

Sermon 3, All Things Are Yours, 2 Peter 1:3-4

Proposition: To know Christ is to have everything necessary to life and godliness.

- I. What We Have: Everything Needed for a Godly Life, v. 3a
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, imagine going on a backwoods expedition with one of the outdoorsmen in this church. Your guide might show you all the gear that he's gotten together, all the sleeping bags and all the fish hooks and rifles and camp stoves, the tent and the port-a-potty and whatever else it is that outdoorsy types take on their expeditions. If he has a particularly bad case of the outdoor bug, he might even tell you how he acquired all this stuff, and explain to you blow-by-blow how to use it. Well, in one sense that's what we have tonight. This is a gear guide to the Christian life by the most outstanding of the original twelve apostles. You may not be an outdoor enthusiast. If fishhooks and camp stoves bore you, you would politely explain to your friend that you just remembered that you need to go home and read your Bible. Because indeed, brothers and sisters, this gear guide to the Christian life should excite us all! Peter is showing us what we need to be like Jesus, what we have, how we got it, and how we use it. We have everything we need for a godly life — and with this instruction from the apostle, we have no excuse for not making the best possible use of it.

I. What We Have: Everything Needed for a Godly Life, v. 3a

What we have, brothers and sisters, is everything we need for a godly life. His divine power has granted to us all things necessary for life and godliness. These are two sides of the same coin in the apostle's book. He makes no iron-clad distinction between the biopsychosocial on the one hand and the ethico-spiritual on the other. The resources for life are just as much God's gift as the resources for godliness are.

So there's no excuse. It's not like we got out here in the backwoods and realized that we have no fire starter. No. Every tool, every technique, all of it, is ours through Christ's divine power.

Godliness is not just worship and piety directed toward God; it is also respect and honor socially, giving honor to those to whom it is due. The Christian life is a life of godliness.

What, exactly, is Peter talking about? What do we need for life and godliness? We need faith. We need obedience. We need the embrace of the body of Christ. We need Scripture. We need food and clothing. Indeed, it may be easier to say what we don't need than what we do need! The bottom line here is that anything you can think of needing, if you truly need it, is something that God has already supplied to you. Indeed, rather than listing a bunch of items for the Christian life here, Peter more simply describes how we got these things and how we are to appropriate them.

II. How We Got It: From Christ, v. 3b

What is the source of everything needed for life and godliness? The divine power of Jesus Christ. Again, this kind of description is much more Greek-philosophical or Hellenistic than what we typically find in the Bible. As you know, most of the Bible is Semitic in its cultural idiom, generally preferring the concrete over the abstract. Both testaments of Scripture tell us a lot about Yahweh and what He says and does, but they also never mention the philosophical concept of the divine nature or philosophically analyze human nature. Why is that? Part of it, no doubt, relates to how we actually experience life. While philosophy is important for understanding the deeper reality of what we experience in our daily life, it is possible to live well in many ways without considering the abstract question of what the divine nature is like. In fact, this adjective "divine" that Peter uses occurs only one other time in the NT, where Paul talks about the divine nature with the Athenian philosophers. So the very fact that Peter mentions the divine nature here tells us something about the cultural milieu in which he's speaking. He is speaking to philosophically educated people, people who are able to think (or at least talk) about the divine nature in the abstract instead of talking about God the Father and Jesus the Son in the concrete. Why is that important? For one thing, it shows us that philosophical investigation into the nature of the divine is not in itself irresponsible or wrong. Scripture too takes up and sanctifies a philosophical vocabulary. Secondly, though, it shows us that truth can and must be translated into different cultural idioms. It is okay to speak of Jehovah in the philosophical categories of the Greeks as well as in the relational categories of the Hebrews. Finally, it shows us God has a nature and that His works are the result of His nature. There is indeed such a thing as the divine nature, and that nature is the source of God's divine power.

A. Through His Power

Indeed, the ultimate source of the things Christ has supplied us for a godly life is His divine power. Jesus Christ holds and exercises the power of God. We know that, of course. Such a statement is basic to Christian teaching. But again, perhaps it is so familiar that we have lost sight of how wondrous it really is. A man like us, exercising divine power to grant to us everything necessary for life and godliness. It's an amazing thought! This man Jesus Christ has and gives everything that we need to know Him and be like Him.

Just like we wouldn't give the nuclear button to a two-year-old, so we would rightly have major reservations about letting a human being exercise divine power. We and everyone we know would get very irresponsible very quickly when handling omnipotence. After all,

omnipotence confers an “undo” button. Imagine what you would do if you were omnipotent. Most of us would create wonderful cars and homes for ourselves, give ourselves limitless amounts of money, spy on the people we don’t like (and make things awkward for them), and on and on and on. Imagine being able to have a tree fall on your ex-girlfriend’s car every morning, but then regretting it and undoing that action and just making her lose one shoe during every job interview! Imagine the ability to magically erase your mortgage, your friends’ debts, your needs. Imagine being able to take stones and make them into bread, or make yourself thin and your body as beautiful as you can imagine even while you pig out on the tastiest foods you can create. Brothers and sisters, we know that frail humanity and the power of God are a really bad combination. It’s truly a mercy to us that God has made us so weak and dependent, because we would do some completely crazy things if we were given divine power. But Peter tells us that Jesus Christ exercises divine power, not to pull practical jokes but rather to equip us for the serious business of living the Christian life! What you need you have, courtesy of the divine expense account. Where did you get the Bible, the church, your own internal motivation, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the joy that comes from knowing Christ? You got them all from Christ, who created and apportioned them to you through His divine power.

