

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 7, 2020 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

WHAT TO KNOW TO ...

BE ALERT!

A STUDY IN 2 PETER

BE DILIGENT!
2 Peter 3:10-18

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ¹⁵and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸but 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 3:11-18 (NKJV)

REVIEW AND REMINDERS

It's been a while since we were in the book of 2 Peter, so just in the way of review and to try to catch us up and get us back on track I want to give you these reminders about the book of 2 Peter in the way of review and to just sort of refresh our memory of what is going in this important book.

5 Important Background Information Facts for the Book of 2 Peter:

- 1. The author of the book of 2 Peter is the APOSTLE PETER, the head and lead spokesman for Jesus' twelve disciples** - The New Testament had four different names for Peter: Simeon (the Hebrew for Peter's original name, Acts 15:14, 2 Peter 1:1), Simon (the Greek name for Simeon applied 49 times in the New Testament), Cephas (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic

word for rock [אֲבִיבָה קηφᾶς]; this is used to play off of πέτρα), Peter (Πέτρος) the leader and spokesman for the early disciples. This is how he is addressed in the greeting emphasizing his authority to speak. The early New Testament Church almost exclusively regarded Peter as the author of the letter. And of course there is the internal evidence supporting Peter's authorship, the letter claims to be from "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1), the writer claims to be the readers "fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed" (1 Peter 5:1), the writer identifies "Silas" (Silvanus) as one who helped him to write the letter (1 Peter 5:12; see also Acts 15:22 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the writer also sends greetings from Mark (1 Peter 5:13; see Acts 12:12).

2. **The book of 2 Peter (like Paul's letter to the Galatians) is actually a **LETTER**, meant to be circulated to multiple early New Testament churches and believers** - Peter is a letter written in normal epistle form and style. The rhetorical and didactic nature of the letter may mean that it was intended to be read aloud to the congregations. It is best to see this letter as a circular type of letter much like Peter's first letter in its present form which was directed to all the churches in the areas mentioned in northern Asia minor in 1 Peter.
3. **The recipient of Peter's second letter were the same recipients of Peter's earlier letter (1 Peter), a group of mostly **GENTILE BELIEVERS/CHRISTIANS** who were now living throughout the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor** – This area would be what is today, Turkey. Peter says nothing directly in the salutation to specifically name the recipients of this letter. But according to 2 Peter 3:1-2, "*Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),² that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of^[a] us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior...*" Peter was writing another epistle to the same people to whom he wrote 1 Peter. In his first letter, he spelled out that he was writing "to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). These provinces were located in an area of Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were mostly Gentiles.
4. **2 Peter is believed to have been written around **AD 67-68**, just before Peter death** – Tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were victims of persecution under Nero at Rome after the disastrous fire in the city of Rome on July 19 of AD 64. Peter's first letter (1 Peter) was written just after the burning of Rome as persecution broke out against Christians and they were literally scattered across the New Testament world, particularly into the area of Asia Minor. 2 Peter was written sometime later toward the end of Peter's life as he himself faced persecution and martyrdom at the hands of Nero. Consensus is that Peter wrote this second letter from prison in Rome, where he was facing imminent death. Nero died in AD 68, and tradition says that Peter died by crucifixion (upside down) prior to Nero's death. That would put the writing of the letter sometime in AD 67-68 just before his death.
5. **The purpose of 2 Peter was to warn these first century Christians of **FALSE TEACHERS** who had infiltrated churches in the area of Asia Minor** - Unlike his first letter, written to encourage Christians being persecuted and scatter under Nero's brutal and tyrannical rule, 2 Peter was written to warn against and alert these vulnerable believers to the dangers of false religions and false professors that could undermine their own faith and sabotage the early church already reeling from these terrible times of persecution. Since the time of the writing and sending of his first letter, Peter had become increasingly concerned about false teachers who were infiltrating the churches in Asia Mino. Though these false teachers had already caused trouble, Peter expected that their heretical doctrines and immoral life-styles would result in more damage in the

future. Thus Peter, in an almost last will and testament, wrote to warn the beloved believers in Christ about the doctrinal dangers they were facing. Second Peter was written for the purpose of exposing, thwarting, and defeating the invasion of false teachers into the church. Peter intended to instruct Christians in how to defend themselves against these false teachers and their deceptive lies. Dr. John MacArthur calls 2 Peter, “This book is the most graphic and penetrating exposé of false teachers in Scripture, comparable only to Jude.” The description of the false teachers is somewhat generic. Peter does not identify some specific false religion, cult, or system of teaching. If anybody in the early church knew the importance of being alert, it had to be the Apostle Peter. Remember he had a tendency in his early years to feel overconfident when danger was near and to overlook the Master’s warnings.

