

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 28 March 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## Grow in Grace!

### 2 Peter 3:17-18

We are finally at the end of our study of **2 Peter!** As we have studied through this epistle, we have learned many vital truths, which I would like to take a few minutes to review.

First, the Peter had much to say about Christian living. In **chapter 1**, Peter declared that Christ has given Christians ***“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”***; and He has given it to us in His Word. We don’t need psychology, psychiatry, psychotropic drugs, therapy, or yoga to iron out our life problems, or to help us to “cope.” We don’t need the world’s empty philosophies. We simply need the power that is available to us through the Word of God, and through the Holy Spirit.

Peter then went on to give us a list of qualities that Christians should be “adding” to their faith. These qualities are **virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity** (love). Genuine Christians who are *lacking* in these qualities are not spiritually dead; but they *are* spiritually “blinded.” They cannot see far-off spiritual realities; and they have forgotten about the incredible mercy that Christ showed them in purging their sins. Therefore, Peter urged Christians to continue to grow in these virtues, so that they will not stumble in their Christian lives.

Peter went on to inform his readers that he was soon going to die (as the Lord had already revealed to him). However, before his death, he wanted to remind them of some things that they already knew. He reminded them that he himself had once been an eyewitness of Christ’s glory, on the day when he, James, and John were on a mountain top with Jesus. He reminded them of how they had seen Jesus in a vision of the future Kingdom age. His face and clothing shone like the sun; and Moses and Elijah were talking with Him. It was a powerful experience! Yet, as powerful as that experience was, Peter said that the ***“word of prophecy”*** (the Scriptures) are ***“more sure”*** than his own eyewitness experience on the Mount of Transfiguration! He reminded his readers that the Scriptures are not the words of men: rather, the holy men who wrote them down were ***“moved by the Holy Ghost.”***

Now, at the beginning of **chapter two**, Peter suddenly switched gears. He issued a strong warning about false prophets (apostates), who would arise from their own midst, in their own assemblies. Throughout **chapter two**, Peter gives us a detailed description of these false teachers. He described false prophets as covetous men, who make merchandise of people. They speak evil of ***“dignities”*** (in other words, of pastors and church governments). They love immorality; and they love to deceive unwary people into joining them in their sin. They are full of lustful thoughts and designs. They also love money; and they say whatever people want to hear in order to enrich themselves. Their teachings sound exciting on the surface; but they are as spiritually unfulfilling as a well without water, or as clouds without rain. False teachers use flowery, swelling words that deceive people; and they promise their followers ***“liberty”*** (meaning license to sin). Yet, they themselves are in *bondage* to sin. The reality is that they never were saved, and changed from the inside. They only *appeared* to have gotten cleaned up from the pollutions of the world. Just as a domesticated dog returns to its vomit, or a “cleaned up” sow returns to the mud, so false teachers, in time, often show their real nature, and return to the filth of the world.

In **chapter 3**, Peter wrapped up the letter by warning against the “*scoffers*” who would arise in the last days. One of the primary characteristics of the “*scoffers*” is that they deny the return of Jesus Christ. They are also evolutionary and uniformitarian in their thinking. (They claim that “*all things continue as they were from the beginning.*”) They deny a literal, six-day Creation; they deny the reality of a world-wide Flood, which once covered the earth; and they mockingly ask why Jesus hasn’t come back yet. However, Peter assured his readers that the reason that Christ hasn’t returned is that He is graciously giving men space to repent before the wrath of the Tribulation begins. Peter admonished Christians to allow the reality of the Coming of Christ, and of the coming new heavens and new earth, to *motivate them to live godly lives*. Until Christ returns, we should strive to be found in peace, without spot, and blameless; and we should remember that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.

With this, we now come to the last couple verses of **chapter 3**. Peter ends his letter with three last warnings and instructions. It is my prayer that as we study these verses today, you who know Christ as Saviour will take these instructions to heart, and heed them. The title of this message is ***Be Diligent!***

### **Read 2 Peter 3:17-18.**

#### **I. Beware of your companions (v. 17).**

As Peter wrote this letter, he knew that it would probably be his last one. This letter, as far as we know, was written very shortly before Peter’s death. Historical records say that Peter was crucified upside down for his faith in Jesus, in the year A.D. 66.

