

July 3, 2016

Growing in Grace Until the Morning Star Rises

2 Peter 1:5 – 21

Last week we saw that 2 Peter was a letter that emphasizes the awesome truth of God's word in the face of falsehood. Peter is writing both to encourage the believers to grow in the truth, and to expose the lie and the false teachers who promote it. The lie takes many forms but the goal of the lie is always the same, to turn the thoughts and hearts of men from worshipping and serving the very God who created them to worship and serve other things. Peter was moved to write this letter because of an increasing departure from the truth of the gospel in the church, which led to a corresponding decline in righteous living. Peter talks about false teachers who were secretly introducing destructive heresies into the church which was leading to licentious and immoral living and an unbiblical worldview. He's writing to these believers to expose and refute the lies coming into the church; and he's writing to reawaken his readers to the truth of God and motivate them to grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

The first thing he says is faith is initiated and sustained by God Himself. That is our faith is not based on our own goodness or ability, but His, and His own relentless faithfulness to do right. Then he says knowing God is the means through which His grace and peace become powerful and effective in our lives. The power to obtain eternal life and live godly lives is through the knowledge of God. Finally he says, knowing the truth of the Word of God, that is, knowing His precious and magnificent promises which are backed by all the glory and excellence of Himself as the guarantor of those promises, causes us to become sharers of His divine nature, and escape the ruin caused by sin. So the truth of God's word needs to become large and powerful in our lives so that we will become partakers of His divine nature and escape the decay and death that is in the world that has come in through the lie that dresses up everything else other than God Himself, as more desirable.

Then Peter follows this truth up with a command to do something in the next three verses: *5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.* Here Peter makes a connection that you must not miss. He says, 'For this very reason...' What reason? For the reason that God's divine power has given us all things that have to do with eternal life and godly living, **make every effort yourself to be godly.** Or said another way, **Since God has given us the power to be godly, strive to be godly!** In other words, we can work hard at these things because God is hard at work in us. Don't turn it around, though – saying, *We work hard so that God will work in me.* The only reason Peter can give this command is by virtue of God working in us. If He were not at work, we couldn't do it. It is similar to the difference between a child who is uncertain of his or her parents' approval and works hard to win it – and the child who is secure in their parents' love and approval and works hard not to live unworthily of that love. **Here is the point: God is for us, and not against us, with divine power on our behalf. And in the confidence of His love and power, work hard at not living unworthily of His love.**

And living worthily looks like *making every effort* in your walk. 'every effort' is just one word in Greek that means to be eager or earnest in contrast to being apathetic or lazy – and 'making' is a word that means 'to apply it' or 'strive'. So together they mean **be earnest in making an effort in your faith that you say you have, to advance in this Christian life.** You are either advancing or retreating – there is no middle ground. Spiritual life either grows or dies, and believers ought not to be content with coasting. If you are not fighting upstream, you're drifting downstream to destruction. And it is not going to happen by osmosis, either. D.L. Moody once wrote: "I prayed for faith and thought that some day it would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith didn't seem to come. One day I read in Romans that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." I had up to this time, closed my Bible and prayed for faith. Now I opened my Bible and began to study and faith has been growing ever since."¹

1 D.L. Moody, <http://christian-quotes.ochristian.com/D.L.-Moody-Quotes/>

The word of God constantly encourages us to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life.² His word calls us to lay aside every encumbrance and besetting sin that so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race set before us.³ It urges us to press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.⁴ And here in 2 Peter it says, *make every effort to add to your faith*. That is, in the exercise of your faith, initiated and sustained by God Himself, and by His power that works in us, be about the business of making these qualities increase and abound in your life. Some commentators see this list as some kind of spiritual ladder. We start with faith and move up through all the rest until we come to love. I don't think Peter had a ladder in mind here. And I don't think they are listed here in the order in which they ought to appear in our lives. Rather I think they ought to be seen happening simultaneously. That is, as you are applying all diligence in your faith to grow in goodness, be growing in the knowledge of God, and as you are growing in the knowledge of God, be growing in self-control. And don't stop there. Grow in perseverance, and make every effort to grow in godliness and brotherly kindness and above all, love. You can almost hear Peter say, 'Go on – go forward – keep pressing into God – there is more of Him than you can ever hope to discover in this lifetime, let alone eternity – so press on!'

8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the increasing part – If these are yours, and if they are increasing seems to indicate that it is possible to make a start of sorts in this Christian life and then peter out – drift, become complacent and lazy and apathetic. Christians who float never stay in the same place, they head downstream. The evidence that God's power has been poured into you by faith is that you are stroking hard upstream, and making every effort to press into God. The goal is to be neither useless and ineffective, or fruitless in this life. That little word 'ineffective' there in the Greek, *argos*, originally, literally meant out of work. And Peter is saying, 'If you don't grow as a Christian, you're out of work, you're unemployed'. And as you look around in the church today, there seem to be a lot of Christians out of work. They're ineffective and unproductive in the church. They are consumers, not producers. They're not growing.