With that somewhat brief reminder and background on this great little book, we want to look at Peter’s closing words to these believers who had encountered so many challenges and difficulties in their own walk and life... perhaps not unlike our own in our day, at least in some ways. Peter gives some great encouragements and exhortations to the believers on how to live in the “last days” and in the midst of false teaching and error. This is a needed word in our day. His basic word to them, and a timely one for us is “Be diligent!” The title of our study! And, oh how we need Christians... believers who are “diligent.” In our day.

Let look at Peter’s closing words in this great letter in 2 Peter 3:10-18 **(READ: 2 Peter 3:10-18)**

What is the purpose of prophetic truth? Think of all the reactions to prophesy today: fear, confusion, speculation, obsession, occupation and even preoccupation... What is the purpose of prophetic truth?

Dr. Warren Wiersbe says (and I like this and think he is right on with this), “The purpose of prophetic truth is not speculation but motivation.”

What do you think Wiersbe means by that? (allow time for response)

The purpose of prophetic truth is not speculation (conjecture, theory, guesswork, opinion) but motivation (inspiration, drive, stimulus, to spur us on); so Peter concluded his letter with the kind of practical admonition that all of us need as believers and that all of us must heed... put into practice. *Now listen, close to what I’m going to say... “It is unfortunate when people run from one prophetic conference to another, filling their notebooks, marking their Bibles, drawing their charts, and yet not living their lives to the glory of the One who is coming again... God.”* In fact, some “Christians” battle one another more over prophetic interpretation than perhaps over any other subject.

Truths genuine believers hold in common concerning prophesy:

(1) **True believers all believe that the “day of the Lord” is a certainty** – It will happen! Peter says it in our passage in verses 10, *¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.* Notice, not “might” but “will.” It’s a

certainty, not matter what mode of interpretation of prophesy or what prophesy teacher you subscribe to.

- (2) **True believers all believe that Jesus Christ is coming again** – One sure event in “the day of the Lord” will be the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all, as believers, agree with that. Listen folks, all true believers believe that Jesus Christ is coming again. They may differ in their views on when certain promised events will occur, but they all agree that He is returning as He promised.
- (3) **True believers all believe that the certainty of His coming and future glory ought to inform and form our faith now** - All Christians agree that this faith in future glory ought to motivate the church. As one preacher put it, “I’ve moved off the Planning Committee and joined the Welcoming Committee!” That doesn’t mean that we should stop study God’s Word that deals with His coming, or that every opposing viewpoint is a correct one, which is an impossibility by the way. But it does mean that, whatever view one holds, it ought to make a difference in our lives now... how we live now, how we treat other now, how we witness now. You get it?

Given all of this “Be diligent!” is the admonition that best summarizes what Peter wrote in this closing paragraph... and in his second letter. This in a way best summarizes what he saying to us in this letter... even in our day. “Be diligent!” He has actually used this word before:

Peter’s Encouragement to Be Diligent in 2 Peter:

- (1) **2 Peter 1:5** - “⁵But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge.”
- (2) **2 Peter 1:10** - “¹⁰Therefore, brethren (Christian), be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.”
- (3) **2 Peter 1:15** - “¹⁵Moreover I will be careful [same Greek word translated as “be diligent”] to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.”
- (4) **2 Peter 3:14** - “¹⁴Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”

Interestingly, notice that Peter begins and ends this letter with the exhortation and encouragement to believer to “diligence.” Why? Now think about this for a minute... “*Why do you think Peter would write to these believers this exhortation and strong encouragement to be ‘diligent’... who were displaced because of having endured the hardship of persecution (1 Peter) and now (2 Peter) were being confronted with heresy and false teaching in their midst?*” (allow time for response) “*Why would his word to be them be ‘be diligent’?*”

How might this apply to us in our day? Be specific! (allow time for response)

Every Christian should aim at finishing well. Diligence in steadfastness and perseverance are huge themes in the New Testament. I want to jump to one example that Peter certainly would have been heavily influenced by during this time with Jesus, from one of Jesus’ parables and His teaching.

