

“Grow Christian grow but be careful” (11)

We have come to the end of our sermon series of **1+2 Peter**, a series in which I hope you have been challenged in your thinking and understanding of this section of God’s word. I also hope and pray that you have been spiritual nourished throughout this whole series. In **1 Peter** we saw time and time again that the theme was ‘**keep on going especially during times of suffering**’. And we’ve seen so far in **2 Peter** that the theme is very much ‘**watch out but keep on growing**.’

In his **second letter** Peter has gone all out to remind us about many things. In **2 Peter 1:1-4** he reminded us of how precious our faith should be to us. In **2 Peter 1:5-11** he reminded us about the importance of growing spiritually as Christians. In **2 Peter 1:16-21** he reminded us that God’s word is true and sure. As we entered **2 Peter 2** he reminded us by way of warnings to watch out. He reminded us to watch out for false teachers who will lead many faithful Christians away from the truth.

In **2 Peter 3:1-9** Peter reminded us that there will be people who will mock us because Jesus hasn’t returned yet but we shouldn’t give up. And finally the last time we were together Peter reminded us in **2 Peter 3:10-13** that we should be living holy lives especially because we know the Lord is coming back again one day.

And so as Peter draws his letter to a close, it is evident that he is filled with love toward his brethren. Notice that he calls them **beloved** in **2 Peter 3:1+8**. And in our text which we will look at today, he uses this term of endearment twice, once in **2 Peter 3:14** and again in **verse 18**. And it’s with this love which Peter has in his heart for his brethren, he writes his final words. And I say his final words because remember he has already told us in **2 Peter 1:14** that he is about to die and as far as we know Peter didn’t write any other letters after this one.

A young man had a near-death experience that changed him forever. He went horseback riding one day and everything was going fine until the horse started bouncing out of control. He tried with all his might to hang on, but was thrown off. Just when things could not possibly get any worse, his foot became caught in the stirrup. When this happened, he fell head first to the ground. His head continued to bounce harder as the horse would not stop or even slow down. Just as he was giving up hope and losing consciousness the thoughtful Asda manager came out and pulled the plug.

Now I don’t know if that would be classed as a near death experience but death is something which will eventually come to us all. Like we saw a few weeks ago the words of a dying man can be the very thing which will last forever. And as just as the final words of any dying person are significant, we know that they can reveal what is of greatest concern to that person.

So what is Peter concerned about? What is Peter going to write to the very people whom he dearly loved? **2 Peter 3:14** “**Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent to be found in peace, without blemish and blameless in his sight.**”

Now Peter has already used the word **diligence** if you remember, it means earnestness. He used it in **2 Peter 1:5+10** when he was encouraging us to earnestly grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. But here he uses the word **diligence** to encourage us to earnestly look for peace whilst we’re waiting for the Lord’s return.

Let me ask you loved ones, **if Jesus were to come back now, how would he find us?** Or in the words of Jesus Himself when He’s sharing the parable about the persistent widow in **Luke 18**. In **Luke 18:8** Jesus asks, “**When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?**” Peter says when Jesus returns He should find us in peace, without blemish and blameless.

Now when he talks about peace, he can be talking about our relationship with God or he can be talking about our relationship with our fellow man or he can be talking about both. **Proverbs 16:7** “**When the Lord takes pleasure in anyone’s way, he causes their enemies to make peace with them**”. In other words when we as Christians focus on being at peace with God, then God will help us to be at peace with our fellow man.

But let me ask you, **how can any one of us be without blemish and blameless?** Before I became a Christian a friend of mine shared with me something which happened to him one night. He had been out all night drinking and he finally crawled back home around two in the morning. His wife was waiting for him and said, ‘**look at you, you’re absolutely**

drunk.’ To which my friend replied, ‘so what, you’re ugly.’ She asked him what he meant by that and he said, ‘well, at least I’ll be sober in the morning.’

You see loved ones we’ve all got our faults, spots and blemishes but **how on earth can we be without blemish and blameless?** Well loved ones it’s not because of anything we have done but because of what Someone else has done. **Ephesians 5:25-27** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing<sup>3</sup> her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”.

