

## 2 Peter 1:3

### Introduction

Nineteen of the twenty-one NT epistles begin with a greeting. These greetings aren't just formalities, as they might have been in many other letters. In fact, sometimes it's in the greeting that the author is already laying the foundation for the rest of the letter. This is Peter's opening greeting in his second epistle:

- 2 Peter 2:1–2 — “Simeon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

And then Peter transitions immediately into the main body of his letter with these words:

### **I. 2 Peter 1:3a — His divine power has granted to us all things **pertaining to life and godliness**...**

What a startling and wonderful beginning this is! On the one hand, we can see that these words are deeply convicting. “His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness” – so what is our excuse for anything less than godly living,<sup>1</sup> ever? We know what the “answer” (remaining sin), but it's never an excuse. On the other hand, these words are wonderfully encouraging. “His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness” – so we should be filled with a complete confidence and hope as we keep on striving to live godly lives.

But what does Peter mean by “godly living”? The idea of godliness is all throughout the Old and New Testaments, but the actual word for “godliness” (*eusebeia*), along with the cognate adjective (*eusebes*) and verb (*eusebeo*) is relatively uncommon. Between them, these three words appear in our New Testament (outside of 2 Peter) only 15 times (and only in Acts and the Pastoral Epistles; 4x's in Acts; 9x's in 1 Timothy; 1x each in 2 Timothy and Titus). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament these words appear only 12 times. On the other hand, these words were commonplace among the Jewish writers of Peter's day who had been influenced by Greek philosophy (Hellenism; cf. Philo and Josephus). They appear in the Greek apocrypha 90 times (69 of these times are in the books of Maccabees [62x's in 4 Mac] and 16 of these times in Sirach). In other words, this word (*eusebeia*) is far more common in Greek philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism than it is in Scripture.

*Eusebeia* is a word that the Greeks and Romans used to describe the kind of life they valued most highly even as pagans. The Latin equivalent is “*pieta*” from which we get our English word “piety,” and both words have this basic idea of duty, of devout loyalty, and careful devotion. One commentator says that for the Greeks and Romans “piety” had to do with showing reverence and loyalty to those to whom it is due,” particularly to the gods (Green). So, of course, for the OT

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<sup>1</sup> “Life and godliness” is a hendiadys (two words joined with “and” to express a single idea/concept [“godly living”]).

Jew or the NT Christian, piety (or the pious life) is demonstrating a devout reverence and loyalty to the one and only true God.

- Proverbs 1:7 (LXX) — **Piety towards God** [Heb., “the fear of Yahweh”] is the beginning of discernment; but the **ungodly** will set at nought wisdom and instruction.
- Isaiah 33:6 (LXX) — Wisdom and knowledge and **piety toward the Lord** [Heb. “the fear of Yahweh”]; these are the treasures of righteousness.

We see that godliness (or piety) has first of all a Godward direction. Is our life characterized by an attitude of careful reverence, and loyalty, and devotion to the Lord? Is our living characterized by the fear of the Lord? Peter joins “piety” together with “life” (“life and piety”), so of course he’s not just talking about an attitude, but a way of living that this attitude toward God results in – a pious life. I think “piety” may be a better translation than “godliness” because it emphasizes more the sense of duty, and devoutness, and loyal devotion, and a “religious” or a scrupulous faithfulness that even the pagan Greeks and Romans valued so highly. One person says that what was prized by the Romans was “dogged determination and an unflinching devotion to duty” (Shelton; quoted in Green). That was their piety. So we hear of devout Muslims and devout Hindus and devout Buddhists, but what about devout Christians? Does that describe me? We hear about a devout and pious Jew, but what about a devout and pious Christian? In this sense, today it might be the religious pagans putting many professing Christians to shame. When we hear the words “devout” and “pious”, we might associate them with a “holier-than-thou” kind of attitude – and certainly that attitude is sinful. But this doesn’t mean we should throw these words out entirely. I’m not sure anymore if “godliness” really captures the full meaning of this Greek word or of this biblical teaching. I wonder if somehow we’ve tamed the word “godliness” and made it more “comfortable.” One of the marks of a lot of Christianity today is an emphasis on so-called “Christian freedom” *as over and against* Christian duty and piety. This is the problem Peter was confronting even in his own day (see below). But what this really amounts to is the difference between a practicing Christian” and a non-practicing “Christian.” Indeed, the fact that Peter is willing to use the word, *eusebeia*, even given its pagan Greek connotations, shows that he didn’t understand Christian freedom to imply any lack of devout piety or devotion to duty.

