

Ending Well – Pt. 3
2 Peter 3:18 (09/28/14)
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“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.” 2 Peter 3:18

He was the most famous man in America in the 1740s. He sailed from England to the American colonies seven times and preached up and down the eastern sea coast. Multitudes dropped their plows and hammers and galloped at full speed through the dusty roads to hear him. He is regarded as the greatest preacher since the apostle Paul. He preached to 20,000 people on the Boston Commons, more than the population of Boston at that time. He is regarded as one of the key influences in preparing the colonists to break from the tyranny of England.

This year is the 300th anniversary of George Whitefield’s birth, December 16, 1714. He died on September 30, 1770, at age 55. The day before he died, though very ill, he preached for two hours in a field in Massachusetts on the subject “Examine Yourselves, Whether Ye Be in the Faith.” They said it was the best he ever preached. He retired that evening to a pastor’s home and as he was climbing the stairs to a bedroom, people flocked to the door to hear him again. On the staircase landing he stood holding a candle and preached Christ until that candle burned itself out and died away. He went to his room, struggled through the night, expired around 6 AM Sunday morning, and went to be with the One he so loved and preached so effectively for many years. George Whitefield ended well. So did Peter.

Jesus told Peter in John 21:18-19 that someone would take him where he didn’t want to go and that he would glorify God in his death. And he did. According to tradition, he was crucified upside down in Rome for his Savior. Peter ended well. However you and I go out, in a blaze of glory or a flickering flame, we want to end well living faithfully for Christ. That was Peter’s great concern in this letter. In chapter 3:14-17 Peter has challenged us to stay fired up and diligent, stay on mission, and stay in the Word. It’s the only way to grow and have discernment. Peter has warned us well to be on high alert for false religions, false teachers, and false teaching.

Now Peter’s last counsel to you and me in verse 18 is this: Keep on growing in grace and knowledge of Christ and bring Him glory now right up to the day of eternity! Let’s unpack this verse this morning, a verse saturated with absolute, essential truth for our lives. Last week we pointed out that this word “grow” is a present, active, imperative. It is a command to be actively growing now. God expects His children to grow. We should be growing, we need to be growing, we must be growing if we are born again and have the life of God in us. When stuff stops growing it starts to rot and stink.

Life is for growing. We love to watch stuff grow. Many of you have those growth charts on your walls, recording every new one-half inch those young guys achieve. Remember those clay heads with grooves in the skull? You soak that head with water, push grass seed down into those grooves, and very shortly you’re raising a nice crop of green hair shooting straight up. Life is for growing and Peter ends his letter urging us to keep on growing in three key, vitally connected areas.

FIRST, YOU NEED TO KEEP ON GROWING IN YOUR GRASP OF THE GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Grow in grace. Not the grace, but grace. The emphasis is on the quality of grace. And what an amazing word “grace” is. This one syllable word captures all God does for and in us sinners through Christ that we don’t deserve. God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. Everything God has done for us He has done for us by His grace. “O the love that drew salvation’s plan, O the grace that brought it down to man, O the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!” Grace is how God channels His love to sinners. Your Bible is the Book of Grace! Thomas Watson said that grace is the beauty of the Christian life.

Cautions about growing in grace:

Make sure as your years go by you are growing in grace, not in legalism or just morality or self-righteousness or stubbornness or snarkiness or pride or irritability or frustration.

Growing in grace doesn't automatically happen over time. Some believers grow more in a few months than other believers who have been saved for decades. Some believers are like flies when they emerge from the pupae; they never grow any bigger.

Growing in grace is not the same as religious feelings. We aren't saved by our feelings and we don't grow by our feelings. You may not feel very good. In fact, you may feel pretty miserable, but God may be growing you through that trial!

Growing in grace is not the same as activity. Being busy with all kinds of religious things and even serving in the church will not cause you to grow in grace. However, if you are growing in grace, you will be serving. But activity and growing are not the same.

How you grow in grace:

Growing in grace means grasping and understanding more and more of the sovereignty of God in bringing His love and mercy and saving work into your life. Grace begins with God and ends with God. He chose you by grace, even though you deserved His judgment. You cannot get to heaven on your own merits, religious or otherwise. God justified, adopted, redeemed, and forgave you by His grace. Grow in grasping that. God's grace humbles us, assures us, strengthens us, preserves us, and transforms us. Grow and flourish in grasping these grace truths in your heart and live on them. When you sin you repent and return by God's grace, to God's forgiving grace, and realize God has not cast you out. Let guilt drive you to grace, drive you to His forgiveness. You came in by grace and God will keep you in by grace. Romans 3:24, "being justified freely by His grace."

The sufficiency of grace:

Marinate your souls in the sufficiency of grace. Grasp this. Live on it. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Jesus told Paul, and all of us, "My grace is sufficient for us, for My power is made perfect in weakness." The sufficiency of grace! Commentator Charles Hodge wrote, "These words should be engraved on the palm of every believer's hand." What is Jesus saying? "All that I am as your Lord and Savior is sufficient for you." You don't get just a little of my grace; you get all you need. John 1:16 says we have received of Christ's fullness, and grace upon grace, grace in place of grace, one wave of sufficient grace after another! Every moment of your life you are given a rich supply of grace. You'll never exhaust it. You always have all Christ's power for all your need. Let this sink into your minds and hearts!

You cannot exaggerate this. This sufficiency of grace is God's answer for every one of your true needs. Every heart and habit issue of your life is resolved right here. All of our biblical counsel points us to Christ and the sufficiency of His grace. God's grace is sufficient for our lust – it teaches and empowers us to true love. God's grace is sufficient for our anger – it teaches and empowers us to practice kindness and patience. God's grace is sufficient for our grumbling, our depression, our doubt, our lack of assurance, our habits of slandering and gossiping and being critical, for our trials and suffering and coming death.

God's grace teaches and empowers us to humble ourselves, to confess our sins, to turn from them, to run after pleasing Christ, to find Christ the delight and joy of our hearts! This is all God's sufficient grace for us! God's grace is God's answer and provision and resource for every human need in this fallen world in these sinful bodies. There is sufficient grace for all our ministries. Paul relished the grace of God. He uses "grace" three times in one short verse about his ministry in 1 Corinthians 15:10 "But by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and His **grace** toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the **grace** of God with me."

No other human theory, religion, therapy, psychology, or counsel can deliver this grace. It comes to you through Jesus Christ. Whether it changes your life depends on whether you have submitted to the Father and by faith embraced the truth of this verse. You cannot exaggerate the power of this verse. Believe

what God says about His grace. This is your identity – you are a sinner saved by grace. Grow in it, walking daily in the growing reality that you are in God’s sufficient grace! Marinate your soul in this grace.

SECOND, YOU NEED TO KEEP VIGOROUSLY GROWING IN KNOWING CHRIST HIMSELF.

Grace always points to Jesus Christ and always leads us to want to know Him more and more. God wants us to flourish spiritually in knowing His Son. The word “knowing” in the Bible often has the idea of intimacy. Adam knew Eve and, boom, they had Cain. Jesus will say to many people, “Depart from Me, I never knew you.” So, grow in knowing Christ intimately, personally, every day.

We have a premarital project called Getting to Really Know Your Future Spouse with 63 questions. You married guys may want to pick up a copy. Of course, that’s what dating is all about, getting to know that person personally. You had a date the other night. Now you are thinking about her, going over and over what she said, what she looked like, what she wore, finding great joy in her gracious and delightful spirit. You want to get to know her better.

Five great truths about Christ

Growing in knowing Christ means pondering and reflecting on Him. You feed on His Word and fill your heart with the great truths of who He really is. Here are five grand truths to fuel your love and devotion and commitment to Him, to give you courage and confidence in living for Him.