READ: Luke 8:4-15, The Parable of the Sower

- *One of the strong lessons from Jesus’ parable of the sower is that it’s easy to begin well.*
- *The seed on the rocky ground sprang up quickly.*

- *The seed on the thorny ground seemed to be doing well for a while.*
- *But neither of them persevered to bring forth fruit.*
- *Only the seed on the good soil bore fruit with perseverance (Luke 8:15).*

In the context of persecution, false prophets, and lawlessness, Jesus said, in **Matthew 24:13**, *“But the one who endures to the end, shall be saved.”*

Given this, what do you think Peter is after in this second letter of his, when he keep reminding these believers (particularly these believers) to “be diligent”?

Peter cites Paul as an example. Notice **verses 15-16**, *“¹⁵ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”*

Probably no other Christian in history can match the accomplishments of the apostle Paul. Yet when he neared the end of his life, he did not mention his many accomplishments, but rather his perseverance. Paul said in **2 Timothy 4:7**, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”* In his letters, he often emphasizes the need for steadfastness, especially when we encounter trials (1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9; Col. 1:11, 23).

The author of Hebrews also repeatedly emphasizes the need to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1; see, also 2:1; 3:6, 12, 14; 4:14; 10:36).

The Book of Revelation promises the victor’s crown to the overcomers, who persevere (Rev. 2:10-11, 17, 19, 25; 3:5, 10-12, 21).

As Peter finishes his final epistle, concerned about the false teachers that were plaguing the churches, he wants his readers to persevere in all diligence. And so he repeats the themes that he has emphasized throughout the letter, warning of the danger of the false teachers and exhorting us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. And he closes with these words. I want us to focus on the last two verses really this evening and here the good and so very important word he has for these believers in his day, but for us today also. Notice his words in verses 17-18 of our passage. Peter writes, *“¹⁷ You therefore, beloved (speaking to Christians, you and I), since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”*

HOW TO “BE DILIGENT” IN YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE (especially in “last days” living)

Peter gives us three essentials for diligence and perseverance in the faith in our passage:

3 Essentials for Diligence and Perseverance in the Christian Life:

1. **To be diligent and persevere as a Christian, guard yourself from spiritual error** (2 Peter 3:17) – Notice, again, what Peter writes in **verse 17**, *“¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with*

the error of the wicked.” The New Testament is clear that the enemy deceitfully infiltrates the church with false teachers who sound biblical, but deceptively lead God’s people away from the truth into destructive heresies. *Let me ask you, “Is this the case today?” Can you cite any examples?* Jesus warned us in Matthew 24:24, *“For false Christ and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”* And Paul would warn young Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”*

Peter has spent chapter 2 and a good part of chapter 3 warning about these men. In verse 16 of our passage, he refers to them as *“the untaught and unstable”* (in contrast to the steadfast), who distorted the Scriptures to their own destruction. So, now in verse 17 Peter warns, *“¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.”*

“Steadfastness” is a Greek noun used only here in the New Testament. But Jesus used the verb when He predicted Peter’s denials and then said (Luke 22:32), *“...when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”* Simon Peter, who had been so unstable, was changed by God’s grace into a rock of steadfastness, so that now he is concerned that others be steadfast in the Lord. *“You”* (*“You therefore...”*) is emphatic, standing in contrast to the false teachers. By telling his readers that they know this (how the false teachers operate) beforehand, Peter is using the principle of reminder and repetition that he has followed earlier in the letter (1:12-15; 3:1-2).

He is saying that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. We get our word “prognosis” from the Greek word translated *“beforehand.”* A prognosis enables you to get ready so that some predicted danger will not catch you unaware. If a doctor says, “If you do not lose some weight, you run a high risk of contracting diabetes,” he’s telling you in advance so that you can take corrective action to prevent the disease. 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.

