



TOPIC: IT'S TIME TO GROW UP

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, . . . but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen

~2 Peter 3:17-18 (NKJV)~

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INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

Do you remember the first day you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into your life to become your savior and Lord? What an exciting time that must have been. When I think about the day I accepted the Lord as my savior, it was as if everything in life had become new. I was in my late twenties and had lived long enough to experience life to the point that I knew it had to be something better than what I had experienced. Unfortunately, all my efforts to find the something better proved to only bring more longing for the something better. It wasn't until the Lord allowed my paths to cross a woman on the job who was saved and witnessing about the goodness of the Lord that I realized the something better I had longed for was in the Lord.

What an eye opening life fulfilling moment it was for me to finally, for the first time in my life, feel internally complete. This is not to suggest in any way that every life need was met for me or that I could stop searching and pursuing my dreams and aspirations. It was that the inner feeling and longing for something better began to dissipate as the revelation of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ began to expand. The more I gave myself to seeking after the Lord, the more I found myself growing in the grace (*favor*) and knowledge of the Lord.

What I've come to learn is that we, as children of God (Christians) will only receive from the Lord what we seek from the Lord. Jesus made this point clear when sharing with His disciples.

Matthew 7:7 (NLT)

Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

The reason some people seem to never grow up in the Lord is because they have not given themselves to seeking, asking nor knocking for the knowledge of the Lord. Our spiritual growth does not happen like our natural growth does. Natural growth (bodily; physically; mentally) will happen just by our life existence. The more we live naturally, the more we will be grow. Our hair grows gray; our teeth grow less; our eyes grow dim; our walk grows slow. On the hand our spiritual growth can only occur as we actively pursue the spiritual things of God. While we did nothing to secure our salvation and redeem our broken relationship with God the Father, we must do something to grow in the Lord.

OUR STUDY

Our study text is taken from the second epistle of the apostle Peter. In his second writing, Peter begins in chapter one with letting us know that he is speaking to those who, like himself, have obtained faith through

the righteousness of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ. He is speaking to the redeemed of the Lord who are in right relationship with the Lord and are in position to continue in faith growing in their knowledge of the Lord. Peter then tells us in verse 3 of chapter one that we have no excuse not to grow because through God's divine power we have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness that will be realized as we grow in our knowledge of the Lord.

It's Time to Grow Up...

2 Peter 3:17-18 (NLT)

17. *You already know these things, dear friends. So be on guard; then you will not be carried away by the errors of those wicked people and lose your own secure footing.*
18. *Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen*

Here in this text, the apostle Peter speaks to a people who have already come into an initial knowledge of the Lord and what it means to serve him. Peter encourages us that we must continue in our pursuit while focusing on three facets: *Guarding, Growing, Glorifying*. There is a progression between the three facets. If we guard ourselves from spiritual error, we will not fall from (be carried away) our own steadfastness and thus will grow in our relationship (knowledge) with Christ. And if we grow in Christ, we will glorify the Father with our life, which is our chief purpose.

Guard from spiritual error.

The New Testament is clear in identifying the deceitfulness of the enemy who infiltrates the church with false biblical teachers who attempt to deceptively lead God's people away from the truth. Peter has spent chapter 2 and a good part of chapter 3 of this second letter warning about these false teachers. In chapter 2, Peter calls them out for who and what they are.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (MSG)

- 1-3 *But there were also lying prophets among the people then, just as there will be lying religious teachers among you. They'll smuggle in destructive divisions, pitting you against each other—biting the hand of the One who gave them a chance to have their lives back! They've put themselves on a fast downhill slide to destruction, but not before they recruit a crowd of mixed-up followers who can't tell right from wrong.*
- 2-3 *They give the way of truth a bad name. They're only out for themselves. They'll say anything, anything, that sounds good to exploit you. They won't, of course, get by with it. They'll come to a bad end, for God has never just stood by and let that kind of thing go on.*

Peter's prognosis is that in the church there will be these untaught, unstable, and unprincipled (or "lawless") men who distort scripture to support their immoral lifestyles. In other words, they used the Bible, but they either cited things out of context or used only the verses that seemed to support their perverted point of view, ignoring the verses that confronted their sin. Some of the largest churches in America are led by men mixing truth and error in subtle, destructive ways. One rule to test them by is, if a man never confronts sin, he is not preaching the Word of God. Nothing protects us from spiritual error more than the unadulterated truth of God's Holy Word. So, Peter warns us to guard ourselves against this spiritual error. Our life in Christ and our relationship with Him and the Father is too critical to leave exposed to destruction. In telling us to guard this precious and priceless life and relationship, Peter says we are to give all diligence to watch over it in order to protect it from those who seek it to their own lust and

our own destruction. Being on guard will keep us from being tossed around by every wind of doctrine (*cf.*, *Eph 4:14*) and will enable us to grow.

Grow in grace and knowledge.