In the eyes of God we are without blemish and blameless only because of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. He was the One who redeemed us from sin through His precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot as **1 Peter 1:18+19** tells us.

When the apostle Paul was giving his résumé in **Philippians 3** he mentions something which is interesting. **Philippians 3:5+6** “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, blameless”.

**Now does this mean that Paul never sinned when he says he was blameless?** No it doesn’t mean that, Paul is saying that when he sinned, he did everything the law required him to do to deal with that sin. In other words he would go to the high priest in the temple like all the Jews would and offer a sacrifice for sin. And in much the same way as Paul, we as Christians today sin and we should do what the Law of Christ asks us to do in order for us to remain without blemish and blameless.

In **1 John 1** we find what we might call the second law of forgiveness. **1 John 1:7-9** “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”.

In other words if we continue to follow God’s ways, if we continue to confess our sins to Him then the blood of Jesus will come to wash us clean. So whilst we’re continually being washed, we’re continually going to be found without blemish and blameless in God’s eyes. The question is, **are we earnestly seeking to walk in God’s way?** Because it’s only as we look forward, can we hope to prepare for what is to come.

**Are you looking forward to the new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells?** Loved ones, if we’re not looking forward, none of us will be found ready when the Lord returns. I understand that this world throws many distractions at us as we travel through it. And if we ever find ourselves being distracted because it seems like the Lord is taking His time in returning, then listen to what Peter has to say next.

**2 Peter 3:15+16** “Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you. As also in all of his letters, speaking in them of these things.” Peter says remember; remember the patience of the Lord is salvation. Peter has already reminded us that time is irrelevant to God in **2 Peter 3:8**. Peter also reminded us in **2 Peter 3:9** that God is patient in His return because He wants others to come to Him in repentance.

Listen to what Paul says in **2 Corinthians 6:1+2** “Working together, we entreat also that you not receive the grace of God in vain, for he says, “At an acceptable time I listened to you, in a day of salvation I helped you.” Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation”.

If you’re not a Christian this morning, then think about this. Every day your alive is an opportunity for you to come to God and receive salvation. Every year that has gone by has been an opportunity for you to come to God in repentance and receive salvation. Today is the day for you to come to Christ in humble obedience. Today is the day for Christians who have or are falling away to come back to their Lord and Saviour.

**Martin Luther once said, ‘The life of Christianity consists of possessive pronouns.’ It is one thing to say, "Christ is a Saviour"; it is quite another thing to say, "He is my Saviour and my Lord."** The devil can say the first; the true Christian alone can say the second. What will Christ be for you, a Saviour or your Saviour? Now it’s interesting that Peter mentions the apostle Paul in these verses.

Now remember that Peter himself took advantage of God's patience for him to repent after he denied Jesus three times. And according to [Galatians 2:11-21](#) we find the apostle Paul rebuking Peter for being a hypocrite. And we can see very clearly that Peter did repent of being a hypocrite by the very fact that he calls Paul his beloved brother in [2 Peter 3:15](#).

[How do you feel when you've been rebuked and told to repent?](#) You know the way some Christians are today, if anyone were to rebuke them, they would leave and go to another congregation and never speak to that person again. Peter clearly held no animosity toward his beloved brother Paul for what may have occurred at Antioch. We need to remember that nobody likes rebuking anyone, but if someone's behaviour is affecting the witness of the church, then something needs to be said.

And so as we remember God's patience in terms of His return we need to be careful what we do with the Scriptures. [2 Peter 3:16](#) "In those, there are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unsettled twist, as they also do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction". Peter says yes there are some of Paul's writings which are hard to understand but don't go twisting the Scriptures to your own destruction.

You know loved ones the Bible can be a great source for much good. James tells us in [James 1:21](#) that the Scriptures can actually "Save your soul". [2 Timothy 3:16+17](#) tells us that "All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work".

[Hebrews 4:12](#) tells us that "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart". So the Scriptures can be a great source of much good but they can also be abused and used to cause a lot of harm.