9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble. What this indicates I think, is that the danger described in verses 8-9, being ineffective and unproductive because you are blind and nearsighted, is not the danger of simply being an unproductive Christian. It is rather the danger that you may not be a Christian at all. When Peter says, *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election...*' I think he is saying that our lack of diligence in advancing in these qualities is one sign that the faith we say we have is not genuine, because those who have genuine faith, those who are among the elect will make every effort. That is, they are advancing in faith and growing in goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. **The confirmation of our election then, is looking more and more like Jesus.**

You see Peter says that those who do not have and grow in these qualities are forgetful. But don't think Peter is saying that they can't remember something. There is a great difference in the way the Bible speaks of forgetfulness and the fact that we can't remember where we put the car keys. If you turn to Isaiah 51 for just a moment, you'll see what I'm talking about. In chapter 51, the Lord is speaking to His people and says, *"I, I am He who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, 13 and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy?"* And the reader of that day would say, 'No that's not right. I would never forget that God is my Maker. I could never forget that God created the heavens and the earth.' To which Isaiah replies, 'If you're afraid of what mortal man can do, then you've effectively forgotten God.' It's a dynamic concept. If you realize who your God really is, how could you ever be frightened of mere men? So forgetting here means not living in the light of the truth you know. So if you are not advancing in your faith, you're not growing in grace, then you're not living in the light of that truth that saved you, if indeed you were saved at all.

2 1 Timothy 6:12,19 ESV

3 Hebrews 12:2 ESV

4 Philippians 3:14 ESV

And then Peter says, if we're making every effort to make our calling and election sure, we won't end up stumbling on the way, or washing out, so to speak, **11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** Literally he says our welcome into the kingdom will be a royal one. This does not mean that entrance, however, is somehow to be earned by doing something. Be careful here. Our diligence is not the means by which we are called and chosen. It is on the other hand, one proof that we have been called and chosen. To make certain about His calling and choosing, and confidence in entering the eternal kingdom is on our side. For His part, God is already certain about those whom He has called and chosen. The evidence of our diligence in these things is to give us hope and assurance in His choosing and great confidence that God is working in us. It means that these things, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love, are the necessary evidence that our belief in God and in the work of His Son is genuine, and they confirm our calling and election; not the other way around.

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. Peter says, 'I am going to remind you, and keep on reminding you, even though you know these things, and were given a foundation in the beginning in these doctrines. It is good for you that I go over and over and over these things.' The Christian walk is not just a matter of learning some doctrines for a test and then moving on. I don't care how you test in these things. What concerns me is how deeply these things get into you and become part of you and transform your thinking.

So for his part, as long as he had breath, Peter was going to keep stirring the saints up by reminding them of the truth of God's word. And apparently, his death was imminent. He says the Lord told him he didn't have much time. The Lord hasn't spoken to me that plainly about my own departure date. Kinda hazy on the particulars. I just know every day is grace and with that in mind, I want to endeavor to be as faithful as I can to carry out the work and the ministry to which God has called me. And it is not about trying to find out something new and profound so that you will be amazed and intrigued and keep coming back. My job is to remind you, Sunday after Sunday of the things you already know, so that you will be stirred and energized to keep on in the faith. The Holy Spirit is the teacher. He will guide you into all truth. He will give you insight. I am simply your reminder.

And Peter is doing exactly that. He's writing to believers who embraced the gospel as it was preached by the generation of disciples that were contemporaries of Jesus. They obviously had heard Peter's preaching before because he tells them: **16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.** They had heard the truth of the gospel from Peter at some point in the past but they were now listening to false teachers, some of whom who were apparently spreading a teaching that denied that Christ would one day return. Peter calls these 'cleverly devised stories'. The word is '**myths**' in Greek and refers to fiction. Peter says, 'The reason I need to remind you again and again of these things is because we're not talking about fiction here – this is the real stuff. Jesus is coming again, in power – and the proof of that is we were eyewitnesses of His first coming and got a sneak peak at His second coming when we saw Him in His majestic, kingly, transfigured splendor on the mountain one day. We saw Jesus with our own eyes, and heard the Father with our own ears. We were there – we saw Him – pay attention here. This is real'

17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." And Peter says, **18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.** Peter was on the mountain with Jesus and James and John, and saw the Lord transformed in front of his eyes, and saw Moses and Elijah there. He saw Jesus talking to them. And everything was lit up. The Bible says that Jesus face shone like the sun and his clothes were white as light. And Peter heard the voice from heaven, as did James and John. So he says, 'We were there – this is real – we are not making this up.' And what he's really saying is, 'We were there, these false teachers were not. Who are you going to believe?'

