

## “BUT GROW IN THE GRACE” (Godly Aspiration)

2 Peter 3:14-18

Key Verse 3:18, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

In what ways are you growing (or not growing)? Many of us pray for our kids to grow in wisdom and stature. We strive to grow in our careers or as a spouse or as a parent. We make goals to grow in knowledge in certain topics or fields of study. In today's passage, Peter tells us to grow in grace. Last week we learned that to be strengthened by grace is a passive experience. We are to simply let ourselves “be strengthened” by God's grace. But in today's passage we are given the imperative to “grow in the grace and knowledge” of Jesus. That means we need to play a role in this growth. In any kind of growth, action needs to take place. Unless a seed is planted, it will not grow. If it doesn't receive light and water, it will not grow. If it is neglected by the gardener, it may not grow. Growing is not passive. Especially growing in grace...If we drift along in life, we are more likely to grow the weeds of pride and self-righteousness. The other obvious implication in the word “grow” is that it means to increase. Grace and knowledge of Jesus should be increasing, not stagnating or decreasing. So why did Peter tell us to grow in this way? I will share a bit about the context of this book so we can get the big picture.

The letter of 2 Peter was written to the same churches in Asia minor as the letter of 1 Peter (1 Pet. 1:1, 2 Pet. 3:1). One of the main reasons for this second letter was to address heresies and false teachings that were at risk of infiltrating these churches. He addressed three main objections to his teaching: 1) The apostles made up the gospel from their own imagination (2 Pet. 1:16-20), 2) There will not be a final judgment by God (2 Pet. 2:1-3), and 3) Nothing radical has happened since creation—Jesus isn't coming again (2 Pet. 3:4b). With this background in mind, it makes sense why Peter spends the bulk of the letter warning about false teachers and Judgment Day. With that background, let's dive into our passage.

Part I: Live with eternal perspective (vv. 14-17). Let's read verse 14 together, OK? “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.” What are “these”? According to 2 Pet. 3:13, “these” refers to “...new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” In other words, we are waiting for Jesus' Second Coming. Whether we are alive when this happens or not, the Bible teaches that every person will stand before God and be judged according to their deeds (Heb. 9:27, Rom. 14:10, 2 Tim. 4:1). This is sometimes hard to believe because it feels so far away. And for some, they don't believe Jesus will come again to judge the world.

Many of us live with a “you only live once” mentality and spend our lives chasing after maximum fulfillment and pleasure in this life. But as Christians, how should we view Jesus’ Second Coming? And what should we do while we’re waiting? Peter gives five exhortations to guide us.

Exhortation is about personal morality. Verse 14b says, “be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish”. The only way to truly be without spot or blemish in God’s eyes is to accept Jesus’ death on the cross for our sin and to receive his forgiveness and cleansing. On the other hand, the words “be diligent” imply that we should strive to become more and more like Jesus. 1 Pet. 1:14-16 says, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Immoral living looks tantalizing, but it always falls short. It never satisfies. Also, we risk leading others astray by our bad example. May God continue working in our hearts to have holy desires and to be satisfied with the true and beautiful things in life, rather than the shallow, cheap pleasures.

Exhortation is about relational integrity. Verse 14c says, “and at peace”. So, we should also be diligent to be found by him “at peace”. Most importantly, this means to be at peace with God. There is only one way to have peace with God, and that is through faith in Jesus. Rom. 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “At peace” can also refer to being at peace with our fellow human beings. Rom. 12:18 says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Finally, “at peace” can refer to living at peace with ourselves, especially our conscience. God gave us our conscience to guide us with an innate sense of right and wrong. It takes a lot of time and effort to be at peace in these three ways. I often feel like I don’t have enough time to work on relationships and can take them for granted. But Peter commands me to be diligent in this effort—that it is more important than my work deadlines or yard work (unless the yardwork is to live at peace with my neighbors!). Of all of the things we can be doing, checking in on our relationships with God, others, and self is something that we should make a priority.

