

## Week 13 - The Closing: Guard, Grow, Glorify - 2Peter 3:17-18

### Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:9-14

#### Introduction

This morning, we come to the end of Peter's second letter

Peter has said what he had to say to his readers, so in the typical form of Greek letters in his day, he closes with a final exhortation and a closing benediction

In this relatively brief letter, Peter has reminded his readers of many things that they already knew as he warned them to be wary of the false teachers in their midst

He intended to stir them to action as he reminded them of the promises of God that are theirs through Christ and encouraged them to continue in godliness as they waited for the return of Christ

Then, in chapter two, Peter turned his attention to the false teachers as he took pains to describe them so that his readers would readily recognize them

In the remainder of the body of the letter, Peter showed that what was happening had been foretold and, therefore, was another indication that the prophecy concerning the Lord's return would indeed occur

And he instructed them concerning God's apparent delay in sending his Son and how they should live in the interim

Now, after a brief aside to show the solidarity he had with the apostle Paul, he turns to his final words which he begins with the word "therefore" indicating a conclusion is being drawn from what came before

While salvation is a one-time event, it is just the beginning of a new life that proceeds from that moment of new birth

And while the believer's sins are forgiven, and God declares the believer to be judicially perfect, God still desires for each believer to continue to progress in spiritual maturity

No true follower of Christ should be content to stand still - to not advance in their spiritual life

So Peter's closing instructions have just as much relevance for us today as they did for his original readers as he gives three essential elements to continuing to progress in the faith

In these final two verses Peter says we must **always be guarding** ourselves against error, **always be growing** in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and **always be glorifying** him with our lives

Please open your Bible to 2Peter 3 and follow along as I read verses 17-18 [2Peter 3:17-18]

*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. 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.*

#### I. Always be guarding

I'm sure you are familiar with the old saying: "Forewarned is forearmed," which means that awareness of a situation prepares one to deal with it

Peter grounds his final block of thought by saying, "*knowing this beforehand*"

Once again, Peter is simply reminding his readers of what they already know and what they already know are the truths that Peter has just reminded them of and, specifically, the danger posed by the false teachers

That there will be those who twist the Scriptures to support their misdeeds and that a person can be destroyed by twisting the Scriptures

The Greek word behind the phrase "take care" means to watch, guard, or defend

And Peter's primary interest is that his readers use what they know to put them into a watchful state - to cause them to be on their guard so that they won't be carried away by error

The truth is constantly under attack, and knowing that gives us an advantage because we can be on guard against those attacks

Paul warned his protégé, Timothy, in **1Timothy 6:20** to “*guard the deposit entrusted to you*” and in **2Timothy 1:14** to “*guard the good deposit entrusted to you*”

In the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, the same word is used in reference to the garrison of a city guarding it against an attack from without

We see this directly in **Proverbs 4:23** where we read:

*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*

That illustrates the guarding that Peter wants his readers to undertake to protect their hearts from error

We must always be on guard against error

The problem Peter deals with here is not just a doctrinal problem - it's also a social problem

It's a normal human desire to want to fit in and to be accepted, and we can easily be carried away by the opinion of others

We saw this in the case of Barnabas in Antioch

Remember, Barnabas was the nickname of a man named Joseph, who vouched for the recently converted Paul

Barnabas means “son of encouragement,” which tells us a great deal about his character

Still, in **Galatians 2:13**, we read how Barnabas was carried away into error when he followed the lead of Peter and the rest of the Jews in distancing themselves from the Gentile believers

It's easy, too easy, to be “carried away” with error even when those who lead us astray aren't necessarily evil people, and anyone can find that they have lost their bearings if they let down their guard

But Peter is most concerned here with those he calls “lawless” using the same word that we see translated as “wicked” in 2:7 [**2Peter 2:7**] when he spoke of the men of Sodom

The sin of the false teachers isn't exactly the same as the men in Sodom; however, they refuse to subject themselves to God's moral law and are therefore foreshadowed by those who did evil in that ancient city

Their teaching is not only false but it is deceptive and designed to lead people to wander from the path of righteousness so as to lead them into destruction

Paul warns of this kind of danger in **Ephesians 4:14** where he writes about no longer being “*carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*”

And he contrasts that kind of teaching with his message in **1Thessalonians 2:3** saying, “*Our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive*”

Having clearly described the nature of the false teachers and their message, Peter warns his readers to be on guard against them

His desire is that his readers stay firmly established in the teaching that is founded on the prophetic and apostolic word and not follow after the deceptive and corrupting error of the false teachers, lose their stability, and fall into ruin

Once a person is saved they cannot lose their salvation

However, we must always be guarding our hearts and minds so that we aren't duped by the allure of false doctrines and lose our stability and commitment to God's revealed truth and its control in our lives

Next, Peter reveals another antidote against apostasy for a Christ-follower is to always be growing

## II. Always be growing

Look with me at the beginning of verse 18 again [**2Peter 3:18a**] where Peter writes:

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Remember, “But” indicates a contrast and what Peter is contrasting here is losing one’s stability

Anyone who has ever ridden a motorcycle will tell you that you are most in danger of falling when you are not moving forward

In fact, the faster you are moving the more stable the motorcycle becomes but balancing a stopped motorcycle and keeping it upright is a very difficult thing to do

The same thing is true with the life of a Christ-follower - if you are standing still you are in danger of falling

The Bible has a lot to say about spiritual growth and one thing it tells us is that growth isn’t automatic

A Christ-follower doesn’t measure their growth by years and being a Christ-follower for a long time doesn’t guarantee spiritual maturity

The author of Hebrews laments this fact in **Hebrews 5:11-13** where he writes:

*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.*

It’s possible to be a Christ-follower for years and still be a spiritual baby because spiritual growth requires intention

And Peter doesn’t suggest that spiritual growth is only for the newcomer to the faith

Rather, he indicates that it is for every believer at all times - making forward progress in spiritual growth is to be the lifestyle of a Christ-follower

Let’s look back for a moment to the first chapter of this same letter and a passage we studied ten weeks ago, **2Peter 1:5-11**

*For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. **For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, **for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.** For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Note what Peter says there in verse 8 - that word “increasing” means always increasing - and that’s for life

And then in verse 10 he says this kind of lifestyle of ever increasing in spiritual maturity mean “you will never fall”

However, in our present verse, Peter’s focus is on increasing in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” which suggests continually making advances in experiencing the benefits of salvation

Grace is a concept that we often downplay - not with our words so much but in practical ways

We know that grace is an unmerited gift that is freely given - it’s not deserved and cannot be earned

And we readily state that salvation is by grace and most of us have accepted the gift of salvation with eagerness and thankfulness

But that’s about where many of us stop as we then begin to expect things as our rightful due

We have the tendency to begin to believe that we are really good people at heart so good things should come our way  
 And even if we aren't exactly "good" all the time that since we do things for God, he should reward us  
 But in reality, grace is the conduit by which God does everything for us - God owes us nothing  
 But because of his grace he freely bestows his gifts to us and everything we receive is by God's grace alone  
 The Lord's brother, James, writes in **James 1:17** that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father  
 And the Father bestows those good and perfect gifts through the work of his Son by grace  
 We start our Christian life by grace, we walk each day by grace, and when we reach the finish line of this life, our spirits ascend into the presence of God by grace

Since Peter commands that his readers continue to grow in grace and knowledge we know that our human will has a part to play in our growth

Spiritual growth is the work of God and it too is a grace gift, Paul makes this clear in **1Corinthians 3:7** where he writes that it's God who gives the increase

But spiritual growth isn't a process that simply happens without our involvement

The principle of sowing and reaping we find in **Galatians 6:7** is in effect when it comes to spiritual growth and we are often our worst enemies as we erect barriers to our growth

Growing requires nourishment and yet we neglect to feed on God's Word

Growing requires hydration and yet we neglect to drink from the Fountain of Life through prayer

Growing requires a good environment and yet we immerse ourselves in the toxicity of the world

And so on

So while we are not responsible for the growth itself, we are responsible for removing hindrances to our growth and actively cultivating the conditions permit and promote growth

Notice also that the growth we are to experience concerns our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

When I was a High School student, I devised an experiment for a biology class to determine what caused a plant to grow upward

Was it because the plant grew toward the light or was it because the plant grew away from the pull of gravity

And through my experiment I discovered that it seemed to be a combination of the two as even a plant kept in darkness tended to turn away from the earth but a plant also grew toward a strong light

I bring that up because Peter's command specifies a direction for our growth as he says safety and stability are found in growing toward Jesus Christ

When it comes to stability we've seen that speed matters

But what Peter shows is that the direction of growth makes the speed of growth pale in significance and while we are more stable when we are growing, that is only true when we are growing in the right direction

Not all movement is progress but growing in knowledge of Jesus - and that's not merely intellectual or theoretical knowledge by the way but personal knowledge - is the best antidote to apostasy

So, we need to always be guarding against error and we need to be always growing toward Christ and next Peter says we need to always be glorifying the Lord with our lives

### III. Always be glorifying

Peter closes his letter with this doxology to Jesus [**2Peter 3:18b**]

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

A doxology is a common way to close a letter in the New Testament so it isn't unusual for Peter to do so

What makes this doxology somewhat unusual is, whereas most doxologies are written to God the Father, this one is directed to the Son

Paul writes a doxology to Jesus in **2Timothy 4:18** as he closes that letter

The author of Hebrews also does likewise in **Hebrews 13:21**

And the book of Revelation contains a doxology to Jesus as it opens in **Revelation 1:5-6**

Otherwise, all of the doxologies we find are directed to the Father

Peter's inclusion of the doxology to Jesus serves to bracket the beginning of the letter as he ascribed the titles of "God" and "Savior" and "Lord" which are all titles of divinity

And this is significant because God the Father doesn't share his glory with anyone as we read in **Isaiah 42:8** where God said through the prophet:

*I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.*

Peter didn't carelessly write what he wrote

Remember, he had been present on the Mount of Transfiguration when he heard God the Father bestow honor and glory to the Son

Here Peter likewise assigns Jesus "glory" which means ultimate honor

And the honor he ascribes is both now and to the day of eternity - which means forever

But we want to focus for the moment on the "now" and notice that it's by our lives that we ascribe glory to Jesus

The glory of our Lord and Savior should be the motivation of our lives

Our goal in guarding ourselves from error and growing in grace shouldn't be to attain some sort of personal fulfillment or even the stability that Peter mentions

We strive to remain on the path of truth and to grow in Christ-likeness to avoid straying and falling and bringing shame to his name and to exalt him before the world

I often remind you that eternal life has two aspects

We tend to focus on its length and the fact that it never ends; but eternal life is also a quality of life

And though we don't enjoy it perfectly yet while we are sojourning on this earth, our eternal life has already begun

Do you know what we will be doing in eternity?

Look with me at **Revelation 5:11-13** where John writes of his apocalyptic vision:

*Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,*

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*

*And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,*

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"*

Imagine being gathered around the throne of Jesus singing his praises with the angels

And then ask yourself why not start now and glorify Jesus not only when you are gathered together with your fellow believers in a worship service but every moment of every day by how you live

## **Conclusion**

Salvation isn't the end of the matter for a Christ-follower

If it were then God could transport us to be at home with him as soon as we accepted his gift of grace

No, the moment of salvation is the beginning of a life-long process

And the road we travel is most often filled with danger as the world, the enemy, and our sinful flesh conspire to knock us off track

That's why there are so many mentions of the necessity of perseverance in the New Testament

Paul writes about finishing his race and keeping the faith and fighting the good fight

There is divine beauty in finishing well

That's why Peter wrote the two letters that bear his name

The first to remind us that we aren't home yet but are sojourners and exiles in a foreign land as he gives practical instruction as to how to live while we are here

And this second letter to remind us of the dangers we face so that we can be on guard against them and continue to grow toward Christ and thereby bring him the glory he is due both now and forever

Let's pray

**Colossians 1:9-14 (page 983)**

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.