Now, what would *you* say if you were one of the twelve Apostles, and you knew that you were soon going to die? What would you say to your brothers and sisters in Christ, whom you love so dearly? How would you encourage your brethren (most of whom had never personally seen Christ when He was on earth, as you had) to stay faithful to the Lord? How would you put such a weighty and passionate desire into words? Well, we’ve just seen how Peter worded it: and it is *absolutely perfect*, because it is the Word of God, and not merely the words of Peter. Don’t brush over these words because they are at the end of the letter. They are extremely important words!

First, Peter says, “*Seeing ye know these things.*” This sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Peter acknowledged several times in this letter that his readers already *knew and understood* the things that he was writing. He wasn’t telling them things that they hadn’t heard before. Back in **1 Peter 1:12**, Peter said that he wished to remind them of these truths, “*Though ye know them, and be established*” in them. In **verse 14** of this chapter, he said, “*Seeing that ye look for such things.*” Now, once again, he says, “*Seeing ye know these things.*” Peter’s readers *knew* the truths that he was reminding them of; yet, Peter wished to *stir up their memories* of these truths once again.

Brethren, God wants us to keep going back over the truths of His Word on a daily basis! He wants us to study His Word again and again, and to meditate on it. Our memories are weak and fallible; and we are easily deceived and blinded by our sinful hearts. Christian, how many days do you talk yourself into *not* picking up your Bible and reading it, because you don’t have much time--or, because you “read it yesterday, or a few days ago.” I hope that this is not the level of importance that you place upon God’s Word! You *need* to be reminded of God’s Word, constantly! The Apostle John wrote, “*I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth*” (1 John 2:21).

Since his readers knew these things already, Peter now prefaced what he was about to say with the word *“therefore.”* Because they knew these truths, they *“therefore”* should react to these truths in a certain way. And what was that way? He said that they should *“beware.”* As God’s people, we should *be on guard* against the errors of the wicked. **(Read verse 17 again.)**

Peter has spent most of this letter warning about apostates and scoffers; and now he’s saying, “Beware of these men! Don’t be overconfident. If you’re not careful, and you start listening to the wicked, you might be caught up in their deadly errors!” By the way, the Greek word for *“wicked”* literally means “without law.” Remember when Peter warned, back in **chapter 2**, about apostate teachers who promised false *“liberty”* to their followers? These are the same people whom he’s talking about here at the end of the letter. He’s talking about false teachers who *misinterpret* the Bible’s teaching about the grace of God. He’s talking about the false prophets who say, “Since we’re under grace, and not under the Law, we therefore can indulge in sin, and it’s O.K.” No, it is *not* O.K., my friends! Christ saved us not only from the *penalty* of the Law, but also from the *power* of the Law. He saved us so that He might now empower us to *perform* His commands! Christ did not save us so that we may now go out and sin, and not be accountable: He saved us so that we might receive the power to *overcome* sin in our lives, and thus please God!

**Read Romans 6:14-18 and 8:3-4.**

Paul says that the Law was *“weak through the flesh.”* What does this mean? It means that the Law had the power to *condemn* us, but it didn’t have the power to *deliver* us from our sin. Only Christ, by His sacrifice, is able to deliver us from our sin; and when He delivers us from our sin, He enables us to perform the Law. We are not free *to* sin; we are free *from* sin.

Now, as I’ve said in past messages, this is not a popular teaching. It wasn’t a popular teaching in Peter’s day, and it isn’t popular today. Our modern Western world is filled with “evangelical” preachers who give lip service to the Gospel, yet who refuse to preach against sin, and who allow every kind of wickedness and immorality in their churches. They excuse it by saying, “We’re under grace!” Folks, grace is not license to sin! Grace is the undeserved favour of God, whereby He forgave us; but He forgave us so that He might impart a new heart to us, and enable us to have victory over sin, and serve Him!

