

A Growth That Endures...



**A verse by
Verse
Exposition
of the
epistle of
2nd Peter**

Ready for His Return 2 Peter 3:14-18 (745)

2 Peter 3:14-18 *Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸ 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.*

In **2 Peter 3:14-18** we have reached the end of the two letters of Peter to the beleaguered churches in Asia Minor. Peter does not close his letter by exhorting these struggling saints to screw down their resolve in order to endure their difficult circumstances. Rather, he supplies them with a panoramic view of the glorious future that awaits all who have rested their hope on Christ. Christ shall

return to receive His own unto Himself (**I Pet. 3:18**). He shall return to secure forever the souls He purchased with His own blood (**I Pet. 1:18-19**). At the same time God will destroy this world (bound in sin as it is) and will create a new heavens and a new earth fit to be the eternal dwelling place of His people. Peter's encouragement to his original readers and to us is to live in light of this glorious future; to live with an eye to the goal of our redemption. Indeed, in **verse 14** he says, **since you look for these things**.

It is this anticipation of future grace that gives energy and shape to our lives in the present. That is, indeed, Peter's point in this final paragraph. **The joyous prospect of Christ's return moves us to the vigorous pursuit of righteousness.** The subject of this big idea, the joyous prospect of Christ's return, grows out of Peter's repetition of the phrase "looking forward" (**3:12, 13, and 14**). The complement of this big idea, moves us to the vigorous pursuit of righteousness, grows out of four imperative verbs Peter uses in this final paragraph – *be diligent* (**3:14**), *bear in mind* (**3:15**), *be on your guard* (**3:17**), and *grow* (**3:18**).

The joyous prospect of Christ's return moves us to the vigorous pursuit of righteousness. Let me illustrate how this works. I am now in my mid-fifties. The seasons of my life have been marked by major events - graduations, a wedding, a career change, a move to Dallas, ordination, and so on. Certainly, however, the births of our children surely rank among the most significant events in my life. Few events in life are anticipated with more joy and excitement than the birth of a child. Julia and I are about to experience what many of you already know – the birth of our first grandchild. Our own daughter's first child is due in late August. Anticipation of this event has fueled an explosion of energy. It is *the* topic of conversation. It has prompted the

rearrangement and redecorating of houses. It has prompted a heightened concern for health. There are financial and schedule adjustments to be made. Julia is already buying baby clothes. Since we don't know what sex the baby is she's having double the fun; buying clothes for a little boy *and* a little girl.

Now, if the arrival of a single baby is the occasion for such activity how much more should the arrival of the Son of God, the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, be an occasion for diligence in preparation? Such anticipation will inevitably impact and shape our lives. One commentary says, "It is the hope of both a new heaven and a new earth that should inspire us and drive us on" (Lucas/Green, p. 148).

For some of us this idea is foreign. The truth is that few souls are gripped by the prospect of a new heavens and new earth. Surely there is a bit of Demas in all of us. In **2 Timothy 4:10** Paul wrote, *for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me*. We have become so attracted *by* this present world, so attached and acclimated *to* this present world, so possessed by affection *for* this present world that we have little capacity for delight in the prospect of future grace.

The joyous prospect of Christ's return moves us to the vigorous pursuit of righteousness. Let's look at the first of the four verbs that I highlighted. *Since you look for these things be diligent.* This, of course, is one of Peter's favorite phrases (**1:5, 10, 15**). In 2 Peter it means *to make all the more effort; to strive*. This is not a call to something new or different. Indeed, we should be continually striving to conform our lives more and more to the Word of God. But Peter's concern in this verse is that we be ready to endure the scrutiny of Christ when He returns as Judge. Remember, the return of Christ is a day of judgment. In

3:7, Peter speaks of *the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*. Peter is concerned about how we shall **be found by Him**.