- He is God Almighty! John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This Savior and Lord who loved us and saved us in God Almighty, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit in essence. He is just as eternal as God the Father.
- He is the Creator of the universe! John 1:2-3, “All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.” Who created the universe? Christ! He was the Father’s Agent to do the creating! Sorry Mr. Sagan and all your evolutionists, there’s much more there than a Big Bang and the cosmos! Jesus Christ is our Creator and Sustainer.
- Jesus, being God Almighty and Creator of all things, joined us here on earth as a human being. John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw His glory!” Nothing is more startling than the reality of the incarnation of God the Son. Never get over it. From that dot-sized little ovum in Mary’s womb to nine months gestation to birth in Bethlehem, to growing up in a Jewish village, mingling with all those people, then going out teaching and turning water to wine and walking on water and raising people from the dead and talking with a Samaritan gal at the well. If we could just rewind the tape, we could watch Him! Do you grasp the reality of Christ incarnate? Do you ever imagine Him coming to your house, sitting down in your family room, talking with you about your life? Maybe He’ll discuss laying up treasures in heaven or plucking out an eye? Or being the servant that He is, He may wash your laundry. He was and is God in the flesh.
- Then He submitted to the Father’s will and laid down His life on that Roman cross in the place of sinners, bearing the judgment you and I deserved. On that one Roman cross and that one crucifixion He satisfied the wrath of God when He drained the entire bowl of divine wrath against sinners – that’s propitiation. “In my place condemned He stood, hallelujah, what a Savior!”
- He conquered death. They laid Him in a tomb, but death couldn’t hold Him there. After three days He came to life, walked out of that tomb, and spent 40 days on earth giving His band of followers instructions. Then in time and space He ascended up into the clouds to sit at His Father’s right hand. If only iPhones had been invented, we could watch Him literally rise into the air. And He is still at His Father’s right hand serving now as our High Priest and waiting to come back for us and set up His earthly kingdom!

Keep growing in knowing and meditating on your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul’s cry in Philippians 3 is “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.” Christ was Paul’s life, and Christ is your life

if you are a believer. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Christ was Paul's identity. The life you now live in the flesh – in all your relationships, your labors, your marriage, in your singleness, at work, at school, or in your graying days – the life you now live in the flesh you must live by faith. You do this every day by trusting, believing, thanking, and obeying the Son of God, who, above all else, loved you and gave Himself for you! This is all you and I need for now and forever. Feed on and grow vigorously in these great truths about your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

THIRD, YOU NEED TO KEEP GROWING IN GIVING CHRIST ALLA THE GLORY EVERY DAY OF YOUR LIFE. "To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

This is Peter's grand finale. He wants to leave this taste of dazzling glory in our hearts. "To *Him* be glory," not to anyone else. He is not equal to any other human being. He is not just a prophet like Mohammed or even Moses. But to Him, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, be the glory both now and forever. Peter will shortly step off the stage of this world onto the shores of heaven and into the arms of his Lord and Savior!

"To Him be the glory both *now*..." Everything about your life should be to bring Him glory today, here and now, at this moment. How do you glorify Christ every day? You bring Him glory by unashamedly confessing Him before people in your world, maybe quietly in one-on-one sharing about Christ, or maybe out there with a loud speaker to thousands making their way to some sports event. But however you do it, you do it unashamedly. People should know Christ means more to you than anything else. When you struggle with your sin, when you believe the devil's lie that there's more pleasure in sin than in obedience, you glorify Christ by coming to Him in repentance. You confess, repent, and radically change. You focus on pleasing and obeying Him, and give Him all the credit for helping you deal with and overcome your sinful habits and addictions. You pray to Him and ask Him to enable you to walk on that water and keep your eyes on Him. Give yourself to Him and He will rescue you and provide everything you need.

And then, "To Him be the glory...to the day of eternity." Eternity will be one never-ending day, one eternal day! No endless circuit of night and day. Revelation 21:23-25 says, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed."

Peter, what a model you are of how to end well. Just like that candle burning down and dying away for George Whitefield, this day of eternity will be on us before we know. End well by blessing and praising and magnifying Christ's name every day that God gives you in this world, and then you too will join Peter and Paul and Mary (had to say that...Mary, the mother of Jesus) in heaven's glory, worshiping around the throne with all the redeemed forever and ever, crying out, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

But you won't be there unless you submit your heart to Christ in repentance and faith, trusting Him here and now as your Lord and Savior. "As many as received Him, to them God gives the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name." (John 1:13)