Could *we* all be characterized today as devout and pious Christians – as “serious” (not somber) Christians visibly marked by the fear of the Lord, by reverence, devotion, and loyalty to the Lord in all things? We ought to be and, furthermore, we can be because, as Peter says:

**II. 2 Peter 1:3a — His divine power has granted to us all things** pertaining to life and piety...

Here’s where we see the fundamental difference between Greek and Roman piety toward the gods and Christian piety toward the one and only true God. The Christian’s piety doesn’t start with himself—with his own effort and strength and “dogged determination,” but rather with a gift that God Himself sovereignly grants. This makes all the difference in the world, doesn’t it? This eliminates both pride and despair. This is what weds together Christian duty and true Christian freedom – so that the most careful devoutness and piety and the truest liberty and freedom exist together. Peter uses the language common in Greek philosophy because it accurately describes the devout, pious, and faithful life that God, our Creator, requires of us, and yet when Peter plugs this word into the Christian worldview, it’s also radically changed. No

longer is my devotion and piety something I can boast about, but rather something for which all of the glory belongs to God.

“His divine power has granted to us all things...” *Whose* divine power? “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. *His* divine power...” I believe Peter is speaking specifically of the divine power of “Jesus our Lord.” This Greek word for “divine” (*theios*) is another word that’s more common in Greek philosophy than it is in Scripture. Other than the two times that it appears here in 2 Peter (cf. 1:4), it’s used only one other time in the New Testament, and that’s when Paul is addressing the Greek thinkers and philosophers (the Areopagus) in Athens.

- Acts 17:29 — Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the **divine being** is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of **man**.

Notice the contrast between the “divine being” and “man.” We see this same contrast in 4 Maccabees where this word is used a lot:

- 4 Maccabees 1:16 (cf. 18:3) — Wisdom... is the knowledge of **divine and human matters**...
- 4 Maccabees 4:13 (cf. 9:9) — The high priest... prayed... that King Seleucus would not suppose that Apollonius had been overcome by **human treachery** and not by **divine justice**.

In other passages in 4 Maccabees we also hear about divine law (versus human law; 5:18), divine hymns (versus human hymns; 10:21), and divine philosophy (versus human philosophy; 7:9). Embedded in the very definition of the word “divine” is the meaning, “*not* human.” It contrasts with that which is merely mortal. So it wouldn’t make as much sense for Peter to refer to God’s divine power. Obviously, God’s power is divine because He’s God. But what about “Jesus our Lord,” who’s truly and fully human just like us? Already, Peter has explicitly referred to Jesus as God (“...by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”; 1:1b). Already, Peter has placed Jesus on the same level as God (“...in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”; 1:2b). And now Peter tells us that though Jesus our Lord is fully human, like us, the power that he exercises as our Lord is no mere human power, but the very power of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16).

“*His*[—Jesus our Lord’s—]**divine power** has **granted** to us all things...” The word for “granted” (*doreomai*) is another rare word in the Bible, used two times in 2 Peter (cf. 1:4) and only one other time in the New Testament, in Mark chapter 15.

- Mark 15:45 — When [Pilate, the Governor] learned from the centurion that [Jesus] was dead, he **granted** the body to Joseph.

In Esther 8:

- Esther 8:1 — King Artaxerxes **granted** to Esther all the property of the persecutor Haman.

And then in 1 Esdras:

- 1 Esdras 1:7 (cf. 8:13-14; 8:55) — To the people who were present Josiah **granted** thirty thousand lambs and kids, and three thousand calves; these were given from the king's possessions, as he promised.