The idea here is not to live our lives as if we were walking on eggshells, fearful that our eternal destiny or Christ's evaluation of us hangs upon what we happen to be doing at the very moment Christ appears. No man can bear such anxiety. Christ, I believe, would find us maintaining, right up to the end, that relationship of trust and obedience that has marked our lives since our conversion (see Hillyer, p. 220). When Christ returns my hope is that He will find me doing what Christians do, saying what Christians say, thinking what Christians think; quite simply, trusting and obeying Christ.

Now Peter describes the only condition that will pass muster in that day. *To be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless*. These have to do, first of all, with our relationship to God Himself. Certainly Christ would find us at peace with God the Father. It is the peace that comes from God's justice being satisfied and His wrath being appeased; turned back all by the sacrifice of Christ in the place of rebellious and guilty sinners. It is the peace that is the fruit of justification (**Rom. 5:1**). **Spotless and blameless**. Peter is not speaking in absolute terms as if He expects us to have reached some sort of perfect purity. We are those who trust that Christ has lived such a life of perfect obedience for us. Indeed, **I Peter 1:19** says that we were *redeemed by the blood of Christ as of a lamb unblemished and spotless*. My friend, are you at peace with God? Will you be able to lay your head down tonight with the knowledge and assurance that all the demands of God's law have been satisfied as it has to do with you; that your guilt has been removed; that the ugliness of the corruption of your heart has been covered by the beautiful robes of Christ's righteousness.

I think our relationships with men are also embraced in the phrase *in peace, spotless and blameless*. It is no stretch to expect that Christ should find us pursuing reconciliation (peace) with all men. Neither is it a stretch to expect that Christ should find us living lives of moral purity in contrast to the ethics and morals of those who deny Christ. In **2:13**, speaking of the false teachers, Peter calls them *stains and blemishes*. Here in verse 14 he uses the positive form of those very same Greek words – *spotless and blameless*. **The joyous prospect of Christ's return moves us to the vigorous pursuit of righteousness.**

The second verb that describes this pursuit appears in verse 15. **And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation.** Remember the skeptics had suggested that the apparent delay in Christ's return meant that God's promises were unreliable. I can hear Peter now: "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard." He teaches us here that what others consider a delay is actually an expression of **the patience of our Lord**. He says consider, regard, bear in mind, count (**3:9**), understand this **as salvation**. For those of us in the church, those of us who profess Christ, this is no delay but a merciful opportunity to repent and to be sure of our salvation. O, beloved, have you embraced Christ as He is offered in the gospel? Are you prepared to meet your Maker and Judge? Are you prepared to stand before the bar of God's infinite justice? Is your faith mere head knowledge or have you been born again; regenerated by the power of God's Spirit? In His mercy God has given you a window to make your salvation sure; to examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith (**II Cor. 13:5**).

At this point Peter makes a reference to the letters of the Apostle Paul. **Just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him** (that means that Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), **wrote to you**. Follow

carefully. Remember the men who had been disrupting the churches attacked the reliability of God's Word (see **3:4** then **5, 6,** and **7**). Peter wants his readers to understand that what he has written is the consistent apostolic message contained in the Scriptures and is, therefore, trustworthy. Here, he appeals to the apostle Paul to support his view. "The reason for this [appeal] is clear: some if not many of the churches to which [Peter] writes had been founded by Paul and "naturally held in high regard the Pauline letters which they preserved and read" (Bauckham, p. 328).

Verse 16. As also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things. By *all his letters*, Peter probably has in mind one or more of those letters that these people may have read – Galatians, Colossians, and Ephesians. *These things* refers specifically to the patience and longsuffering of God. In **Romans 2:4**, for example, Paul asks, *or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?* **In which** [letters] **are some things hard to understand.** I don't think Peter is saying that the letters of Paul (or Scripture generally) are inherently difficult. Given the rest of the verse I think what he's saying is that proper interpretation of the Word requires careful study and labor - something the false teachers are unable and unwilling to do. **Which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.** False teachers **distort** or twist the Word of God, especially those difficult passages that require instruction and careful study to interpret correctly. They twist the Word to suit their own sinful purposes. Here's the point of this reference to Paul's letters. The battleground between truth and error is always the Word. It has been so ever since the serpent said to Eve, "*Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?*" (**Gen. 3:1**).