What are some of the deceptive errors and destructive heresies that may be being preached and taught in our church today? (legalism, liberalism, prosperity gospel,

7 Deceptive and Destructive Errors/Heresies To Beware of in the Church Today:

- (1) *Salvation by faith **plus works** - Some proponents (groups) of this to beware of could be Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, liberal Protestantism, Church of Christ, Mormonism, (so called) Jehovah’s Witnesses (note; all cults promote this false teaching)*
- (2) *Baptismal **regeneration** (and/or infant baptism) - Some proponents (groups) of this to beware of could be Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, some Presbyterian groups, Church of Christ, some Pentecostal groups*
- (3) *Loss of **salvation** (eternal insecurity, falling from grace) - Some proponents (groups) of this to beware of could be Roman Catholicism, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Church of Christ, most Pentecostals, all of the cults*

- (4) **Repentance-less Gospel** (not calling sin, sin) - *Some proponents (groups) of this to beware of could be those embracing more liberal theology such as some Methodist churches, some Presbyterian churches, some Lutheran churches, some Baptist churches, some Non-Denominational churches, etc.*
- (5) **Universalism** – Universalism is a liberal, religious tradition that teaches that every person will be saved, regardless of repentance. It says there are many paths to God and that all religions are valid paths to God and salvation. Universalism rejects the existence of Hell. Universalists also reject the miraculous aspects of traditional Christianity as running contrary to modern knowledge. They reject the divinity of Jesus, instead, considers Jesus to have been a great man whose life and teaching are worthy of imitation. It a broadly inclusive movement consisting of atheists, agnostics, humanists, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and more. Unitarian Universalists pride themselves in serving as a strong voice for social justice and liberal religion. The denomination promotes gender equality and racial and cultural diversity. It also promotes sexual diversity and has affirmed the rights of bisexuals, gays, lesbians, and transgender people, including ordaining gay and lesbian clergy and affirming same-sex marriage. *Some proponents (groups) of this to beware of are The Unitarian Church, The Church of Christ Scientist, the Unity Church of Christianity, other groups that may advocate some Universalist theology today are American Baptist, Anglican, Dutch Reformed, Mennonite, Methodist, and some Presbyterian groups... and that list is growing.*
- (6) **Post-modern emergent movement** - The post-modern emergent church movement is little more than “old fashioned” modernism, which is a close spiritual relative to atheism. In all of these philosophies, the Bible is discarded for the humanist fashions of the times. For example: The atheist denies creation (as described in Genesis), the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Christ. The modernist allows for some form of God, but denies the same doctrines – atheistic evolution has been replaced with theistic evolution, which also denies the God of the Bible. The post-modernist may allow for the possibility of creation or evolution, virgin or non-virgin birth, a physical or non-physical resurrection, but the “truth” is not important – in fact, it’s anathema to the post-modern to allow that “truth” exists. While some emergents profess the Gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, they also affirm that salvation is available in other belief systems. So let’s lump them all in the same bin of unbelief. *Some proponents of these ideas to beware of are Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball (Vintage Faith Church), Tony Jones, Erwin McManus (Mosaic), Doug Pagitt (Solomon’s Porch), Donald Miller*
- (7) **Health, Wealth and Prosperity gospel movement** – The prosperity gospel (also known as the “health and wealth gospel” or by its most popular brand, the “Word of Faith” movement) is a perversion of the gospel of Jesus that claims that God rewards increases in faith with increases in health and/or wealth. As Stephen Hunt explains, “In the forefront is the doctrine of the assurance of “divine” physical health and prosperity through faith. In short, this means that “health and wealth” are the automatic divine right of all Bible-believing Christians and may be procreated by faith as part of the package of salvation, since the Atonement of Christ includes not just the removal of sin, but also the removal of sickness and poverty.” *Some proponents of these ideas to beware of are Joel Osteen, Leroy Thompson, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Benny Hinn, T.D. Jakes*

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 (2 Tim. 4:1-2).
- Let's face it: the Bible has some hard teachings that confront the popular ideas of every culture.
- It's not popular to say that we all are born in sin, hopelessly lost, unable and unwilling to come to God for salvation.
- It's much more flattering to human pride to say that while we all mess up once in a while, we're really not so bad as to deserve hell.
- Hell itself is not a popular topic.
- It's not popular to teach that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that those from other religions, no matter how sincere, will not go to heaven unless they repent and trust in Christ alone.
- It's not popular to teach that we must repent of our sins and submit to Christ as absolute Lord and Master.
- It's much more palatable to teach that grace means that God winks at our sin and that Jesus is there to help us reach our full potential.
- I've been accused of being legalistic and not understanding grace because I teach that we must obey Jesus Christ.
- It's not popular and soon may be criminal to teach that homosexual behavior is sinful.

