

## Text: 2 Pt 3.17-18

Last January, we concluded our study of 2 Peter. Today I want to return to the last two verses for the day. I am calling our theme for today:

### Personal Discipleship Sunday

Both the morning and afternoon messages will come from this text and focus on our own spiritual growth in the coming year.

This morning our title is **Growing in Grace**

One of my favorite guest speakers at BJU when I was a student was Dr. Ed Nelson, longtime pastor in Denver, Colorado, but through his life an evangelist and church planter. He planted his last church in Arizona when he was in his eighties. He is now with the Lord, a very godly man who took an interest in people. I only met him a few times, but once he knew you, he seemed to remember you.

Dr. Nelson wrote a Discipleship book that he called, "Growing in Grace" after this passage. I always think of him when I come to 2 Pt 3.18.

When we come to the new year, we tend to reflect on the past and think towards the future, even though it is really just another turn of the planet on its axis and nothing has really changed. Psychologically, though, we seem to think of the New Year as something new and fresh. (We are weird like that.)

In recent years, I've taken the occasion to speak about personal discipleship and especially Bible reading. This year is no exception. I decided to make this the theme for both our morning and afternoon messages.

For the morning then, we will talk about growing in grace.

What does that mean?

We are familiar with growing up: that means growing out of your clothes before you wear them out, and in theory means becoming a mature adult.

(Some people seem to struggle with that last, and have an extended period of adolescence, but really, that is just "some people" and not "us" ... right?)

But seriously, what does it mean to grow in grace?

That will be our theme for today.

Read 2 Pt 3.14-18, text 17-18

**Proposition:** The progress of the Christian life is a progress in grace, learning to live in dependence on God so that you look more and more like Jesus Christ.

## I. In Contrast with Being Carried Away

### A. Verse 17 mentions unprincipled men

1. Ever present through history: full of error
2. We might focus on these men and blame them for spiritual weakness
3. The issue isn't these men, but our hearts: *don't be carried away with their error.*

### B. The Bible gives us ample warning against error

1. The danger is known in advance (*proginōskontes*)
2. The source of advance warning
  - a. The repetitive examples in the OT (1 Cor 10.6)

1 Cor 10.6 ¶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

- b. The considerable warnings of the prophets and apostles (3.2)
  - c. Peter's own words in this epistle (ch. 2-3)
3. Our reaction to warnings: *often distaste!*

Notice how I've described chapter 2: "the gruesome chapter"

### C. The danger is being overwhelmed with error

1. The image of being "carried away" is the imagery of being overtaken in a flood
2. When you read chapter 2, you are flooded with error
  - a. Bad doctrine
  - b. Bad behaviour
  - c. Bad men

The reaction is repulsion, and "I'd never be like that"

### 3. To extend the metaphor

- a. The first signs of a flood aren't overflowed banks
- b. The first signs are rising water
- c. A little error can lead to a lot of error

A word from Spurgeon:

"I know some who have said, 'Really, it does not matter what we believe, so long as we are right on the main point.' But it does matter, for those who neglect any of Christ's words shall fall little by little. Every truth is a diamond of untold value. I do not know whether there is such a thing as an unimportant truth. Somewhere or other, near to it, there may lie certain consequences that we are unaware of. Truth being neglected, an error may fill its place, and that error may become pregnant with mischief from generation to generation. It is an ill time for the Church of Christ when it begins to walk blindfolded, or when it even desires to neglect any of the precepts or the doctrines that Christ has left behind Him. Moses was to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him on the mountain, and Ezekiel was to remind the people of his day of the exact pattern of the house of the Lord, and we need constantly to be put in mind of all that makes up the palace of truth where Christ dwells."<sup>1</sup>

- The doctrine of baptismal regeneration crept into the church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. At first it was an error, but it eventually dominated a wide swath of the church and is the official teaching of the Roman church today.

### 4. The opposite of growing in grace is being carried away in error

- a. Christian growth isn't automatic

---

<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, *2 Peter*, 2 Pt 3.17.

b. Christians can and do sin, sometimes grievously

Peter: “beloved, be on your guard”

## II. In Progress towards Knowing Christ

A. Growth opposes falling away: this is the other side of the story

“Continuing spiritual growth is the effective safeguard against falling.”<sup>2</sup>

1. No article in the Greek: lit. “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord”
2. That means he could be talking about one thing or two separate things (I tend to think two things)

B. Growing in grace

1. This goes back to the beginning of the epistle
  - a. Grace brings salvation (1.1)
  - b. Peter desires the multiplication of grace to the readers (1.2)
  - c. Through grace, we have everything we need to grow in godliness (1.3-4)
2. Growing in grace addresses our will: imperative
  - a. Our tendency to guard our lives by law
    - 1) Though we don’t like rules, we tend to ask for rules

Consider the OT Israelites: God gave them the Law

- The most spiritual Israelites saw beyond the rules to the grace of God and developed deep relationships with God (the Psalmists, for example)
- Many Israelites relied on rule keeping, if it would prosper them (but chafed at external discipline, as everyone does)

---

<sup>2</sup> Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, 177.