Verse 17. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand. What does “this” refer to? Let me simply reword the phrase. *You therefore, beloved, knowing* that the distortion; the twisting of the Word of God is common and can be disastrous, **be on your guard.** Here’s the third verb that describes how we are to prepare for His coming. Now, what exactly are we to guard? What are we to keep watch over? Paul’s words to Timothy in **I Timothy 4:16** help us out. *Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.* In other words, watch your life and watch your doctrine. Putting it another way: pay close attention to what you believe and how you behave. Peter is saying *pay close attention* to your life and doctrine to ensure that both are consistent with the Word of God. Verse 17 is a call to be a **sentinel** over your theology and your life; to always be a **student** of the Bible and theology; to be a **servant** of Christ and others.

Verse 17 is a call to be serious (not casual) about spiritual things. Why? Because if you are not, you run the risk of **being carried away by the error of unprincipled men.** The Greek word for *carried away* means to be “swept along with the crowd.” It’s like being caught up in the crowd as thousands try to leave a stadium at the same time after a big football game - everyone going the same direction; individuals helpless to turn and go against the flow (see Gal. 2:13, Barnabas). And whom do we see leading the way? Who do we see at the head of this mass of people? Not the courageous and holy prophets of the Old Testament. Not the godly and Spirit-filled apostles of the New Testament. Not the faithful evangelists, and teachers, and pastors of church history. Oh no, at the head of this mass of humanity are *untaught, unstable,* and **unprincipled men.** Leading the way are men who are callous to both the laws of nature and of conscience; men who are driven only by the desire to gratify their own sinful lusts; men who “ignore all moral constraints” (Bauckham, p. 337). Peter used the

same term “unprincipled men”, back in **2:7** with reference to the perverted, debauched, corrupted, lecherous men of Sodom.

The tragedy is that this crowd is headed for destruction as surely as the herd of pigs in **Mark 5:13** – *and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.* Beloved, the clear and present danger of embracing error in faith and practice is that **you fall from your own steadfastness**. The same word for “fall” is used of a shipwreck in **Acts 27:26, 29** (*run aground*, NASB). Maybe an appropriate modern idiom would be “crash and burn.” We know that genuine believers are secure in Christ; their eternal inheritance being reserved for them (**1 Pet. 1:4**). But others, who may profess Christ and yet embrace error in doctrine and godlessness in behavior will find themselves in a spiritual freefall. If unchecked by repentance and faith in Christ such spiritual declension will end in actual apostasy – the renunciation of Christ and of one’s profession of faith in Him which has no remedy and from which there is no escape.

But how shall such a disastrous fate be avoided. Is there a prescribed preventative - a safeguard - to such a destiny? **Verse 18. 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.** Here’s the fourth verb: *But grow*. We understand growth. We have seen our children grow up. Twenty-six years ago we carried little Katheryn home from Baptist Hospital in Nashville. If it pleases God, in six months Katheryn will carry her own child home from the hospital. We see plants grow. One of the gifts I gave Julia for our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary was a tree. We planted the “anniversary tree” in our back yard. It is now nearly twenty feet tall. But what does it mean to grow spiritually? The

Greek verb here means “to keep on growing.” One guy said, “Living a Christian life is something like riding a bicycle; if you don’t keep moving, you will quickly lose your balance. There is a measure of safety in momentum” (Roy Irving, *Adult Teaching Guide*, p. 89). So to grow means that we continue to develop, to increase, to advance, to press on, to progress in the things of Christ.