Exhortation is about understanding God’s patience. Verse 15a says, “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation...” In the context of this chapter, this refers to God’s patience in holding back his wrath until the appointed time has come for Judgment Day. Verse 9 says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” What a loving God, who waits hundreds, even thousands of years for as many people to be saved as possible! If this is the case, shouldn’t we hurry up with the thing for which

he is patiently waiting? If my wife is waiting in the car for our kids to join her so we can go on vacation, shouldn't they hustle to get ready and join her rather than prolong the event that she is waiting for? I would have used myself in this example instead of Christian, but I am not sure I have ever waited in the car for them when leaving for vacation. If you know me, you know that I am slow and thorough, especially when leaving for a trip! (back to verse 15) As believers, we have been commissioned by Jesus himself to bring the gospel to the world. This is also something we can only do on this side of death. Once Jesus comes again, evangelism will become irrelevant. The gates will be closed. But they are open now, so we should honor the Lord's patience by sharing the good news of salvation generously. This patience can also be understood in the context of one person's life. If you have already received Jesus, take a moment and thank God that he was so patient with you, waiting for you to come to repentance! If you have not yet put your faith in Jesus, be encouraged that he is waiting patiently for you to accept his free gift of salvation. Rev. 3:20 says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

Exhortation is about being stable in Christ. Verse 17 says, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability." What is the "error of lawless people"? Verse 16 refers to "ignorant and unstable" people who twist the Word of God to their own destruction. This could also refer to the false teachers spreading the heresies I mentioned earlier, such as, "There will not be a final judgment by God". These people live according to the flesh and twist the Word of God to justify their lifestyle. They mislead believers (especially new believers) with their crafty, sly words and their behavior. Before Jesus comes again, false teachers and distractions are sometimes allowed by God to test our faith and to give us opportunities to be strengthened by grace. We should be discerning and aware so we can remain stable in Christ amidst the hurricane of information and influence that we live in. You might be thinking, "Phew, I'm glad we don't have any false teachers in Chicago UBF!" However, even if that is true, there are other ways that false teachers and distractions can sneak into our community and "carry us away". How? Let me ask you a question: How many of you have access to YouTube and social media? Now, I'm not saying that all YouTube content is evil, but it is a platform that provides access to nearly unlimited false teachings. Some of them are obvious, but some twist the truth just slightly and sound very convincing. This can cause believers (especially newer believers) to be led astray from the gospel and sound biblical doctrine. So, the next time you open YouTube, remember to watch out for false teachers! Exhortation is about growing in grace. Verse 18a says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Instead of being carried away with the error of lawless people and losing our own stability, we should put down deep roots in God's grace and the knowledge of Jesus, growing into a huge, strong tree that can be a source of blessing to the broken world around us. This all sounds great, but how can we grow in grace and what does a grace-filled person look like?

Part II: Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (v. 18).

Let's read verse 18 together, OK? "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." What is the grace of Jesus? If you didn't hear P. Mark's message last Sunday, I encourage you to go back and read it, since it thoroughly answers this question. He explained that Jesus' grace is "incongruous", and that it's "a beautiful gift given to the totally unworthy." It is the grace we receive when we accept the gospel and all our dirty sins are forgiven. Moreover, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us! That is mindblowing.

Before we get into the "how" of growing in the grace, let's think about what a grace-matured person is like. Picture a person who is mature in Jesus' grace. What is this person like? Are they easy to be around? Do they point out all your flaws and failures? Do they make you feel insecure? Are they judgmental toward you and others? Do they laugh a lot? Do they tell good stories? Do you feel encouraged after being with them? Do they give godly and wise advice? 2 Peter 1:5-8 gives a good list of grace matured qualities: virtue (excellence), knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. If we are growing in the grace of Jesus, we will be growing in these qualities. When I am with a grace-matured person, I feel safe and less inhibited. I don't walk on eggshells and I feel more free to be myself. I also feel free to share my sins and wounds and ask for their prayer and help. Who wants to be like this? I do! Let's see what insight the Bible gives on how to grow into grace-matured people.