In each of these cases what we have is a governor or a king granting something in accordance with the authority he has to do so and/or the bounty and riches that he has at his disposal (cf. Bauckham). That's the special nuance or meaning of this special word. So now listen again to Peter: "His[—Christ's—]divine power has granted to us[—according to His authority to do so, and according to the immeasurable bounty and riches that He has at His disposal—]*all things*." In the Greek, Peter makes "all things" emphatic by putting this word first in the sentence. Peter says, literally: "ALL THINGS to us his divine power has granted—the things pertaining to a devout, and a godly, and a pious life." And so once again, we see how for the Christian duty and freedom are one and the same – liberty and freedom and a devout and pious life exist together. Peter's emphasis is on the devout and pious life that *we* are called to live, and yet at the same time he emphasizes not our own resources, but the unlimited resources that have been granted to us by Christ's own divine power. And then he continues:

**III. 2 Peter 1:3b** — His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and piety, **through the knowledge of him who called us** by his own glory and virtue...

The theme is still the devout and pious life that we're called to live, but are you seeing how after emphasizing not our own resources, but Christ's, now Peter emphasizes not our own initiative, but Christ's—and not our own virtue or our own praiseworthiness, but Christ's? Christ has granted all things pertaining to a devout and pious life *to whom?*—To us who have come to know Him experientially in personal relationship. It's through our knowledge of Christ (cf. 1:8; 2:20; 3:18) that we've gained by faith that all the resources of His divine power have been granted to us, which means that no Christian has been granted less of these resources than another. To know Christ by faith *is* to have been granted all the resources of His divine power. Or to put it the other way around, it's impossible to have the true knowledge of Christ and not have been granted in full all the resources of His divine power.

But lest we start putting the pressure on ourselves again (or become prideful) by supposing that this knowledge is something that we attain through our own efforts, Peter reminds us that even our knowledge of Him, through which we've been granted all the resources of His divine power, is not the result of our own questioning, or searching, or investigation, but rather wholly the result of *His* divine initiative in calling us (cf. Mk. 2:17). This call isn't just an invitation. It's not a "call" that it was possible for any of us who have heard it to refuse (though there is also that kind of "call"). This call was a powerful summons that drew us irresistibly, creating faith in us and working in us the true knowledge of Him. It's the call of Christ when he cried out in a loud voice to one who had been four days in the tomb: "Lazarus, come forth" (Jn. 11:43). Paul speaks of the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). This is the call that actually makes effective in time God's sovereign election and choice before the foundation of the world (cf. Gal. 1:15).

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 — God **chose** you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this **He called** you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Romans 8:30 — Those whom He **predestined** He also called, and those whom **He called** He also **justified**, and those whom He justified He also **glorified**.

Peter will speak in verse ten of our “calling and election,” where our calling is simply the fruit and the application of our election.<sup>2</sup> So powerfully effective and irresistibly compelling is this divine call, that all those who are saved Christians can be referred to simply as the “called.”

- Revelation 17:14 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:24) — [The Lamb] is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are **called** and **chosen** and **faithful**.

So now we read again:

**IV. 2 Peter 1:3b** — His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and piety [a devout and pious life], through the knowledge of him **who called US by his own glory and virtue...**

The ESV says, “who called us *to* His own glory and virtue,” but Peter emphasizes “*His own* [*idios*]” glory and virtue so that I don’t think this has anything to do with what we’ve been called to, but rather it has everything to do with the miracle of *how* a sinner like me could be called at all. We’ve been called not because of our own glory and virtue, but because of His own glory and virtue.

What is this “glory and virtue”? Notice how we have here another word pair much like “life and piety” in the first half of this verse.<sup>3</sup> Just like “life and piety,” these two words together (“glory and virtue”) are meant to convey a single idea (“glorious virtue”; hendiadys). “Glory” is a common enough word in the Bible, but “virtue” (*arete*) is yet another word that’s more common in Greek philosophy than it is in Scripture (outside of 2 Peter only two other times in the NT and only 5 times in the Greek Old Testament). In Greek culture, “virtue” could refer to courage and valor displayed through a person’s mighty deeds in battle, or to moral uprightness and purity displayed in a contest with evil (Wis. of Sol. 4:1-9; 2 Mac. 6:31; 4 Mac. 7:21-23). So whether we’re talking about physical conflict or moral and spiritual conflict, virtue has to do with praiseworthy deeds of valor and prowess and might. Sometimes, the Greek word for virtue is actually translated “valor” and “courage.” As it happens, the pairing of “glory” and “virtue” was not uncommon in extrabiblical Greek writings (Green). One ancient writer “speaks of someone whose ‘**valour** and **glory**... are famed throughout Greece.’” Another one “honors the brave men who won war ‘by their own **valour**; the **glory** of it would not have been shared with anyone else.’” Someone else tells the story of an Amazon woman and says that “since her **valour** and

