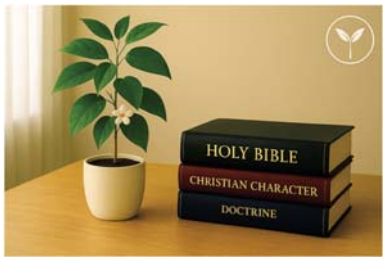
How Does Knowledge as a Christian Change My Worldly Life?
(Christian Character Series Part IV)

2 Peter 1:5: *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge.*



In **2 Peter 1**, the Apostle Peter laid out a phenomenal blueprint for us to follow regarding the how and why of developing a focused and loyal character that is modeled after Christ. After reminding us of the incomprehensible promises God brings us through His power and Jesus' sacrifice, He then focuses us on doing our part. Peter gives us a blueprint for building a virtue "ladder" of Christian character development, with our faith as the first rung. Because we have the firm footing of Christian faith in place, we can then develop "moral excellence," which in turn gives us the stability to next develop knowledge. As we will continue to see, when followed, the order in which these attributes of our Christian character develop will yield an unbreakable allegiance to daily living God's will through Christ.

recap recap of our previous Christian Character Series

Let's briefly review the first two rungs of the Apostle Peter's virtue ladder of Christian character:

The first rung:
The Allegiance Attribute of Faith—the allegiance of our life's direction.

Allegiance means loyalty. If we decide we are living a life of faith, it is necessary that our loyalty is to serve God through that faith.

The second rung:
The Allegiance Attribute of Moral Excellence—the allegiance of our heart.

We put God first by eagerly and fully supplying moral excellence to the foundation of our faith. Our heart motivates our direction.

Why is the Allegiance Attribute of moral excellence the next quality after faith? Because without a godly standard of moral excellence fashioned in the shape of God's love for us, everything else we could potentially build upon our faith would crumble, as it would be built upon a faulty, sinful earthly perspective.

Excellence and virtue can and do abound in many people for many reasons, and we always want to be aware of them and support them. However, we cannot forget the WHY of our seeking such virtue and the loftiness to which we are to strive. Our calling is to godliness, something even higher than human moral integrity.

What's next after faith and moral excellence?
2 Peter 1:5: *...and in your moral excellence,* (fully supply) *knowledge <1108>.*

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Knowledge: Strong's Exhausti Concordance #1108 *gnosis*; knowing (the act), i.e. (by implication) knowledge

Moral excellence is the foundation upon which we are instructed to build *knowledge*. For most of us, knowledge is knowledge—knowing something—so how does moral excellence focus our Christian perspective to change the role of knowledge in our daily lives? What changes with knowledge just because we are a Christian? Why does knowledge need moral excellence to continue in this Christian growth pattern?

The word *knowledge* generally signifies intelligence and understanding. As far as our Christianity, the deeper we study God's word with the help of His spirit (His power and influence), the deeper our understanding becomes. It's important to note that much of the knowledge today is corrupted by worldly perspectives, opinions and social pressures. We need to be discerning about this.

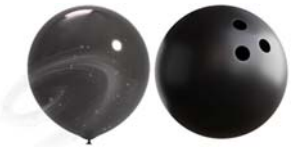
The third rung: The Allegiance Attribute of Knowledge—the allegiance of our intellect.

Why is knowledge the next quality after moral excellence (living up to our highest purpose)?

Let's begin the answer by looking at a powerful example of knowledge improperly applied without our Christian moral excellence.

1 Corinthians 8:1-2: *1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge <1108>. Knowledge <1108> makes arrogant* (inflates), *but love edifies* (constructs). *2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.*

Knowledge can inflate someone's arrogance. In contrast, love edifies or constructs good character. Knowledge in and of itself can be helpful, but if misapplied, it can be detrimental. Misapplied knowledge fuels a hollow character, and a hollow character has no true strength or substance.



When we look at an inflated black balloon from one end, it's perfectly round, black and shiny. What's inside that balloon? A lot of air! Let's tape the balloon to the table and set a black bowling ball next to it. They look similar, but one is full of air and the other is incredibly dense. We want the knowledge we are given through God, His word and His strength to be full of something strong and weighty—not full of hot air! The ball and the balloon look similar but have very different uses.