'But', Peter says, 'We have something more convincing than eyewitnesses. We have the unbreakable, unchangeable, completely trustworthy, word of God'. **19** *We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.* You have to understand that when Peter says 'the prophetic message' he was not referring to one specific prophecy, but rather the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures as he knew them. Furthermore, the English construction here may lead you to believe that Peter was telling his readers that they could believe his message because he was an eyewitness, **and** they also had the word of God to back it up. I'm not fond of the ESV here. It is a bit unclear and misleading. But it is entirely clear in the Greek as to his meaning. Literally it would read this way: '**And we have more sure the prophetic word...**' In other words, as vivid and real and awesome as Peter's eyewitness encounter with the majesty of the transfigured Christ, he says we have something more real, more solid and more sure.

When Ravi Zacharias was ministering in Vietnam in 1971, one of his interpreters was Hien Pham, an energetic young Christian. Ravi says, 'He had worked as a translator with the American forces, and was of immense help both to them and to missionaries such as myself. Hien and I traveled the length of the country and became very close friends before I returned home. We did not know if our paths would ever cross again. Seventeen years later, I received a telephone call. 'Brother Ravi?' the man asked. Immediately I recognized Hien's voice, and he soon told me his story. Shortly after Vietnam fell, Hien was imprisoned on accusations of helping the Americans. His jailers tried to indoctrinate him against democratic ideals and the Christian faith. He was restricted to communist propaganda in French or Vietnamese, and the daily deluge of Marx and Engels began to take its toll. 'Maybe,' he thought, 'I have been lied to. Maybe God does not exist. Maybe the West has deceived me.' So Hien determined that when he awakened the next day, he would not pray anymore or think of his faith.

The next morning, he was assigned the dreaded chore of cleaning the prison latrines. As he cleaned out a tin can overflowing with toilet paper, his eye caught what seemed to be English printed on one piece of paper. He hurriedly grabbed it, washed it, and after his roommates had retired that night, he retrieved the paper and read the words, 'Romans, Chapter 8.' Trembling, he began to read, 'And we know that God works all things together for those who love Him, for those who are called according to His purpose...' Hien wept. He knew His Bible, and knew that there was not a more relevant passage for one on the verge of surrender. He cried out to God, asking forgiveness, for this was to have been the first day that he would not pray. After finding the Scripture, Hien asked the commander if he could clean the latrines regularly, because he discovered that some official was using a Bible as toilet paper. Each day Hien picked up a portion of Scripture, cleaned it off, and added it to his collection of nightly reading. What his tormentors were using for refuse, could not be more treasured to Hien." The deep darkness of his prison was suddenly made light by the word.⁵

The word of God is more real, more solid, more sure than even an eyewitness account. Peter's reply to anyone who would want to question his experience is that 'We have something more sure, more real, than just someone's experience. I've had a convincing experiential proof that the gospel is true, but there's an even more convincing proof. We have the unalterable word of God'. Peter was also saying something that we might miss because we're not Jewish. When someone claimed to have heard a voice from heaven, Jews would call that the 'daughter of the voice', because they believed that the written word of God was the voice of God and the audible voice was only the daughter of the voice. And if they had to choose between the audible voice and the written voice as it were, the written voice always took precedence. Which is why Peter says, '**And we have more sure the prophetic word...**'

Michael Green, in his commentary on 2 Peter and Jude says, "*The Jews always preferred prophecy to the voice from heaven. Indeed they regarded the latter, the bath kol, daughter of the voice, as an inferior substitute for revelation since the days of prophecy had ceased...[Peter] is saying, if you don't believe me, go to the Scripture!*"⁶ And Peter is also saying, "Pay attention to this word of God until two things happen: until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. Don't just skim over the words in this book. Keep at it until the light of understanding breaks in your mind and the morning star of faith arises in your heart.