Be careful, Christian! There are just as many deceivers out there today as there were in Peter’s day. They are all over the “religious” channels; and they are all over the internet. They even deceitfully make their way into Bible-believing Baptist churches. Be on guard! Know the Word, so that you won’t be deceived.

By the way, the Greek word for *“led away”* is exactly the same word that Paul used in **Galatians 2**. In that chapter, Paul told his readers about an occasion when a Christian was *“led away”* into an error. And guess *who it was* that got *“led away”* into error? It was none other than the Apostle Peter!

**Read Galatians 2:9-16.**

Did you notice that expression “*carried away*” there in **verse 13**? That is the same verb that is translated in **2 Peter 3:17** as “*led away*.” Interesting, isn’t it? Remember, Paul is not talking about *unsaved* people here in **Galatians 2**: he’s talking about his brothers in the Lord. Not only that, but he is talking about a couple fellow Apostles! Peter was one of Jesus’ original twelve Apostles; and Barnabas was one of the eight Apostles to the Gentiles. These were good, godly men. God had used them to proclaim the Gospel far and wide, and to lay the foundation of the churches. Yet, during a church fellowship dinner at the church of Antioch, Peter and Barnabas were both “*carried away*” by peer pressure; and they ended up denying a very important New Testament truth. They didn’t deny the truth with their *words*; but they did deny it in their *actions*. Peter knew very well that Jewish believers were no longer under the obligation of the Old Testament dietary laws. He also knew that Jewish believers were no longer required to separate themselves from Gentile believers. There is to be *no* distinction between Jew and Gentile in the church! Of all people, Peter should have known this truth, because he was the one to whom God had given this new revelation!

**Read Acts 10:9-20, 34-35, 44-48.**

Think of this! *Peter himself* was the very first believer to receive the memo from God that the wall between Jewish and Gentile believers was now completely broken down! How could he possibly forget this truth? Yet, in a moment of peer pressure, he went against what he *knew* very well to be the truth.

By the way, aren’t you glad that the Rock that the church is built upon is *Jesus*, and not Peter? In **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus called Himself *Petra*, which means “enormous rock,” or “boulder.” In contrast, He gave Simon the name *Petros* (or Peter), which means “*little* rock.” Jesus gave Simon the name “Peter” (or “*little rock*”), because He wanted his new name to be a reminder of the kind of character He wanted him to have. He wanted Simon to be strong and unbending in his faith, like a rock.

Now, Peter was *far* from “rock-like” during Jesus’ earthly ministry. He was always getting “the big head,” and saying things that got him into trouble. Then, on the night of Christ’s arrest, Peter denied that he even knew the Lord! However, *after* Christ’s resurrection, Peter became a very different man. He began to live up to his new name of “*little Rock*.” Christ changed and transformed him. Nevertheless, Peter was not very “rock-like” during the fellowship dinner at the church of Antioch. He became afraid of what his Jewish brethren at the church fellowship would think of him if he didn’t separate from the Gentiles; and in practice, he denied the truth! Paul wasn’t shy about correcting him, either! He reminded Peter of the truth that he knew very well—that God had removed the barrier between Jew and Gentile. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile; and in the church, there is no barrier in fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. Peter knew all this in his head; yet, in a sense, he *forgot* it. Because of peer pressure, he quickly got “*carried away*” into an error.

If Christians can be “*carried away*” into error through the influence of *Christian friends* who are disobeying the Lord, how much more can they be “*carried away*” by apostates, who use “*great swelling words of vanity*” to deceive people? In **Mark 13**, Jesus described what it would be like during the Tribulation, before His return to earth; and several times, He warned

Jewish believers who will be living at that time to be “on guard.” In **verse 5**, He said, “*Take heed lest any man deceive you.*” In **verse 9** He said, “*But take heed to yourselves.*” In **verse 33** He said, “*Take ye heed, watch and pray.*” Though these words are especially addressed to the believers who will be living during the Tribulation, there is a principle here for all of us. The principle is, “*Take heed*”!