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<sup>2</sup> Another hendiadys

<sup>3</sup> Other word pairs in 2 Peter are: “Precious and extraordinary” (1:4); “calling and election” (1:10); “power and coming” (1:16); “honor and glory” (1:17); “saw and heard” (2:8); “bold and willful” (2:10); “caught and destroyed” (2:12) “blots and blemishes” (2:13); “judgment and destruction” (3:7); “holiness and godliness” (3:11); “waiting for and hastening” (3:12); “spotless and blameless” (3:14); “ignorant and unstable” (3:16); “grace and knowledge” (3:18).

**fame** [glory] increased, she made war upon people after people of neighboring lands.” This same person also “hails the goddess Athena’s power and the ‘memorial of her **valour** and of her well-merited **fame** [glory]” (Green). So one commentator sums everything up by saying that this word, “virtue,” “is a way to speak of... acts that invite renown or glory” – of all praiseworthy deeds of might and valor (Green). Can you see, now, how we have not been called *to* His own glory and virtue, but *BY* His own glory and virtue?

Consider these Scriptures:

- 1 Peter 2:9 — You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the **virtues [the praiseworthy deeds of renown]** of him who **called** you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- Isaiah 42:8–13 (cf. 43:20-21; 63:7; Hab. 3:3) — I am the LORD; that is my name; my **glory** I give to no other, nor my **praise** [LXX, “virtue”] to carved idols... let the habitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give **glory** to the LORD, and declare his **praise** [LXX, “virtue”] in the coastlands. The LORD goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his zeal; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes.

And now we come back again to 2 Peter: “His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to a devout and pious life, **through the knowledge of him who called us by HIS OWN glory and virtue...**” – by His own praiseworthy deeds of valor and renown. Our calling has come on the basis of His own glory and virtue—revealed in His sinless life, and sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection and ascension into heaven. Our calling has come on the basis of His own glory and virtue, and not because of any glory and virtue that we have.

### Conclusion

Throughout this short epistle, Peter is very concerned with the living of a life that is pious and devout—with “piety toward God.” In chapter one, verses 5-7 Peter says:

- 2 Peter 1:5–7 — Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with **piety**, and **piety** with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

In chapter three:

- 2 Peter 3:11 — Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and **piety**...

In chapters two and three, Peter emphasizes the fate of the impious:

- 2 Peter 2:5–7, 9 — If [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the **impious [asebes]**; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to

extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the **impious**; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked... then the Lord knows how to rescue the **pious [eusebes]** from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

- 2 Peter 3:7 — But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the **impious**.

And, of course, here in verse three, Peter's first words, right out of the gate, are these: "His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to a devout and pious life. Why is this such a big deal for Peter? Later on in 2 Peter, we learn that there were false teachers in the church promising so-called "freedom" *in the place* of duty, and so-called "liberty" *in the place* of piety (2 Pet. 2:19). So right at the beginning—right out of the gate, as it were—Peter shows us how Christian duty and piety is different from the duty and piety of the pagans. Christian piety relies not on our own resources, but on all the immeasurable resources of our Lord's divine power, not on our own initiative but on the divine initiative of our Lord who called us, and not on our own virtue and praiseworthiness but on our Lord's own praiseworthy deeds of valor and renown. Therefore, Christian duty and freedom are not two mutually exclusive things, but rather one and the same. Freedom and a truly devout and pious life exist together. They *must* exist together, Peter says, if we are to have that joyful assurance of our calling and election – of our deliverance from judgment on the final day and our entrance into the new heavens and the new earth in which only righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 1:10; 2:5-7, 9; 3:7, 11; 3:13). How good it is, then, to hear and to believe these words:

**"His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to a devout and pious life, through the knowledge of him who called us by His own glory and virtue..."**