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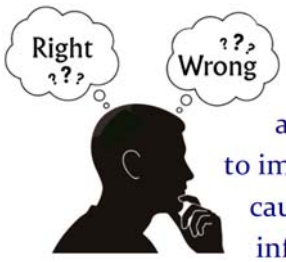
In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is teaching a lesson based on his own failures. Previously known as Saul of Tarsus, he was a prominent Pharisee who used his ego-driven understanding of the Law to make it his personal mission to persecute Christians. His knowledge was misapplied! It lacked the substance needed to make a sound judgment.

From personal experience, he already warned that knowledge can "inflate" or make someone *arrogant*.

Paul continues his focus on the early church dilemma about eating meat previously offered to idols. Some found it acceptable, while others disagreed:
1 Corinthians 8:7-11: *7 However not all men have this knowledge <1108>; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.*

Paul is telling us that even though there is nothing wrong with this—because no principles have been violated—we must rise above what we know so that we don't stumble others.

9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge <1108>, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge <1108> he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.



This is a powerful statement of responsibility! If we, as mature Christians, similarly influence new or immature Christians into acting in a way that violates their conscience, we may be causing them to sin—*he who is weak is ruined*. Stumbling another is not acceptable. When someone lacks mature spiritual knowledge, trying to imitate actions that only true understanding can support can cause real harm. Paul cautions us to be mindful of how our behavior might unintentionally mislead or influence others.

Knowledge can easily be misapplied:
1 Corinthians 8:12-13: *12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.*

This principle emphasizes sacrificing our preferences and being sensitive to the needs of others as we lay down our lives for our brethren.

Our first approach to developing knowledge goes back to a mirror question about moral excellence:

Am I living up to my highest purpose in how I explain myself and what I know? What is the allegiance of my intellect really loyal to? Is it loyal to looking good to others or to being a true and powerful example of appropriately applying and living godly knowledge?

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It is easy to want to look good to others and say, "There's nothing wrong with me doing this. What's your problem?" But that's not the right attitude.

It's important to recognize that having knowledge doesn't mean we can answer every question or know the depths of every single prophecy, for example. No one has perfect knowledge. Instead, knowledge involves understanding what Christlikeness is and striving to learn and apply it to transform our lives.

Our spiritual knowledge is fed by our faith in the light of God's glory that shines within us:

2 Corinthians 4:6-7: *6 For God, who said, Light shall shine out of darkness, is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge <1108> of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.*

This is the key! The light of *the knowledge of the glory of God* is within us. It doesn't come from us; it comes from Him, through us. This is the type of knowledge we want. We don't want this so that we can be boastful about it. These verses say knowledge comes from Him through us, so there is nothing for us to be boastful about.

Because this knowledge, the allegiance of our intellect, comes from God, we need to be humbly subservient to our mighty God through Jesus. This allegiance of our intellect can only thrive when His light fills our emptiness. Don't be the balloon. Be the bowling ball with substance.

Having our moral excellence firmly beneath us will drive us towards a better understanding of God and His plan.

The godly allegiance of our intellect will recognize that the source of our knowledge ultimately is God:

1 Timothy 2:3-6: *3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge <1922> of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*

Knowledge: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1922 #*epignosis*; recognition, i.e. (by implication) full discernment, acknowledgement

Thayer's Greek English-Lexicon: 1) precise and correct knowledge 1a) used in the New Testament of the knowledge of things ethical and divine

The word for knowledge in this text is different. The previous Greek word was *gnosis*. However, this word is *epignosis*, meaning "recognition" or "full discernment." It's a precise and correct knowledge of the truth.

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Jonathan's Thoughts

I have to comment on this verse because it's one of my favorite scriptures that uses the word "ALL." Paul describes what God's kingdom on earth will be like. It will be a time when every man, woman and child who ever lived will understand the beauty of God's plan and can use their free will to decide whether they want to be part of it.

Come to the knowledge of the truth—a full discernment of truth with nothing hidden; everything will be exposed and explained.

This is a process. We don't currently know everything, nor are we capable of such. However, we are blessed to know many things through God's spirit, but not everything.

