

Exegesis of 2 Peter 1:3-15

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[Delivered at the Metro South Pastors' Conference on April 19, 1993]

Introduction

“We do not know one-millionth of 1% about anything,” quipped Thomas Edison, who exhibited a continual desire to know more. Or as Mark Twain put it, “The trouble with the world is not that people know too little, but that they know so many things that ain’t so.”

Aren’t you continually amazed in your ministry about how little true knowledge is displayed in our present American culture? Or are you more perplexed about the ways in which much knowledge is misused? George Barna, in his book, *Frog in the Kettle*, claims that with the invention and proliferation of the computer we now know only 3% of what we will know by the year 2010. He calls it an information avalanche that begs informed use.

And that’s not a new concept!

Peter was well aware of how false teachers, including the higher intellects who spawned Gnosticism, touted their superb knowledge. Surely certain kinds of knowledge can be used for civic righteousness, to help humanity in their physical domain, to ease their suffering, to cure their illnesses, to aid their lifestyle. Yet on the heels of newly acquired knowledge there always seems to arrive a humongous appetite for control, power, money, fame... whatever might serve the self a banquet of evil desire. It is with genuine apostolic ardor that Peter writes to defend his flock against such “*springs without water and mists driven by a storm.*” “*They will introduce destructive heresies*” he says, under the cloak of knowledge. They make up stories and laugh because you lap them up in ignorance. The vehement language of chapter 2 responds to the insidious elitism of the gnostic, who is so sure about his knowledge of the inside secrets of the kingdom of God that he has lost sight of Christ and is no longer concerned about the forgiveness of sins which comes through that relationship.

In these early verses that we will ponder today, the apostle must have been restraining his emotion... for you might recall how “knowledgeable” he had once claimed to be. In his certainty he nearly lost that precious connection with the Lord Jesus, had there not been grace enough to forgive him his denial. I’m convinced that Peter’s “sanguine” nature (impetuous, extroverted) would still desire to draw the sword and slap these false shepherds up side the head with some cold steel, but he has learned to be patient and use the Word. So he progresses as slowly as he can, focusing on the needs of his people.

“*I want you to always be able to remember these things,*” he ends this section. It took some bitter experience to teach him to be a persistent teacher of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He would gladly take the time to share what he had learned with them to secure them in their faith.

It’s almost ironic that we know so little about the letter which has often been called the Epistle of Knowledge. While the historical contours of First Peter are quite distinct, this letter is wrapped in mystery and the reconstruction of its historical background is beset at almost every point with perplexing uncertainties. Sporting the weakest attestation of any book in the New Testament, you might say it has held onto the canon by the skin of its teeth. This “second letter” makes it likely but not certain to have a similar destination as that of the first.

But if there is much uncertainty about background, there is no uncertainty about the intent and message of Peter’s writing. Written in the service of Christian hope, knowledge is a prominent motif, yet not emphasized or imparted for its own sake, but rather for the purpose of strengthening Christian hope and defending it against the attack of error, preserving it from the corrosion of doubt.

We have recently as a synod identified Adult Spiritual Growth as job #1. Perhaps our circumstances are similar to Peter’s and we need to share the confidence of those who were eyewitnesses, who would not “shrink back” even in the face of death. Perhaps we have invested so much energy in training children that we haven’t

held adults accountable to a process of continued maturation, or as Paul Kelm put it in the *Spiritual Renewal* theses, “Christian education, a Lutheran priority, requires the church’s attention. Greater emphasis must be given to adult Christian education. Unless adults are regularly in the Word, children’s Christian education will lack models, support and parental ownership. Unless adults are regularly in the Word, witness to the community will be superficial. Unless adults are in the Word, everything from stewardship to family life and decision making to volunteering will be in a state of crisis.”

Let us then examine these verses to learn for ourselves and our people how the Word “*keeps us from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Verses 3-4

3 Wj panta hñi thj Qeibj dunamewj autou ta proj zwhñ kai eußebeian dedwrhmehj dia thj eþignwsewj tou kal esantoj hñaj idia doch kai a)reth4 di)wñ ta timia kai megista hñi eþaggel mata dedwrhtai, isa dia toutwn gehhsqe qeibj koinwnoi fuseswj, apofugohtej thj eðtwf kosmw |eðeþiqumia |fqoraj.

Technical

(v. 3) I noticed right away that the translators varied in their handling of Wj, most often turning the following genitive absolute, thj qeibj dunamewj, into the subject. As the subject of the participle, this phrase commonly meant “God.” (Evidence of this can be found in a parallel expression from the decree of Stratonicea, an inscription in honor of Zeus and Hecate, dated 22 A.D.) Dunamij is one of the leading words of the epistle, recurring with emphasis in v. 16. This power and the glory of Christ is what Peter, without reservation, holds over the heads of the false teachers. When he called us, he gave us the knowledge of himself, and through this knowledge as the means, all that exhibits the Christian life. The perfect tense of dedwrhmehj expresses the continuing nature of all that was given. One might consult 1 Peter 2:9 for a comparison of areth which means *excellence* or the display of all that is divine and thus by implication, all that is good. The dative case could be either instrumental *by* or dative of advantage *to* or *for*.

(v. 4) The antecedent of the relative pronoun di)wñ must be the words glory and virtue. The ward qeibj, the second occurrence in as many verses, occurs elsewhere only at Acts 17:29 where the Apostle Paul, speaking to Athenians, aptly speaks of “the Deity” using a phrase familiar to cultivated Greeks. Here qeia fusesij has a similar ring, originating from Hellenism more than from a common biblical usage. Yet Peter teaches neither Stoic nor Platonic philosophy, not intimating that man is absorbed somehow into deity but rather that those who are sharers with Christ will also share in his glory as it is revealed. apofugohtej as an aorist active participle means *to escape completely*. The basic meaning of fqora denotes not sudden destruction caused by some external force, but rather a dissolution brought on by internal decay.

Practical

Since we have learned to know God through faith, (consider the grace of that!) divine power has been granted to us. Yet we wonder what kind of power is this? A power, as Peter notes, which brings about life and godliness, which is to say that when we believe, we receive so much power of every kind from God that what we do and say is not said or done by us but by God himself. Even when we struggle in this world and even when we sin or fail in our testimony, God is ever strong and powerful in us (2 Co 12:9-10). And so it may be understood that if we do not have this divine power we have nothing.

“While ‘Christ for us’ remains the certainty for our salvation, ‘Christ in us’ is the subsequent biblical truth that shapes Christian life (Ga 2:20; Co 1:27; Ep 3:17-19). Lutherans need to see Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Their faith-life is relational, not merely propositional. Their God is immanent, not merely transcendent” (Kelm). So the knowledge which Peter stresses is not some supernatural power to work miracles,

per se, but what is useful and necessary for our life and our witness (which is, in part, our godliness). This knowledge is predominantly to be appreciated as a relationship with Jesus, a privileged status with God. “This is the greatest, noblest and most necessary gift God can give us,” says Luther, “a gift we should not exchange for everything heaven and earth contain.” So by the Word we confirm our calling, that there is no need for higher learning than can be found in Christ, our true treasure (Co 2). Our sins are remitted and eradicated, and our enemies devoured, so that we have an undaunted conscience and a cheerful heart and fear nothing.

We are called by God? None of us begged God to send out his Gospel, for before anyone thought of it, he offered grace. Presenting his package in the cradle, pouring it out richly and beyond measure from Mary’s arms to the stretched arms of the cross, He alone must receive the glory and honor. Dare we boast or consider ourselves elite in any form or fashion? Our world needs the antidote of truly humble Christians who in humility and true godliness share their privileged status with others!

Peter augments our understanding of the character of faith in verse 4. If we know Christ, and God through him, then by faith, we have eternal life and the power to overcome the devil. But we don’t always feel this. It is yet in promise form, the beginning of faith, not its conclusion.

How great and precious a gift are these promises? If, in this post-Easter season we claim that Christianity stands or falls on the Resurrection of Jesus, then we can never regard our relationship with the divine nature as trivial. That divine nature is the joy, peace, love, life, wisdom, truth and whatever can be called good. So Peter says that just as God cannot be robbed of eternity, we cannot either. If Satan attacks us, then he must attack God. Whoever wants to oppress us must oppress God.

What a message for us preachers to share in this darkened world!

Verses 5-9

5 kai\au\to\ tou\to de\spoudh\ pasan pareisehgekantej epixorhghsate e\th\ pistei u\mw\ th\n a\reth\, e\de\th\ a\reth\ th\ gnwsin. 6 e\de\th\ gnwsei th\n e\krateian, e\de\th\ e\krateia\ th\n u\pomnh\, e\de\th\ u\pomnh\ th\n eusebeian, 7 e\de\th\ eusebeia\ th\ fil adel fia\, e\de\th\ fil adel fia\ th\n agaphn. 8 tau\ta\ ga\k u\mi\ u\parxonta kai\ pl eonazonta ou\k argouj oude\ akarouj kaqisthsin ei\ th\ tou\ kuriou\ h\mw\ I\hsou\ Xristou\ e\pi\ gnwsin: 9 w\ ga\ mh\ parestin tau\ta, tu\fl o\j e\stin muwpa\zw\, l h\hn l abw\ tou\ kaqarismou\ tw\ pal ai\ au\ tou\ a\rtiwa\.

Technical

(v. 5) kai\au\to\ tou\to de\ might translate into “Yes and for this very reason,” which is an adverbial usage found among the classics such as Plato. Pareisenegekantej, an aorist active participle, has the connotation of *bring in alongside* and when used idiomatically with the word *effort* expresses the idea of utilizing every effort. Alongside what God has done we are to bring every ounce of determination we can muster. epixorhgein originated with the idea of furnishing the Greek chorus with additional supplies. The compound seems to have an accumulative force, *to add further supplies*, which evolved into the sense, *provide even more than expected*. pistij highlights the subjective quality of loyal adherence to the teachings of Christ rather than the teaching itself. areth means *virtue* or possibly *moral energy*. In classical times the word identified divinely attributed ability to accomplish heroic deeds on the battlefield or in the arena or through the arts. The basic concept pointed to the quality by which one stands out as being excellent. In respect to ethics, Aristotle maintained that it was the right behavior or average of extremes. The Stoics connected it with nature, something like our modern-day concept of Yule Gibbons (an environmentalist).

(v. 6) in the list of virtues we find something analogous to the Stoic process of maturation, called *poikorrh*. The moral and spiritual life is regarded as a germ which is expanded by effort, one step leads on to another and each step is made by the cooperation of the human will with the divine. a\reth leads to gnwsei, not of the spiritual mysteries as in 1 Co 8:1 or 13:2, but of the goodness and reasonableness of the will of God. It is that knowledge which makes the friend as distinct from the servant. Knowledge has been taken to mean

practical skill in details of Christian duty. From knowledge comes *ἐγκρατεία*, which literally means *holding oneself in, self-restraint*, the opposite of what the false teachers were advocating.

Then follows *ὑπόμονη* which understands that with God a thousand years are as one day. This issues in godliness, a large word summing up the whole of the practical side of the Christian life... this again develops into love for those who share the faith and finally flows naturally into *ἀγάπη*, the love of Christ and in Christ of all mankind.

(v. 8) *πλεονάζοντα* implied excess among the classical writers, *to have more than enough, to exaggerate*. But to the fervent Christian can there be an excess of good? The present tense marks out a continual action.

(v. 9) *τυφλοὶ* The false teachers are indicted not only as barren trees, but as blind leaders of the blind, because they have lost sight of the *ἐπιγνωσίη* of Christ which was given to them. *μυωπαζῶν* is a present active participle referring to the involuntary contraction of the squinted eyes of a shortsighted man. Perhaps the meaning is extended to *shutting their eyes to the truth*, with the intention of emphasizing the responsibility of the believer. *ἰαμβανῶ ἢ ἡ* may well be causal, an idiom translated *forget*.

Practical

If what we have is indeed priceless, then we have every reason to add to it, to be diligent, so that our faith might be evident to others and helpful for them. I will honestly tell you that those in my congregation who impress me most are not the most eloquent or rich, but those who by their powerful, active and busy faith quietly, yet persistently, conduct the business of our King. They nurture their neighborhood. They look positively at opportunities as answers to prayer, and will find the strength and courage and resources to meet needs. Peter in essence says, “You have a good inheritance and a good field. See to it that you do not let thistles or weeds grow in it.” This is faith turning into goodness.

So he lists the graduated progression of faith toward Agape.

Knowledge comes to him who practices faith in a sensible manner. This includes everything from a practical diet and a regimen of exercise, to laying under your neighbor’s car or handing him the tools to change the brakes or tune the ignition. One should not do anything unwisely, and so give offense to his neighbor.

Self-control applies to the moderation of all circumstances in life: in words, in mannerisms, in appetites. We should not live extravagantly, yet not in poverty. We watch our tongue and manage our demeanor that others might say (at least overall) that this man or this woman walks with God.

Peter tells us that if we lead a decent and respectable life we ought not think that we will avoid trouble and hardship or even persecution. If you believe and lead a good life, the world cannot tolerate you. When it finds your number and pesters you even in the dark of night, you will need perseverance to endure.

Godliness simply means that we serve God with our whole heart, not seeking our own gain or advantage. God alone must be praised in what we do and say, and our reason for doing and saying is that we desire to increase God’s glory.

Brotherly kindness obligates us all to help others like brothers. We must look after our neighbor, not despise or harm him. This is not a pietistic plea, that we slap WELS words all over everything, but rather that we live a holy life of service.

Finally, love extends beyond friends to those who do not reciprocate good to us. Here even our enemies receive our goodness, though we can only comprehend giving it to them through our Lord Jesus and his desire to “know them.”

Ray Stedman of Peninsula Bible church in Palo Alto, California, once asked a nine-year-old boy what he wanted to be when he grew up, and he answered, “A returned missionary.” The boy looked ahead not to the years of graduate study, not to the years of separation from home and loved ones, not to the months and years in steaming jungles and parched deserts – but to the final state of recognition and acclaim. It’s hard to skip the preliminaries and still reach a final goal. The musician’s finger exercises, the Olympic athlete’s daily push-ups, and the Christian’s daily stint in the prayer closet and his life of daily progress cannot be bypassed.

Verses 10-11

10 dio_{ma}-lon, adel_{foi}, spoudasate bebai_n u_nw_n th_n kl_{hsin} kai_eo_{ghn} poeisqai: tauta_{gak} poiountej ou_{mh}ptaishte pote. 11 ou_{wj} gak plousiwj e_pixorhghqhsetai u_nh(eisodoj ei) th_n ai_von basilei_n tou kuribu h_nw_n kai_{swth}roj _{hsou}Xristou.

Technical

(v. 10) spoudasate repeats the exhortation of v. 5, this time as an aorist active imperative, stressing the urgency of his plea that they should set their minds and hearts and souls on living for God: *be most diligent!* Bebai_n , *firm* or *secure*, might be translated *to confirm* or *to attest* with the infinitive. The middle voice of poeisqai signifies *to make for yourselves*. Here again the necessity for cooperation of the Christian human will is strongly suggested. Christ has called and elected you... now you hang on to the gift. The infinitive is expegetical or complementary describing the verb *give diligence*. This holy life is the guarantee demonstrating the calling and election to one's self and to others. ou_{mh}ptaishte pote means *you will never stumble*, not you will never sin – for in this sense we all stumble (Ja 3:2). He is conceptualizing the forward march along the King's highway and the final entry into his kingdom. You will make a safe journey, all the way to the end. The repetition of e_pixorhghqhsetai from v. 5 brings out with great emphasis the response of God's grace to man's faithfulness. eisodoj initiates a view that it is Christ who calls us into the kingdom because it is his alone to give, no qualifications but that of faith (cf. Ro 6:23; Mt 25:34).

Practical

Dr. Luther spoke about election and the surety of our call in this way, “Indeed the election and God's eternal foreordination is firm enough in itself and requires no confirmation. The call is also strong and firm. For he who hears the Gospel, believes in it, and is baptized is called and will be saved. Now since we, too, are called, we must be zealous, says Peter, to confirm this call and election for ourselves, not only for God.”

A parallel concept is employed in Ephesians 2:12 where Paul says, “Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” God is God over all even when a man does not recognize him as God, believe in him or trust him. So also our call and election are firm enough in and of themselves, yet not for us, because we are not always certain it applies to us. To overcome this weakness of the flesh Peter wants us to confirm this calling and election for ourselves with good works.

Unlike physical strength, which wears out as one expends an overage of energy, spiritual strength is stimulated by use and application. So sharing our faith increases our faith, because we see the visible results of our good works in this world. We do not attach our faith to these works with any hope of increased favor before God, but we are satisfied and thrilled by the results.

I suppose we ought to talk about how to deal with the knot of election. So many who have not felt faith deeply run into this like quicksand. They want to reason out their election, that they might be sure of where they stand, which is really not the best exhibition of faith. Faith trusts the facts of Calvary and the empty tomb. Faith knows Christ and is sure of him. But those who employ some other method than Peter describes here, of first trusting Jesus for forgiveness and then concentrating on a growing life of faithfulness, will find a pit in their stomach. They will be embittered either over their own lack of faith or over the assurance of Scripture that will keep them from failing. The devil waits in his lair with the awful gifts of despair and hatred to consume those who strive against God in this doctrine.

Heaven's doors are open for those who have a fruitful, well-exercised faith. Sometimes we may err in overstating the spark of faith in the last hour of death. Surely you can be saved with a mustard grain of faith! But to wait until that time, postponing matters and keeping God at arm's length, is to wait too long. Those who live their faith out in a productive and effective way will have an entrance richly provided, and will enter life

cheerfully and confidently. You and I have seen this courage in death, as a member of ours despises life, departs with pride, as it were, and leaps through the gates of pearl. We may even envy them their ease... but this is not from a weak and latent faith, but rather a faith long and well employed.

Verses 12-15

12 Dio_{mel} I h_{sw} a_u n_{aj}- u_po_mimn_h s_{kein} peri_tou_{twn} kai_{per} ei_{do}t_{aj} kai_est_hrig_{mehouj} e_o th_t-
parou_{sh}|a| h_{qei}a| 13 dikaion de_hgou_{mai}, e_o)o_{son} ei_{oi}/e_o tout_w|tw|skhn_wna_{ti}, diegei_{rein} u_naj- e_o
u_po_mn_hsei, 14 ei_ow_j o_{#i} taxin_he_{stin} h(a)_{po}tesij tou skhn_wna_{to}j mou kaq_{wj} kai_o(kurioj h_ow_n
)h_{souj}- Xristoj_ech_i wse_h moi, 15 spouda_{sw} de_{kai}e_{ra}stote e_xein u_naj- meta_{thn} e_oh_n e_odon th_n
tout_wn mn_hm_{hn} poieis_{qai}.

Technical

(v. 12) Dio_{Here} Peter introduces a fresh point which completes his introduction. The faith of his readers is i_{so}t_{imoj} with that of the apostles, because it embraces all that leads to life and godliness... and develops by that effort which seeks virtue not license to sin. From this point to the end of the chapter he insists upon the truth of this faith. It rests upon the evidence of eyewitnesses, of whom he himself is not the least. The future active indicative of mel I h_{sw} was always translated at Sem with the word *intends to* or *is about to do*. Here the statement is stronger, hinting at the thought of duty as appears again in verses 13 and 15. There is a prospect of frequent communication between him and them. The words e_o th_t-parou_{sh}|a| h_{qei}a are explained by ei_{do}t_{aj}, the things which they know are the truth as was presented to them. E_{st}h_{rig}mehouj e_o is a much stronger phrase than Ei_{do}t_{aj}, “you know them and do them.” Truth here inscribes not only moral truth, that is the necessity of growth from pi_{stij} to a_ga_{ph}, but historical or doctrinal truth opposed to seso_fi_smenoi mu_{qoi}. The perfect tense indicates a settled state or condition.

(v. 13) skhn_wna, a tent. This metaphor for the body suits well the general conception of life as a pilgrimage or journey, with permanency in heaven (cf. 1 Pe 1:1). Paul uses the same terminology in 2 Co 5:1ff. Quite naturally one would with this concept think back in ancestry to the Patriarchs and their sojourn in the promised land as nomads. diegei_{rein} portrays the process of waking someone up, a present active infinitive. The preposition in compound is perfective “to wake someone up thoroughly.” The epexegetical infinitive explains what Peter considers to be “right.”

(v. 14) taxinoj_{has} been disputed as either *suddenly* or *soon*. Either explanation is possible, and yields good sense. If the apostle means that he is to die soon, there was great reason why he should be earnest in admonition. If he means that he is to die suddenly, as if by violence, the necessity for his insistence is still same. In John 21:18, our Lord foretold that Peter should die a violent death o_#an g_hra_{shj}. If the apostle was ger_wn when he wrote this letter, he would feel ever more sure that this prediction must soon be accomplished. a_{po}tesij, *putting off*, is a word that speaks of a garment more than a tent, yet the same imagery is blended into Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians 5. Kaq_{wj}...e_och_i wse_h moi. The most natural definition of these words is to be found in John 21:18-19. An argument has been proclaimed against the authenticity of 2 Peter on the grounds that the author here quotes the most suspected chapter of a very late gospel (which betrays an historical critical bent), but all he does is refer to a prophecy of our Lord Jesus. Some commentators link the statement to some saying of our Lord’s which has not been preserved elsewhere, or came directly to the apostle via a special revelation.

(v.15) kai_{is} even. He speaks in this way of making provision for them after his death. e_{ra}stote indicates *every time, on every occasion*, which might be better interpreted *whenever there is need*. e_odoj is *end* or *close*, used by later writers, as here, for the departure of death. poeis_{qai}, a present middle infinitive, dovetails with the noun into one concept, *to remember*. The infinitive is utilized to complete the main verb “to make an effort.”

Practical

Peter stresses what was the absolute genius of Martin Luther, persistent reminders of the Gospel. Luther wore himself out with the Catechism and the learning of “small things.” As a doctor of theology he never considered himself to have known Christ too well that he should not review truth. We must remind our people, as Peter reminds us, to daily engage the Scriptures, to love meditation and crave devotion. Exhortation, as Paul puts it, is the fine art of reminding those who already know and have heard it to persist and rouse them not to lose sight of it but to continue and make progress.

“We are all burdened with that old rotten sack, with our flesh and blood. It always chooses the wrong path and constantly pulls us down to its own level, so that it is easy for the soul to go to sleep. Therefore it is necessary to drive constantly and to persevere... in spiritual matters” (Luther).

Who doesn't want his ministry to end on this note? Wouldn't you rejoice if your people, through you and your labor, NEVER forgot the grace of God? Peter doesn't cling to this life, or seek comfort in physical attachments. He hesitates even to call the body a house, but rather labels it a tent – for we are simply passing through. Our destiny, our home is with Jesus.

Conclusion

Some students drink at the fountain of knowledge. Others just gargle.

Are our people so fattened in their passive learning of the word that they have not progressed in faith? Do we do too much of their work for them?

Peter might cause us to seriously reevaluate the way we extend knowledge and encourage our people to grow. Helping them to concentrate on the graduated steps of maturity in faith will strengthen them and enable them to share their knowledge of all that Jesus has done for them with others.

When William Carey began thinking of going to India as a pioneer missionary, his father pointed out to him that he possessed no academic qualifications that would fit him for such a task. But Carey answered, “I can plod.” How true it is that God accomplishes mighty things for his kingdom through those who are willing to persevere, who are willing to plod faithfully through one difficulty after another in the power of the Spirit.

Gentlemen, if it is no good to know more unless we do more with what we already know, then we must align ourselves with Peter in a commitment to teach progress in faith. We start by growing ourselves, plodding onward in life and in, contemplation of his word. From there we draw plenty of practical advice to give others!

God bless your plodding for the greater knowledge of his kingdom.