Indeed, we are to **grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord**. We are not those who are standing still. We are not coasting into heaven. We are not resting on what we heard and learned in high school and college. Rather, we are advancing day by day with *our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith* (**Heb. 12:2**) - advancing in our knowledge of the inexhaustible riches and beauty of Christ (**Col. 1:19, 2:9**) advancing in our knowledge of and love for the doctrines of His saving and sustaining grace (**Eph. 1:6-8a**); advancing in obedience to His will as revealed in His Word; advancing in conformity to His character; advancing in imitating His example (**John 13:15**); advancing in love for the brethren (**John 13:34-35**); advancing in reliance upon the promises of God in Christ; advancing in fellowship with Christ (**Phil. 3:10**); advancing in gratitude for our deliverance from sin and its penalty (**Col. 1:12-14**); advancing in dependence upon His all-sufficient grace (**II Cor. 12:9**); advancing in anticipation of His glorious return (**2 Pet. 3:12, 13, 14**).

The joyous prospect of Christ’s return moves us to the vigorous pursuit of righteousness. Christ is the center of it all. Indeed, Peter concludes, **to Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.**

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Big Idea: The joyous _____ of Christ's return moves us to the vigorous _____ of righteousness.

“looking forward” (**3:12, 13, and 14**) ... four verbs Peter uses in this final paragraph – *be diligent (3:14), bear in mind (3:15), be on your guard (3:17), and grow (3:18)*.

Verse 14. *Since you look for these things be diligent (see 1:5, 10, 15) to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.*

In relationship to God ...

It is the peace that comes from God's justice being _____ and His wrath being appeased; _____ by the sacrifice of Christ in the place of rebellious and guilty sinners (see **Rom. 5:1**).

In relationship to men ...

It is no stretch to expect that Christ should find us pursuing _____ (peace) with all men. Neither is it a stretch to expect that Christ should find us living lives of _____ in contrast to the ethics and morals of those who deny Christ.

Note: *In 2:13, speaking of the false teachers, Peter calls them “stains and blemishes.” Here in verse 14 he uses the positive form of those very same Greek words – “spotless and blameless.”*

Verse 15. And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation.

For those of us in the church, those of us who profess Christ, this is no delay but a merciful opportunity to _____ and to be _____ of our salvation.

Peter's reference to the letters of the Apostle Paul in **verses 15 and 16**. Peter wants his readers to understand that what he has written is the _____ apostolic message contained in the Scriptures and is, therefore, _____.

Here's the point of this reference to Paul's letters:

The battleground between truth and error is always the _____.

Verse 17. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand be on your guard.

I Timothy 4:16, *Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.*

In other words, watch your _____ and watch your _____.

Putting it another way: pay close attention to what you _____ and how you _____.

you fall from your own steadfastness. The same word for "fall" is used of a _____ in **Acts 27:26, 29** (*run aground*, NASB). Maybe an appropriate modern idiom would be "crash and burn."

Verse 18. 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.

The Greek verb here means "to keep on growing." So to grow means that we _____ to develop, to increase, to advance, to press on, to _____ in the things of Christ.

Indeed, we are to **grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.**

We are always advancing with *our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith* (**Heb. 12:2**) - advancing in our knowledge of the inexhaustible riches and _____ of Christ (**Col. 1:19, 2:9**) advancing in our knowledge of and love for the _____ of His saving and sustaining grace (**Eph. 1:6-8a**); advancing in _____ to His will as revealed in His Word; advancing in conformity to His character; advancing in imitating His example (**John 13:15**); advancing in _____ for the brethren (**John 13:34-35**); advancing in reliance upon the promises of God in Christ; advancing in fellowship with Christ (**Phil. 3:10**); advancing in _____ for our deliverance from sin and its penalty (**Col. 1:12-14**); advancing in _____ upon His all-sufficient grace (**II Cor. 12:9**); advancing in anticipation of His glorious return (**2 Pet. 3:12, 13, 14**).

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