B. Through Knowing Him

But this was not a unilateral gift. That is, it doesn’t come to you unconsciously, without your knowledge, consent, or participation. The way God has chosen to work all these things in you is rather through your conscious mind, and specifically through your knowledge of Christ. That’s what the text says! We grow in being like Christ, grow in our ability to live the Christian life, grow in grace and peace, through knowing Christ.

That’s right. Remember the little song, “Read your Bible and pray every day and you’ll grow, grow, grow”? What is that song saying? It’s saying what this verse says too: You can only grow in the Christian life of godliness by knowing Jesus Christ. There is no substitute whatsoever for spending time with Him, listening to Him in His word and speaking to Him in prayer. Brothers and sisters, that is what Christianity is all about! The gifts for life and godliness come to you through your knowledge of Christ.

So what are you doing to grow in the knowledge of Christ? The Christian life cannot be lived from within your own unaided resources. It can only be lived insofar as you are drawing from the Lord Jesus.

C. Through His Effectual Call

Well, Peter goes on to describe Jesus’ character in one more way. He is the one who called us through His own glory and excellence. His excelling virtue, His moral beauty, His excellence in every way, has drawn us to Himself. Now, some translations say that He has called us “through” His own glory and excellence, while others say He has called us “to” His own glory and excellence. Once again, the correct reading is impossible to determine on grammatical grounds alone. Both readings are true! God has called us, in part, by showing us how desirable and beautiful He really is. He has revealed Himself to us as the one whom we desire to see, the one in

whose presence alone will we truly live. But He has also called us “to” His own glory and excellence. That is, He has invited us to share in that glory and excellence that He has, in the day when the righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He calls us to His own kingdom and glory, and He will bring us to that destination. Indeed, then, both readings are true. It is the beauty and glory of Christ that attracts us now — and He promises that we will be like Him when we see Him as He is.

III. How We Appropriate It: Through His Promises, v. 4

Well, how do we make use of these tools for life and godliness that have been granted us through the very divine power of Christ Himself? We appropriate them through His promises. It is through His promises that we gain the power to make use of the tools for life and godliness that His power gave us. These are honorable promises and very great promises. Once again, we see the Hellenistic language here. Our culture has no time for honor; we laugh at the very idea, as I said last week. Virtually all English translations have rendered the Greek word “honor” here as “precious.” Now, undoubtedly the promises are precious to us. But the reason they are precious to us is that they are honorable promises made by an honorable God who will honor them. That’s right. God has given us promises that He will surely honor. It is through these promises that we can actually grow in the godly life that God wants us to live. Again, then, brothers and sisters, we see the need to read the word of God to learn His promises to us and then to devote ourselves to prayer in order to claim the promises within it! It is through these promises, promises God will certainly honor, that we gain two tremendous benefits.

A. They Give Us an Ethical Likeness to Deity

The first benefit is an ethical likeness to deity — that is, a life of goodness like the goodness of God Himself.

The Eastern Orthodox churches teach that human beings come to share in the divine energies, and that partaking of the divine nature never erases the creator-creature distinction but that it nonetheless so permeates us with God’s energy that we can, in some important sense, be conformed to Him not just ethically but even ontologically. Our being can become more like God’s being.

Now, is that what Peter is talking about here? It would seem not. Scholars who have no real problem with the Orthodox teaching on this point nonetheless insist that a survey of the phrase “partakers of the divine nature” in other authors of Peter’s time confirms that in every case, the human beings are not thought of as transcending mortal limitation and becoming divine. Rather, the phrase refers to an ethical conformity to God. To partake of the divine nature and to escape from the corruption of sin are two sides of the same ethical coin.

Do you want to become a god? Or are you happy to remain a human? That’s the real question here. To embrace divinization in the full sense is by definition to leave behind humanity. But surely God would not want us to leave behind the good humanity He gave us. Rather, what He wants us to do is leave our sins behind and start living like Jesus. He kept all the commands of God. He loved God with His heart, mind, soul, and strength, and His neighbor as Himself.

That is what partaking of the divine nature means — not becoming additional persons of the Trinity, or even growing into demi-gods like Hercules, but rather becoming ethically good like Jesus is. That's what's in view here, as the result of appropriating God's promises so that you can be the person He's calling you to be.

B. They Free Us from the Corruption Caused by Sin

You see, corruption and decay and death are a result of sin. Moral corruption especially is a consequence of sin. But in Christ, we are freed from these things! You have already escaped corruption, not in the sense that you won't die or ever get gangrene, but rather in the sense that you are even now being delivered from corruption as, through the knowledge of Christ and appropriation of His promises, you leave behind sinful desire and move toward holiness.

So, Christian, are you ready for this pilgrimage called the Christian life? Are you ready to gather together your stuff, all the gifts for life and godliness that Christ's power has granted you? Are you ready to take that stuff and utilize it by appropriating Christ's promises for yourself? I beg you to live as you have been called to live, as someone who is moving toward God's own glory and virtue. You have the gear you need. Use it in reliance on the Spirit. Faithful is He who called you; He will surely bring it to pass. Amen.