Loved ones, it's all very well running around with a huge sword ready to do battle, but if you don't know how to handle that sword properly, the chances are you're going to hurt yourself with it. And it's in that way which Peter says twisting the Scriptures can lead to your own destruction. [Now what kind of people does Peter have in mind here?](#) [What kind of people would be most at risk of misusing God's word?](#) I believe first on that list are those who have little knowledge of what the Bible actually says.

Sometimes when we go shopping in Walsall town centre we come across these so called street preachers shouting at the top of their voices about judgement day, trying to scare and intimidate people into becoming what they call Christians. And on occasion we like to stop and get into some kind of discussion with them and very quickly you can tell that their knowledge isn't that great. We had a visitor a few months ago who claimed to be an atheist, he also claimed he had read the Bible but every time he asked a question you could tell that he didn't understand the Bible. Sometimes we have non-Christian friends who try to quote Scripture to us without understanding exactly what it is they are quoting.

The point I'm trying to make is that there are many people out there who arm themselves with a little knowledge of the Bible, and think they are ready to do battle in the spiritual realms. And as someone once said loved ones, 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' Unless someone has studied the context of a passage, it is so easy to misapply it.

The next group of people who have a high risk of twisting the Scriptures are the immature Christians. When you think about a baby when it's born, it doesn't jump out of the womb and start running around. No, that baby can't even stand on its own two feet, that baby can't move anywhere unless mum or dad moves them. Over a period of months, it will possibly begin to crawl around and maybe after a year or so that baby will try to walk on its own.

[But what happens when that baby does try to walk on his own for the first time?](#) It usually falls over, that's what happens. Loved ones, baby Christians often want to run with the Scriptures before they have even learned to walk with the Scriptures. And as a result they end up stumbling over time and time again. And so Peter reminds us that we need to be careful when we're dealing with the Scriptures. Because if we're not careful, we can fall and be led away by the error of those who twist the Scriptures.

[2 Peter 3:17](#) "You therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware, lest being carried away with the error of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness." What Peter says in this one verse is a total summary of what he's been warning us about in [2 Peter 2+3](#).

Peter is telling us that there is a very real danger of falling away. Now remember he told us back in **2 Peter 2:1** that these false teachers who were once true Christians are now denying the Lord who bought them. He told us in **2 Peter 2:15** that these same people have now forsaken the right way and gone astray. And finally he told us in **2 Peter 2:20** that these very same people once escaped the filthy things of the world but are now entangled again in those very things. And as a result they are now in a worse state than they were before they actually became Christians.

We've just seen that those who have little knowledge of the Bible and those who are immature Christians can easily twist the Scriptures to their own destruction. The point I'm trying to make loved ones, is the theme of **2 Peter**, 'Grow Christian grow but be careful because you might fall away from truth'. I'm saying what Peter and other parts of the Bible says, be careful or less you will fall.

And do you remember the best way to help that from happening? **2 Peter 3:18** "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Just as what Peter says in **2 Peter 3:17** is a total summary of what he's been warning us about in **2 Peter 2+3**. What he says here in **2 Peter 3:18** is a total summary of what he is encouraging us to do in **2 Peter 1**.

In **2 Peter 1:1-4** he reminded us of the blessings which come by the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In **2 Peter 1:5-11** he reminded us about how we can grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In **2 Peter 1:12-21** he reminded us that in order for us to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, we constantly need to look at the witness of the apostles and the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures.

In other words Peter is simply saying, if you want to avoid falling away, then simply keep on growing. Grow in the grace of Jesus Christ, by appreciating and living with and in God's unmerited favour. And remember growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ isn't just about intellectual knowledge, it's more than that. Growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ means to live like Jesus lived; behave like Jesus behaved, speak like Jesus spoke. Handle difficult times like Jesus did, trust in our heavenly Father like Jesus did.

So loved ones growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ will not only help us from falling away. But growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ will do something else. And those are the words I want to leave you with today.

Since these are Peter's letters we've been preaching our way through over the past few months, I will leave you, with the last words of a dying man, named Peter. **2 Peter 3:18** "To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen".