

“GROW IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.”

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Scripture Texts: II Peter 3:17-18

Introduction.

When I talk with many of our senior saints one of the concerns or fears I hear expressed the most is basophobia. You didn't know that did you. It is also call FOF, fear of falling. When we get older it is a legitimate concern. If you have fallen before it is an especially big concern. For some of us this fear is on our mind a lot, we worry about it, we take precautions, we use extra means to keep it from happening, like canes and walkers and removing obstacles. That's wisdom.

There is a parallel between our fear of physically falling and spiritually falling. We should treat them both in similar ways and be just as diligent with guarding against both. In fact, we should be more diligent in guarding against spiritual falling.

What is more important, our bodies or our souls? Didn't Jesus say,

Matthew 10:28 Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

In a real sense this is the point of Peter's last letter.

We come this evening to the last words of the last letter of an old man who will soon face martyrdom. When you are at the end of your life, you choose your words carefully. What is the most important thing that needs to be said?

Peter is clearly a good pastor, a good shepherd of the sheep, he cares about their souls more than anything else. You hear his heart again as he writes “beloved” for the fourth time in this chapter.

These are the words of a man who fell and fell bad. These are the words of a man with painfully intimate knowledge of what it means to fall into sin, who boasted he never would and did worse than he dreamed possible.

When Jesus told Peter it would happen Jesus also told him,

Luke 22:32 “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And *when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*”

This is Peter making good on that command of Jesus, *when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*

This is Peter strengthening his brothers, his church, and the church down through the ages. This is Peter fighting for our faith, that we not lose our stability and fall.

Of all the things Peter could possibly say as his last words, Peter urges us to grow and increase and multiply in grace and peace through the knowledge of God.

Peter ends the way he began, grace and knowledge. Verse 2 of Chapter 1 says, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

This simple verse about growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus is an excellent summary of the NT, of what it means to be a Christian, and what it is we are called to do in the Christian life.

What does Peter mean when he says this and how do we do this?

What does growing in grace and knowledge mean?

Grace.

There are two realms, we are either under grace or under law. If under the law then we are under the wrath of God. At judgment we will be judged on how well we kept the law and since no one has or can, we will receive the justice of God which is death. We will pay for our lawlessness.

The other realm is being under the grace of God.

Grace of course is the undeserved and unmerited favor of God toward sinners through faith in Jesus Christ, by whose blood we are justified and forgiven and cleansed and reconciled to the Father, whose wrath has been satisfied and taken away. Under grace we will receive eternal life.

In the realm of grace we are to grow in our experience of that grace and understanding of it and our increasing consciousness of it. I am more conscious of God's favor and kindness and mercy and goodness and generosity than ever before.

This growth isn't some supernatural super spirituality. It is plain old, practical daily transformation from our old ways to new ways, from flesh to spirit, from being all about me to being about Christ, a growing love for Him and the things of the Lord.

Knowledge. Knowledge includes our understanding of the truth about God and what He has revealed in His Word. But knowledge moves beyond intellect to heart, to grow in a

knowledge of Jesus, an intimacy with Him, a real relationship, moving beyond Jesus being an acquaintance.

We must be like Paul who said his one ambition was to know Jesus and be like Him. And as Peter says it, though we don't see Him we love Him.

Are we growing in our understanding and awareness of who God is and what He has done in the world and in our life? Are we growing in our understanding of God's great plan, of the nature of spiritual conflict and why what is happening is unfolding the way it is? Are we growing in our love of the truth? Are we seeking to know the things that are above?

How can you know an infinite, incomprehensible God whose thoughts are above our thoughts and whose ways are above our ways?

Human beings cannot fully comprehend God and even in heaven and with all eternity to learn and grow, we will never plumb the depths or scale the heights of fully knowing God. But God is knowable, we can know Him. Our knowledge will always be a partial knowledge but it will be real knowledge because God has revealed all that He wants us to know about Him to us.

It is enough for us to love Him and worship Him and glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

How do we grow in grace and knowledge?

How do you grow? How does anything grow?

By Jesus.

First, we must be firmly planted and rooted in Jesus Christ. It starts of course in being born again. Growth assumes birth.

Peter is talking to those who are "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world" (I Peter 1:4). Apart from Him we can do nothing, through Him all things. It starts in the roots, soaking up Jesus, soaking up grace, lots and lots of grace until it comes out in the leaves and the fruit.

Colossians 2:19 holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Focus on Christ and you will grow in grace and knowledge. That's what Peter said to begin with.

II Peter 1:2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

By His Word

There is no growth without food and drink and air, and this is our food and drink and air.

I Peter 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

Grow from being a child to a mature adult. Grow out of judging things by your feelings and impulses and self-centeredness. Move from milk to meat.

This is a big book, it is full of a ton of grace, an unfathomable ocean of grace, a never ending fountain of grace. This is the source, drink deeply, more deeply.

The bottom line is this, you cannot grow in God's grace without growing in your love and knowledge of His Word. The two are inseparably linked.

Know the Gospel in all its increasing depth and meaning and richness.

Know the Word of God, it is truth and life.

Lovers of grace love God's Word.

By trials

James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 5:3-5 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Our memory verse for this month speaks to this:

II Corinthians 4:16-17 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

By fellowship with believers

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good

works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Ephesians 4:12b-15 for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

By private and public worship, and prayer.

Do we take time every day to attend to our souls, to give thought to spiritual things, to the reality of eternity? What have we done each day that says we are very much aware we have a soul that is destined for eternity? Have we guarded our souls, guarded our tongues, guarded our thoughts?

We are growing in grace and knowledge if we are growing in our awareness and knowledge of our sinfulness and unworthiness. We can see Paul progress in his deeper knowledge of himself. If we are satisfied with ourselves we are not growing.

We are growing if we are less and less interested in the things of the world, and if we are more and more grieved by the state of the world.

We are growing when we see our attitude toward God changing, loving Him more, desiring Him more. Not just His gifts and what He does, but Him. The true goal of our hearts is to know Him and love Him, to glorify Him and enjoy Him.

We are growing if we are aware of a greater dependence on Christ, not less dependence.

What happens if we don't grow in grace and knowledge?

You know what cause you to stumble and fall. You know that hinders your spiritual life and growth, you know what takes your soul down. You know the sins, the distractions, the compromises, the things that vex your spirit, that lead you in a less than edifying direction.

II Peter 3:17 take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

The opposite of grow is a slow drifting and falling into faithlessness and apostasy.

Notice what this is saying. The choice we face in life is not grow or just stay the same, it is grow or die, grow or be carried away by error, grow or lose your stability, grow in Christ or lose Christ. Pedal or fall over. Swim or sink. Run or get run over.

Are you being carried along by the world? Hang around with foolish people and you will become a fool; hang around foul mouthed people and you will become foul mouthed; hang around people disrespectful of authority and you will become disrespectful of authority; hang around video gamers and you will become one.

If you hang around ungodly people at school or in the neighborhood or on the internet, you will become ungodly.

If you hang around certain YouTube videos, Netflix or HBO shows, movies you watch, music you listen to, you will grow in that direction. Garbage in, garbage out (gigo).

Where are you intersecting with the culture too much? Where are you closest to the world? Avoid whatever hinders or stands in the way of godliness, of growing in grace and knowledge.

To Christ belongs all the glory now and forever.

Peter doesn't end with us, he ends with Jesus. The goal of our growth is not just growth for growth's sake, but for the glory of God.

To Him and Him alone belongs all glory now and until He comes and for all eternity.

It is as if Peter could already hear the refrain of the angels song in heaven.

Implications and application.

Peter had a rough start, but he finished well. Well done, thou good and faithful servant. May we heed his words, may we grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, may we do all we do to the glory of Jesus, may we finish well, by God's grace and for His glory.

Watch your footing. The world is a slippery place and the devil is a slippery devil.

Hold fast, hang on, don't give up, yes tribulations come, trials are hard, the enemy is real, the sins are strong. Fight the good fight of faith, endure hardship, there is a goal, a prize at the end, and eternal blessing that far outweighs everything.

Coasting is not an option, drifting with the current is not an option, retiring from growing in grace and knowledge is death.

Pursue Christ until you are filled with the fullness of Christ. Finish well.