Growing in the grace of Jesus sounds very similar to 2 Tim. 2:1, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus..." Being strengthened is a passive activity—we must depend on the One who gives us strength. But in our passage today, Peter gives us the imperative to grow. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." The "branch" that abides in Jesus grows in grace and in every way just by abiding or remaining in Jesus. But verses 7 and 10 from this passage give us more tips on how to grow in Jesus: if my words abide in you, and if you obey my commands you will abide in my love. Like a branch, if we are connected to the vine (Jesus), we grow in his grace. And when we break his commands and sin, we need to come back to the grace of Jesus faithfully. We must reject self-condemnation but also reject self-deception that we are fine. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As we practice the gospel, we grow in maturity and learn to faithfully come back to Jesus' grace.

One diagram that has helped me over the years is the “Growing in the Gospel” chart (The Gospel Centered Life, Walker, Will, and Thune, Bob, World Harvest Mission, 2009). At the point of conversion, my awareness of God’s holiness was not very great, nor was my awareness of my sinfulness. However, as I grow in my walk of faith, my awareness of God’s holiness increases. And as I become more acutely aware of my sin (of both obvious and hidden sins), I grow in awareness of my sinfulness. A healthy response to this growing divide is to keep believing this gospel, which means that the cross as well as our love and appreciation grows larger and larger.

Another way that I have experienced growing in the grace of Jesus is through coming to him for healing. As we live in this sinful and broken world, not only do we sin, but we are also sinned against. This wounds our souls and makes us defensive, untrusting, and skeptical. This affects our ability to show grace to others. But when we come to Jesus who is safe and always cares for us perfectly, we can be healed from past wounds and free to be gracious with others in ways that we used to be judgmental and harsh.

In essence, growing in the grace of Jesus means we should be growing to be more like Jesus as he demonstrated during his life on earth. And remember, it’s not our own power or strength, but the grace of God that works this change in our hearts and lives. But Peter says we need something in addition to grace.

Peter encourages the believers to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as well. Why does Peter encourage them to grow in knowledge? Does he mean that we should all get a PhD? I don’t think so. The word “knowledge” is a translation for the Greek word “gnōsis”, in this case meaning “the knowledge of Christ as a saviour” (<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1108/kjv/tr/0-1/>). Also, it seems that verse 17b is connected, “take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” Based on this, along with the context of the whole letter, he is exhorting the believers to grow in the knowledge of Jesus as their Savior and Lord—to have a solid understanding of the gospel and what Jesus is like. When we know who he is and trust in him, we receive and grow in grace. And the more deeply we receive Jesus’ grace, the more we want to learn about Jesus!

For me personally, my goal used to be achieving the American Dream—getting an excellent education, a great job, a beautiful house, a sporty car, and a nice family. However, since I deeply received Romans 1:5 at a 2007 UBF Easter Conference, Jesus changed my life goals and desires. Since then, God has steadily been growing me in the grace of Jesus through coming to him for healing, prayer, studying his Word, and helping me repent and receive his grace newly. Although I have a long way to go, Jesus has

been growing me in his grace branch by branch, leaf by leaf and fruit by fruit. I look forward to becoming a fully mature tree that is can be a blessing to many.

In this passage, Peter concludes his letter to the churches with five exhortations on how to live with eternal perspective, which are about: personal morality, relational integrity, understanding God's patience, being stable in Christ, and growing in grace. The fifth exhortation is like a hidden gem, a secret of Christian living. We should remember and grow in Jesus' grace, and we should also grow in knowledge/understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The two go hand-in-hand and keep our Christian life in balance. There is truly no better lifestyle than growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. God wants us to live a godly life because our reward in heaven is great but also because it makes life on earth rich and beautiful! That is life to the full. May God help each of us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.