Now here is where the rubber meet the road... it's one thing to say guard yourself from spiritual error, it's quite another to know how to do that... how to guard yourself from spiritual error.

3 Helps for Guarding Yourself From Spiritual Error Today:

- (1) Be **grounded** in the **Word of God** for yourself through careful and diligent study and use
- (2) Be **connected** to a good New Testament Church where the truth of God's Word is **preached** and **taught** with authority and in truth and power
- (3) Be **discerning** and think critically of what is being preached and taught today under the **guise of Christianity**

2. To be diligent and persevere as a Christian, **grow** in the **grace** and **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18a) – Notice Peter's words again in verses 17-18... pay particular attention to the first part of verse 18... look at it, *¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*"

Being on guard will keep you from being tossed around by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14) and will enable you to grow. We need to 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.

4 Important Truths About Growth in General:

- (1) **Growth depends on life** - This is just as true spiritually as it is physically. You must be born before you can grow. The Bible teaches that we all enter the world spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-

3). Being religious or moral is not enough. Jesus told the religious, moral Pharisee, Nicodemus (John 3:3), *“Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* God alone can impart new life. Without new life from God, Christianity becomes moralism. Genuine Christianity is a matter of what Henry Scougal called, “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. We must keep growing until the day when we meet Jesus Christ. After more than 25 years as a Christian, the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13-14, *“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* We never reach the place where we can say, “I've arrived!”
- (3) **Growth is gradual, not instantaneous** - Even Jesus started out in this world as a baby. No one moves from being a baby to an adult in a day, a week, or even a few years. It takes time to mature and develop. You don't bring a baby home from the hospital and say, “There's the refrigerator, kid. The bathroom is down the hall. Take care of yourself!” You don't expect a baby to do what a 20-year-old can do, nor do you expect a 20-year-old to have the maturity of a 60-year-old. Growth is a process. The important thing is to be involved in the process so that there is progress. Growth is gradual, not instantaneous.
- (4) **Growth is difficult, not easy** - You've got to crawl before you walk and once you get the hang of walking, you still fall down a lot. And spiritual growth is the same way. There are a lot of tough lessons that you only learn by trial and error. Sometimes you fall flat on your face. You have to get up and keep trying again. Sometimes you get over-confident, thinking, “I've finally learned that lesson!” Then you fail and the Lord shows you that you haven't learned it yet.

With those general lessons, let's consider specifically what it means to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... what Peter is telling us about growing

2 Keys to Christian Growth: (2 things Peter tells us about growth in our life as believers)

- (1) **Grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** - Grace is the key to a relationship with God because He both saves us by His grace (Eph. 2:8) and sustains us by grace (2 Cor. 12:9). But grace is opposed to every human way of approaching God, and so we have to be on guard constantly so that we do not lapse into a merit system with God. The world operates on the merit system. All of the world's religions, including some that are labeled “Christian,” operate on the merit or works system. They say, “You get into heaven based on what you have done.” The merit system rewards our achievement and feeds our pride. But grace is opposed to the merit system. Grace means undeserved favor. We deserve God's wrath, but He blesses us apart from our works. Under grace, we do not work to earn heaven, but we freely receive all that God has provided for us at Christ's expense. Paul explains in Romans 4:4-5, *“Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”* Under grace, God gets all the credit and human pride is humbled. How do we grow in the grace which comes from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? The overall principle

is, *“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Peter 5:5). Growing in grace involves coming to a greater understanding of God’s holiness, justice, and sovereignty, which also makes you see more of your own rebellion, selfishness, and pride. You see more and more of how unworthy you were to be the object of God’s saving grace, and yet you also see more and more of how great His undeserved love and favor were that drew you to Himself. C. H. Spurgeon explained it this way, *“If you, dear friend, would be truly humble, you must look at your Savior, for then you will say, Alas! And did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I? You will never feel yourself such a worm as when, by faith, you see your Savior dying for you; you will never know your own nothingness so well as when you see your Savior’s greatness. When you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you will be sure to grow in humility.”*

Martyn Lloyd-Jones affirms the same thing, *“Personally I can be certain I am growing in grace if I have an increasing sense of my own sinfulness and my own unworthiness; if I see more and more the blackness of my own heart.”* To grow in grace, you must esteem yourself *less*, but esteem Christ more!