We journey towards that full knowledge by first recognizing our highest source of authority is the Bible. Here Paul is speaking to Timothy:
2 Timothy 3:15-17: *15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

Timothy learned about God from his mother and grandmother (**2 Timothy 1:5**). They passed down great faith and knowledge. Such knowledge can be passed down from generation to generation. Through God's spirit, this knowledge can be developed in others; it doesn't have to begin from scratch.

We Christians have a strong foundation from which we can gain knowledge. As people of God, we must fully equip our minds to feed our intellects in a way that honors God at all times. Honoring Him with what we know will drive what we do.

Peter told us in **2 Peter 3:15-16** that our beloved Apostle Paul, according to the wisdom given to him in all his letters, took the Old Testament and explained its connection to Christ. Still, it wasn't easy for the Jewish Christians to understand this connection, but over time, they accepted it. The Old Testament is a vital source for understanding the plan of God.

The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed. *— Augustine*

We can't have one without the other. The knowledge of our true Christianity, of our discipleship, is dependent on both the Old and New Testaments. If we don't read the Old Testament and make the connections with the New, we miss a major contribution to the depth of our becoming Christlike.

Next, we dedicate ourselves to the lifelong journey of comprehending the inspired word. It is one thing to recognize its authority; it's another to comprehend it:
2 Timothy 2:15-16: *15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness.*

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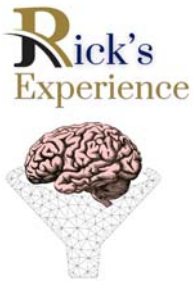
When we think about the value of the Old Testament, we think of Jesus. The moment he was baptized, he went into the wilderness to be by himself. But Satan was there to tempt him. Each of the three times Satan tried to tempt him, Jesus quoted Old Testament Scripture. He didn't want to debate. It was about the Scriptures, the holy word of God. Our knowledge must be founded on God's word, as Jesus showed us at the very beginning of his ministry.

Our moral excellence fuels the allegiance of our intellect (knowledge) to fiercely and decisively fight off and conquer all that would detour us from the knowledge of God. This is a "present-tense work in progress."

2 Corinthians 10:3-5: *3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge <1108> of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*

Paul tells us this is a battle he regularly and constantly fights. There is a problem with *taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*—we can work on that today, but tomorrow we will have to work on it again. And the next day, we will have to work on it again because our thoughts are imperfect.



At our home, we have well water from a well that is about 500 feet deep. We get sediment in this well, so we have a water filtration system. I have to change the filter every six months. When we take it out, it has gone from pure white to full of sediment and yucky scum. Unless we continuously filter the water, we will end up with sediment coming through and into the water. This is how we need to treat our mind—it must be constantly filtered so that we're looking at things appropriately.

We need to not only gain the knowledge of God; we must magnify it mightily in our lives.

Our knowledge of God and His plan are based on His wisdom and knowledge, which helps explain why sin abounds in our world. God's wisdom reveals why the world is as it is.

Paul talks about why ancient Israel and the entire world is out of favor with God:
Romans 11:32-33,36: *32 For God has shut up* (concluded) *all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.*

All are disobedient, yet God will *show mercy to all*.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge <1108> of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

If we're limiting God's mercy to just Christians, we're missing out—we're taking this incredible knowledge that has been shown to us across all these different scriptures and narrowing it down. Perhaps we need to change the filter so we can filter out the sediment

of earthly thinking and really see the magnitude of God's plan for man. If we can do this, we will better understand His heart and His intention for the well-being of mankind.

Does the allegiance of our intellect bring us to this kind of mental space of awe and gratitude? *From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever*—is this the conclusion of our studies? Do we have the sense of awe that His plan is for everybody?

Finally, this knowledge we are offered is worth leaving all previous accomplishments behind—it's worth walking away from everything:
Philippians 3:7-11: *7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing <1108> Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.*

When Paul became a follower of Christ, he left behind all his accomplishments and worth he enjoyed when he was known as Saul of Tarsus. He traded it all in to follow Christ. Talk about *value*!