- Israelite rebellion to the rules brought God's judgement, leading up to Babylonian captivity
- After the captivity, the Pharisees arose, making law-keeping the focus of their zeal (Orthodox Jews to this day are the heirs of the Pharisees)

b. New Testament Christians often reduce Christian living to rules

- 1) NT epistles often have a balance of theology and application
  - a) You could call this "teaching" and "rules"
  - b) Ephesians, Galatians, prime examples
- 2) Over time, Christians have compiled their own lists of "do's and don'ts" (a point of criticism by many, believers and unbelievers)

The problem is that grace never develops by law. We still should obey the imperatives of the Bible, but we need grace more than law.

c. Growth in grace comes by dependence on God, even when we don't understand everything

- 1) We accept Christ by depending on him and the grace offered on the cross
- 2) We grow in grace by depending on him in the decisions of daily life

Do you have trouble with your temper? You need to yield to God, trust that he will solve your problems, don't try to win by the force of your own wrath.

C. Growing in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour

1. As mentioned, I see "grow in grace and knowledge" as two separate but related things
  - a. I grow in grace by depending on my Lord and Saviour
  - b. I grow in knowledge by studying my Lord and Saviour
  - c. And the more I know about my Lord, the more I want to be like my Lord, and try to live like him: thereby growing in grace

2. Early in the book Peter says the way we find grace multiplied is “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (1.2)
  - a. We learn what Jesus is like, we imitate him
  - b. We learn how the “Jesus-life” should operate: we follow the path
  - c. We go through experiences that put our knowledge under a test: it shows itself strong
  - d. We develop the fruit of the Spirit (or the virtues in Peter’s language) and enjoy the blessing of exercising it in our life

Growing in grace involves surrendering our will to him.

Growing in knowledge involves filling our minds and ways with him.

### III. By the Use of Spiritual Means

- A. Talking about knowledge, what means does the Lord give us?
  1. Our Bibles
  2. Our Churches
  3. Our Personal Devotional life
- B. The power of these means is that though we don’t see visible growth, the more we exercise them, the more we grow
  1. We grow to know our Lord more by reading our Bibles
  2. We grow to know our Lord more through Christian fellowship (the church body, very vital)
  3. We grow to know our Lord more through personal communion with him – very important

All of these things help us experience God’s grace, and when trials come, we are ready to face them, steadfast in grace

- C. The annual spiritual challenge
  1. Bible reading schedules
    - a. Three from the Navigators
      - 1) 5x5x5: Read the New Testament in a year

- 2) Book at a Time: Work steadily through one book at a time (with a “poetry” reading as well, that includes Isaiah)
  - 3) Daily Bible Reading Plan: four readings from four areas of Scripture, takes you through whole Bible (my choice last year)
- b. Our own Chronological Bible Reading schedule
- 1) New format this year, roughly 26 readings a month
  - 2) Not tied to a specific date of the month
  - 3) Allows for taking most Sundays off (church schedule can interfere with reading)
- c. NEW! Beginners Bible Reading schedule
- 1) About 1/3 to 1/2 a chapter a day
  - 2) Keys in on important NT books as well as selected Psalms and Proverbs
  - 3) Includes a Chronological Christmas reading in December
2. Bible reading journal
- a. I did this for many years, then laid it aside (don’t remember why)
  - b. I found that I became sporadic — my Bible reading was often inconsistent and I got way behind
  - c. Picked up daily journaling:
    - 1) Date
    - 2) Reading
    - 3) One thought I noticed in my reading
  - d. Makes me accountable to myself
3. Church participation
- a. You need **the fellowship** of the local church to grow spiritually
  - b. You need **service** in the local church to grow spiritually

Do you regularly think about how to help someone else grow in the Lord? Even just by cultivating friendships?

c. Challenge:

- 1) How often to you attend church services each week?
- 2) Why don't you commit to one more service than you are currently doing, thinking of others and yourself?

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** The progress of the Christian life is a progress in grace, learning to live in dependence on God so that you look more and more like Jesus Christ.

There are many things we need to think about in our Christian lives. There are some things we need to change as we apply the Scriptures to our lives.

But the most important thing is to grow in grace. That only happens by applying yourself to the means God offers to help you grow.