5 <https://soundfaith.com/sermons/28754-ravi-zacharias-hien-pham>

6 Michael Green, 2 Peter and Jude, (InterVarsity Press, Leicester, England, 1987)

The morning star is a reference to the Lord Jesus found in the book of The Revelation: *'I am the root and offspring of Jesse, the bright morning star.'*⁷ You see, the word of God brings light into our sin-darkened souls. The light of His truth dispels the darkness of the lie. What we need in a sin-darkened world is the light of heaven to dawn. C. H. Spurgeon wrote that *'The Bible is a pure vein of gold...a star without speck, a sun without blot, a light without darkness,...a glory without dimness. O Bible!...This is the book untainted by any error; composed alone of pure, unalloyed, perfect, truth.'*⁸

But Peter is also speaking of something even greater. See what he says, ***'Pay attention to this word, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns...'*** In this sin-darkened world, the word of God comes as a bright shining light. Some translations have it as ***'a lamp shining in a dark place'***. The word of God is a lamp shining. Yes this is the very word of God. But as John McArthur⁹ says, it is only a kind of night light in this dark world. You see, there is the dawning of a new day coming. Right now we live in the dark, illuminated by the lamp, the word of God, with the promise of the morning, Christ the morning star in our hearts. But one day soon, it will be forever day. And the blazing sun of that day will be Christ Himself, and we will have the written prophetic word in person. But until that day comes, we need the Scriptures.

You see, this is the very word of God. It is powerful and living and transforming. It is more sure and real than your experience, because it comes from God and it cannot be twisted to suit your needs. Peter reminds his readers, ***20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*** When Peter says 'prophecy of Scripture' he is talking about all of Scripture in the Old Testament, not just certain sections of what we call prophecy. And by implication this means all of the New Testament Scriptures. Literally he says, 'No prophecy of Scripture comes into being through the will or inclination of the prophet'. Or *"No prophecy of Scripture comes into being, or originates, or arises, or comes into existence from one's own interpretation."* Peter is not talking about how you interpret Scripture, but the source of Scripture. The reason you need to pay attention to this word, the reason you can trust this word, is because it is God breathed, not some man's invention.

He says ***'Men wrote these words as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'***. Don't think this was some kind of automatic writing where they put a pen in their hands and the pen mysteriously moved and words came out. It was men carried along by the Holy Spirit. The word picture here is of a ship that is moved by the wind. In other words, it was as if these prophets raised their spiritual sails and the Holy Spirit blew them along in the direction He chose for them to go and they wrote as they moved along under the power of the Holy Spirit. The thoughts they translated into words were inspired by God Himself. One great implication then is that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own personal whim or bias. It is a warning not to play fast and loose with the word of God. We cannot change the words to suit our assumptions, or to fit our pre-conceived ideas of who God is and what He is like. The meaning of Scripture does not change with the wind or with culture or politics or public morals.

The word of God is the same yesterday – today and forever. ***'For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which was preached to you.'***¹⁰ The word of God is culturally, politically, economically, philosophically, scientifically, morally and every other way – relevant to every culture, in every age, for everyone. This means that you have a decision to make about the word of God. Either you believe as it says, men empowered by the Holy Spirit wrote it, or they did not. And if the former is true, the implications must impact every part of our lives. If God is the author, then this is truth whether you believe it or not. And if this is truth, and you don't accept it, then you are living according to the lie, and instead of eternal life, eternal damnation awaits.

7 Revelation 22:16 ESV

8 C.H. Spurgeon, A Sermon Delivered on Sabbath Evening, March 18, 1855, No. 15.

9 John McArthur, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/61-15/The-Sure-Word-Part-2>

10 1 Peter 1:24-25 NASB

But for those who hold the word of God as truth, and let it dictate life and living, it is a light shining in a dark place. It is life and light and life eternal. It is wholly reliable. It is powerful, working its purpose in our hearts and not returning void to Him who sent it. It is pure like silver refined in a furnace seven times and more desirable than gold. It is sanctifying. It gives life. It is able to make you wise. It fills you with joy and promises great reward. It gives strength to the weary, comfort to the suffering, hope for the hopeless, and salvation to the lost. It is the imperishable, unchangeable, eternal word of God. On June 27, 1819, Adoniram Judson baptized his first convert in Burma. His wife, Ann, described how this convert had responded to the Scripture: "A few days ago I was reading with him Christ's Sermon on the Mount. He was deeply impressed and unusually solemn. **'These words,'** said he, **'take hold on my liver; they make me tremble.'** Oh may the word of God take hold on our liver and cause us to tremble with a holy fear and glorious anticipation. Until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in our hearts.

Our good and gracious Father,

May Your word would break upon us like the sun and the morning star of faith arise in our hearts. Don't let us be dull and unhearing and hardened by the deceitfulness of sin so that we wander in darkness and ignorance of Your great love and mercy. Cause a love for Your word to swell within us so that all other loves dim in comparison to it. May we be those who love Your word, cherish Your word, let Your word guide us, direct us, lead us in paths of righteousness. Oh Christ, You are the great ground and hope of our lives. Grant us we pray, the willingness to do what You have commanded, because we know that in ourselves we cannot muster up the willingness or the effort. Grant us the assurance of our salvation and may the evidence of that flow from our lives in holy living and self-control, perseverance and godliness, brotherly kindness and love, confirming our faith and giving You great glory and honor and praise, we pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.