Paul had a perceived value in his previous life, but really, his life was like that empty black balloon. He traded it in for something of great substance and weight that could change lives! He chose to put everything else he knew aside, because what he was learning while following Christ far surpassed it. We can't keep both. If we keep what we were, there's not enough space for us to transform into *new creatures* (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

Knowing the lack of value in what we leave behind, we now look at the value of what is in front of us:
9 and may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know (<1097> root word for <1108>) him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

This is the great conclusion of the Apostle Paul's journey of leaving those things behind. Faith is the basis—*through faith in Christ*. Although he doesn't use the words "moral excellence," it is implied when he says, *not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith*. So, he shows us faith brings us to moral excellence, which gives us the ability to know—the knowledge of what God wants him to be and do.

Peter wrote the blueprint for Paul and the rest of us. Paul is essentially explaining part of that blueprint using his own life experience.

Faith is our basis, and moral excellence is our standard that awakens and drives the allegiance of our intellect—the loyalty of our mind.

Why is knowledge the next quality after moral excellence (living up to our highest purpose)?

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Faith and moral excellence can fully supply our capacity to drink in the knowledge of God over the knowledge of men. It is a different source of knowledge, brought to us in a different way. Without moral excellence built on faith, our knowledge is far too easily subject to the whims, opinions, agendas and imaginations of our sinful world.

Social media is a sad example. There are too many ways to go that aren't really where we need to be. We want to place ourselves in environments where faith and moral excellence can develop, so that we can learn what we need to know.

The Allegiance Attribute of Knowledge: *Based on our pursuit of moral excellence, our efforts should bring us to an ever-growing intellectual appreciation of God's word, God's plan, and our putting God first. The stronger our faith and our moral excellence, the stronger our minds will be, and the more substance we can impart to our own hearts and then to others.*

Where do we go from here? What's the next rung on the ladder?

The Apostle Peter lays the foundation of *faith* and says we've got to build *moral excellence*—living up to our highest purpose based on that faith. As we live up to our highest purpose, we are to pour the *knowledge* of God into us to grow in the right direction.

Peter continues to build the case for becoming Christlike. It isn't just about believing in and loving Jesus. That is a wonderful place to start, but it's not where we end. We have to go up this incredible character ladder.

It all comes down to making sure our *knowledge* is built on the right things: *moral excellence* based on the *faith* of those who follow Christ.

So, how does knowledge as a Christian change my worldly life?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.

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Next episode

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(Christian Character Series Part V)

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1422: How Does Knowledge as a Christian Change My Worldly Life?
(Christian Character Series – Part IV) **See:** CQ Rewind SHOW NOTES
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God has granted everything needed for life and godliness through His promises. These promises form the foundation of Christian character. Our response is allegiance—loyal commitment to God's will. 2 Peter 1:5 is used throughout the questions.

Overarching Question: Why does the Apostle Peter place knowledge after faith and moral excellence in the virtue "ladder" of Christian character development? How does this order impact the way Christians should grow?

1. What dangers are associated with strictly worldly knowledge not built on moral excellence? (1 Corinthians 8:1-2, 7-11)
2. What is a mature Christian's responsibility in indulging their liberty in Christ when it comes to influencing others with a less developed conscience? (1 Corinthians 8:7-13) Think of a time when your actions or understanding could have caused someone else to stumble. Based on the principles of 1 Corinthians 8, how would you approach the situation differently now?
3. What is the source and purpose of our spiritual knowledge? How does this inform our attitude towards our own understanding? (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)
4. How does your pursuit of knowledge reflect an allegiance to God's will, rather than to your own reputation or desires?
5. How does the Greek word *epignosis* deepen our understanding of the kind of knowledge God desires eventually for all people? How is this different from *gnosis*? (1 Timothy 2:3-6)
6. What are the risks in ignoring either the Old Testament or New Testament when establishing our spiritual foundations? (2 Timothy 3:15-17, 2 Peter 3:15-16)
7. How do we take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"? Why are we a work in progress in this ongoing battle? (2 Timothy 2:15-16, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5)
8. How has the allegiance of your intellect felt that sense of awe over the breadth of His plan for all of mankind? (Romans 11:32-33,36)
9. How does Paul's personal journey illustrate the value of Christian knowledge over worldly accomplishments? Describe how he counts "all things to be loss" because of the "surpassing value" of knowing Christ Jesus? (Philippians 3:7-11, 2 Corinthians 5:17)
10. What are some practical steps to 'filter' your thoughts and knowledge, so your mind remains focused on Christ and not worldly perspectives?
11. Finally, why IS knowledge the next quality after faith and moral excellence?