the Christ who converts you.

Peter is not after works based salvation. He's after true salvation which really changes us. When a believer looks at what Jesus has done, they are reminded of the way in which their conversion equips them to live a life which actually pleases God.

If you are not a believer and you wonder what is next, look to this Jesus and the salvation he offers you. If you are a believer who is burdened with the fight of sin and feels that you are about to fall, consider his redemption and the weight of it.

Charles Spurgeon knew that such a glimpse of Jesus was sufficient to console us and spur us to action. Consider his words in closing: **"Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound. In musing on the Father, there is a quietest for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea, be lost in his immensity, and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest refresh and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the wounds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead."**

So let us take great comfort in knowing this Jesus and living our lives in a loving and joyful response to his salvation.