Now, as Peter was writing this letter, he was approaching the end of his life. For three and a half decades, his Master, Jesus Christ, had been changing Peter more and more into His image; and Peter had, indeed, become like a “little rock.” He had been made steadfast. Now, at the end of his life, he wanted to ensure that his Christian brothers and sisters would *also* remain “steadfast.” He knew how quickly a believer can fall from his steadfastness, because *he himself* had had a terrible fall years earlier.

### **Read Luke 22:31-34.**

The word “*strengthen*” in **verse 32** means “to make steadfast.” At this point in Peter’s life, he was *not* being “steadfast.” He was spiritually weak, and was ready to be sifted like wheat. That’s why Jesus called him by his old name “Simon,” instead of “Peter” (“little rock”). Nonetheless, Jesus had good news for Peter. Very soon, he was going to be “*converted,*” or changed. This word “*converted*” does not mean “saved,” because Peter was already saved. It simply means that God was going to perform a radical change in Peter’s life, and make him into a strong man of faith, instead of the weak, wavering Christian that he was right then. Jesus made a miraculous conversion in Peter’s life; and He can do the same in our lives, as well.

Christian, be on guard! You cannot lose their salvation: but you *can* be greatly influenced by the ungodly—to the point of appearing like an unsaved person. Lot *looked* like an unsaved person after he had lived in Sodom for a while. David *looked* like an unsaved man on the night when he looked at Bathsheba. Peter *looked* like an unsaved man on the night when Jesus was arrested. All these were saved men; but when they stumbled, they surely didn’t *look* like believers. They fell from their steadfastness; and it was a hard fall. This is why Christians should beware of the things that they read; of the things that they watch; of the counsel that they receive; and of the people with whom they keep company. The Bible says, “*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed*” (**Proverbs 13:20**). Don’t think that you can’t be drawn away from the truth. You can!

Are you on guard, Christian? Are you listening to the advice of the ungodly—or of worldly, carnally-minded believers, who have bought into false teachings? Are you reading God’s Word constantly, so that you will be steadfast, and changed into the image of Christ?

## **II. Grow in grace and in knowledge of the Lord (v. 18).**

(**Read verse 18 again.**) I have heard it said that the Christian life is like riding a bicycle. How so? Because if you don’t keep pedalling forward on the bicycle, you will fall down! It’s the same way in the Christian life. If you be not moving *forward* in obedience to the Lord, you will fall. Too many times, I have seen people get saved, and start getting excited about serving the Lord; but then, they came to a scriptural command or precept that they didn’t want

to obey; and they “hit the brakes,” and “fell off the bike,” so to speak. For some, they halted at the matter of being scripturally baptised into a scriptural church; and because they didn’t obey, they not only fell, but went backward in their Christian lives. Some did join a good church after they were saved, and they began to get involved in serving the Lord; but then, they were confronted with a standard that they didn’t like, and they got upset about it, and walked away from the Lord for a long time. A Christian friend whom I once knew had sat out of church for 15 years of his life--during which time he lost his son to the world. Why did he do this? Because the pastor had told him he needed to cut off his long hair before he could be involved in the choir. What a horrible loss! Some Christians simply didn’t want to exert the effort to read their Bible, or to pray; and they became spiritually weak, and quickly fell into a state of virtual non-usefulness for the Lord. Christian, whenever you “hit the brakes” and say, “I don’t want to do this thing that God requires of me,” God hits the brakes, too! He is not going to pull and push you along in your Christian life, in spite of your disobedience. He will not continue to bless you in spite of your disobedience, either. You *must* continue to grow!