(2) **Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** - For the third time in this letter, Peter refers to Jesus as *“our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (1:11; 2:20). You cannot separate Jesus Christ as Savior from Jesus Christ as Lord. When you trust in Christ as Savior, you yield all of yourself that you know to all of Christ that you know. The Christian life is a matter of increasingly growing in submission to Christ as through God’s Word you see more of who He is and more of who you are. The knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes from Christ as we grow in obedience to Him. Jesus said in John 14:21, *“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who love Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”* Such knowledge of Christ includes both facts about Him (as revealed in Scripture) and knowing Him personally. You need both. Michael Green explains, *“Knowledge of Christ and knowledge about Christ are, if they keep pace with one another, both the safeguard against heresy and apostasy and also the means of growth in grace.”* Knowledge about Christ keeps you from the many errors of the false teaching there are out there that deny the deity of Jesus Christ. But Christ is not just a subject to be studied; He also is a person to be known. We should be growing to know Him personally on a deeper and deeper level as we spend frequent time with Him in His Word and in prayer. So Peter tells us that to persevere as a Christian, we must guard ourselves from spiritual error and grow in the grace and knowledge of Him. Finally,

(1) **3. To persevere as a Christian, live to glorify Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18b)** – Notice, one more, Peter words at the end of this letter in verse 18, *“¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”* Peter ends with a *doxology* right there at the end of verse 18, *“...To Him be the glory, both now and forever. Amen.”* This is as clear of a statement of Christ’s deity as there could be. God will not share His glory with anyone (Isa. 42:8; 48:11), and yet Peter ascribes glory to Jesus Christ. Clearly, Jesus Christ is God. The overarching theme of the Christian life is to glorify the triune God in everything. This means that our aim in growing in grace is not so that we can feel happier or more fulfilled or more significant. Rather, our lives should exalt Christ, so that through us others may

see how great He truly is. “He must increase, but I must decrease” as John says in John 3:30. He alone is worthy! When is He to be glorified? Both now and to the day of eternity. We begin now! We should praise and exalt Him in all that we do, both on Sundays when we gather for worship and throughout the week as we think often on His great love and sacrifice that saved us from God’s wrath. And then, when we are with Him in heaven when He comes, we will gather around the throne and sing, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:12)! Glorify Him both now and unto the day of eternity!

CONCLUSION

Guarding, growing, and glorifying! There is a progression between the three terms.

3 Corresponding Results of Being Diligent in Your Christian Walk:

1. If you guard yourself from spiritual error, you will not **fall** from your own steadfastness
2. If you don’t fall from your steadfastness, you will **grow** in your relationship with Christ
3. If you grow in Christ, you will **glorify** Him with your life, which is your chief purpose

At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the last of the marathon runners were being carried off the field to first aid stations about an hour after the winner had crossed the finish line. Just a few spectators remained in the stands when they suddenly heard the sound of sirens and police whistles. All eyes turned to the gate to see John Stephen Akhwari, wearing the colors of Tanzania, limping into the stadium. His leg was bloodied and bandaged from a bad fall. He hobbled around the track past the finish line as the crowd rose and applauded as if he were the winner.

Someone later asked him why he had not quit, in view of his injury and the fact that he had no chance of winning a medal. He replied, “My country did not send me 7,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it.” (From, *Leadership*, Spring, 1992, p. 49.)

Christ didn’t give His life for you just to start the Christian life. He gave His life so that you would finish it and finish it well. You will do so if you guard yourself from spiritual error, grow in the grace and knowledge of Him, and live to glorify His name.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. *What are some of the subtle spiritual errors of our day that we need to be on guard against?*
2. *How can we know if we’re growing spiritually? What are some biblical tests for growth?*
3. *Many today confuse grace with being tolerant of sin. What biblical texts refute this? What does grace really mean?*
4. *What is the difference between knowing about Christ and knowing Christ? Can you have one without the other?*