Lets consider several truths about growth in general before we look at what it means to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. ***Growth depends on life.*** This is just as true spiritually as it is physically. We must be born before we can grow. The Bible teaches that we all enter the world spiritually dead (*cf.*, *Eph 2:1-3*). Being religious or moral is not enough. Jesus told the religious and moral Nicodemus that unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God (*cf.*, *John 3:3*). Without new life from God, Christianity becomes moralism. Genuine Christianity is the reality of the life of God in the soul of man.
2. ***Growth is a necessity, not an option.*** The Christian life is like riding a bike: if you aren't moving forward, you'll fall off. To maintain your steadfastness, you must be growing. If a child is not growing, he has a serious health problem. Growth is normal when there is life. But, unlike children, when it comes to the spiritual life, growth doesn't end. As children who have grown, we will reach, for example, a shoe size where our feet will stop growing; we will reach a height or stature where we will remain for the remainder of our life. As Christians, we must keep growing until the day we meet Jesus Christ. We never reach the place where we can say, "I've arrived!" Paul made this point clear after walking with the Lord some 25 years in his writing to the Philippian church.

Philippians 3:12-14 (MSG)

I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where god is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

3. ***Growth is gradual, not instantaneous.*** No one expects growth to be instantaneous being fully developed the moment we are saved. Even Jesus started out as a baby in this world. It takes more than a day, a week, or even a few years for one to move from being an infant baby to a fully grown adult. Maturity takes time to grow and develop. You wouldn't expect a new baby fresh home from the hospital to be able to head to the kitchen to fix his/her own meal. Now, you can and quite frankly should be able to expect an 18 year old to fix his/her own meal. However, you can't expect the 18 year old to have the wisdom and maturity of a 60 year old. What we are saying is that growth is a process that takes time. You must put in the time in order to reach the goal.
4. ***Growth is difficult, not easy.*** There's a saying that we crawl before we can walk. Spiritual growth occurs in the same way. There are some lessons that we only learn by trial and error. We can expect to sometimes fall flat on our face but we mustn't stay down. We have to get back up and try again. Don't let discouragement speak in your ear. The most successful people will tell that their success came after several bouts with failure. It is through our failures that we finally learn the lesson. While growth may not be easy, it does get easier as we use our failures to learn and grow from.

What it means to grow in grace. Remember grace is the key to a relationship with God because He both saves us by His grace (*cf.*, *Eph 2:8*) and sustains us by grace (*cf.*, *2 Cor 12:9*). How do we grow in the grace which comes from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Growing in grace involves coming to a greater

understanding of God's holiness, justice, and sovereignty, which also makes us see more of our own rebellion, selfishness, and pride. We see more and more of how unworthy we were to be the object of God's saving grace, and yet we also see more and more of how great His undeserved love and favor were that drew us to Himself. The more we draw unto God, the more we in turn will grow in grace and knowledge of God. This is because the more we come into the knowledge of who God truly is and just how much he loves and cares for us, the more obedient we will become in serving Him.

To Him be Glory.

Peter ends with a doxology "To Him be the glory, both now and forever. Amen". This is as clear of a statement of God's deity as there could be. God is the Supreme Being and Creator of all. To glorify Him means that we are to acknowledge the greatness and splendor of His Majesty through honor, worship and praise of which He alone is worthy because He is God of all.

As we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, our lives will begin to model the life of Christ. The attributes of who God is and the power of His deliverance will become a reality in the who we have become and are becoming. From this new us will usher the greatest witness to the world of the life changing and sustaining power of the work and life of God's Holy Spirit in the life of surrendered man.

There is no effort or work on our part to glorify God separate from our work on growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. Giving God glory will be the by-product of our growing in Him. How wonderful it is for those who knew us before we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior and can bear witness or testify about our old man and his deeds who now we have the blessed opportunity to live a new life before them that shines light upon our Savior. I'm sure when they ask us of our new life and how did it happen, our response will be just like the man Jesus healed of his blindness who told the people "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (*cf., John 9:25*); our response will be "One thing I know, I once was dead but now I'm alive".

CONCLUSION

Spiritual growth is the process of becoming more mature in one's relationship with Jesus Christ. Someone who is growing spiritually will become more and more like Christ. The spiritually mature will be able to "distinguish good from evil" (*cf. Heb 5:14*). Spiritual growth begins the moment a person comes to faith in Christ and should continue until a person enters Christ's presence after this life.

Spiritual growth is expected of every believer in Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews reprimands his readers for no longer trying to understand and being still in their infancy. He tells his readers that it is time to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. This is what the apostle Peter means when he says "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ". As we have shared, spiritual growth is not easy nor is it instantaneously. Growth is not easy because it involves a killing or mortifying of the deeds of the flesh and we must understand that the flesh will not die without putting up resistance. Although we were immediately in sin the moment we breathed our first breath, we were shaped in iniquity and this shaped has occurred from our birth until the day we repented of our sin and began to live in the newness of life through Christ. For some, it may have been 20 years, for some it may have been 30 years or even 40 years for others. Regardless of the years, the growing process will involve us coming to grips with our old self and submitting our self unto the working power of the Holy Ghost through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ's power in the believer that gives us the ability to grow spiritually. As we rely on His power and follow His teachings through obedience, we can and will develop greater spiritual

maturity. I admonish you, my brother and sister to give the earnest diligence to seek after the living God; devote yourself to growing in grace and in your knowledge of the Lord. The reward will be a life matured and jointly fit together with the Lord living out the child of God you were born to be.

God's peace and blessing be upon you....

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