In **Philippians 3:14** Paul wrote, ***“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”*** That phrase ***“high calling”*** literally means “upward calling.” In other words, Paul is talking about the Rapture! Christian, you absolutely *must* continue to press forward in your Christian life--either until you die, and are called up to heaven, or until the Lord returns, and you meet Him in the air. Every day, you must be growing ***“in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”***

Now, let’s take a look at the two parts of Christian growth. First, we should be growing ***“in grace.”*** What is grace? Grace is the unearned favour of God. It is God’s giving us something we don’t deserve, out of His love for us. If you know Christ as Saviour, God imparted His grace to you at the moment you were saved. He removed the penalty of sin (which is death and hell), and made you a member of His family. That was a gift of His grace! It is the gift that Paul was talking about when he said, ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”***

However, God’s grace doesn’t stop at salvation. *Every* spiritual empowerment that God gives to Christians to help them live their Christian life is a gift of His grace. Every time God provides you with the power you need to overcome sin, and to live a fruitful life for Him, that provision comes from the treasury of His grace. Paul had a lot to say about this treasury. Let’s look at a couple Scriptures.

**Read Ephesians 1:3-9.**

**Read Hebrews 4:16.**

Are you growing in grace, Christian? Are you asking the Lord for wisdom and power to live your life for Him? When He gives you this wisdom, do you avail of it? Do you *act* according to the knowledge of His will? Are you continuing to grow in God’s grace every day?

The second way in which Peter says we must grow is ***“in knowledge.”*** What kind of knowledge? Well, on one hand, Peter may be talking about *personal* knowledge of Christ—your relationship with Him. He may also be talking about knowledge of the truths and

doctrines in His Word. Regardless of which kind of knowledge he’s talking about, though, one thing is for sure: you can’t have much of a personal relationship with the *Lord* if you do not have much knowledge of His *Word*. You must have *both*. The only way that we can know what our relationship with the Lord should be like is to read His Word. It’s the same in any earthly relationship. The only way you can really *know* and *have a relationship* with a friend or loved one is to *listen* to that person—to pay attention to what he or she is saying—to know that person’s “likes” and “dislikes.” If you really love your wife, you will want to know *everything about her*. You will want to know what things please her. You’ll want to know what things might hurt her feelings, so that you can avoid those things, and be sensitive to her needs. You’ll want to know what things are extra special to her, so that you can show her that you care. The Bible calls this dwelling with your wife “**according to knowledge**” (**1 Peter 3:7**). In any human relationship, there must be *knowledge* if there is to be a vibrant, healthy, functioning relationship.

So it is in our relationship with the Lord. We must *know* the Lord’s will by knowing His Word. We must strive to know everything that He has revealed about *who He is*, and about *what He has commanded us*. Doctrine is extremely important! It is not just a “study”: it is the knowledge of God, which is foundational to a relationship with Him. You had to know certain things in order to *enter into* a relationship with the Lord in the first place. In order to come to Christ, you had to receive the *knowledge* of how to be saved. Likewise, you must have a growing knowledge of Biblical truth *after* your salvation. Otherwise, you will shrink spiritually, and be defeated. Without knowledge, godly zeal turns into mere “religious emotion”; and when you’re being governed by your emotions and feelings instead of by the word of God, you are heading toward spiritual shipwreck. Christian, grow in grace, and in the *knowledge* of your Saviour, and resist every false form of “knowledge”! Any philosophy, knowledge, or “science” of man that is contrary to God’s Word must be rejected. If you don’t heed this warning, it will be destructive to your relationship with the Lord.

**Read 1 Timothy 6:20-21.**

**Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.**

### III. **Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 18).**

(**Read verse 18.**) Peter ends his letter with one last important statement: “**To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.**” The purpose of your life is *not* to pursue happiness. The purpose of your life is *not* to make a better material life for yourself and your family. Jesus said, “He that seeks his life shall lose it.” The purpose of your life is to bring glory to the name of Jesus in everything you say and do. Are you striving to fulfil that purpose, Christian?

**Conclusion:** As we close this series of messages from **2 Peter**, I would ask: “Do you know Christ as your Saviour?” You don’t need to be a wicked, immoral apostate preacher to be lost, and on your way to hell: all you need to do is not come to Christ on His terms. Have you received His gift of salvation? If Christ were to return for His people today, would you be caught up in the clouds, or would you be left behind? If you’re not sure, place your trust in Christ today! If you do know Christ, are you serving Him with all your might? Are you taking heed of your companions? Are you growing in grace and knowledge of Christ? Are you glorifying Him?

