

Grow in Grace and in the Knowledge of Our Lord

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord, interpreting the period of time in which we live from the first coming to the second coming of Jesus, and avoiding the misinterpretation of scripture.

Duration: 29:07

Scripture: Psalm 1:1

Topics: "Growing In Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the negative effects of excessive television consumption on individuals. He emphasizes the need for preachers to improve their communication skills to engage with a visually-oriented audience. Despite the prevalence of television and visual media, the preacher affirms the importance of preaching the whole counsel of God, even if it includes difficult concepts. The sermon also highlights the danger of misinterpreting Scripture and the importance of guarding oneself from error. The ultimate goal is for Jesus Christ to be glorified in the lives of believers.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from DesiringGod is available at www.DesiringGod.org 2 Peter 3, 14. Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation.

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men 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.

Well, this morning we take leave of our 10-week stay with 2 Peter, and the last text that we want to look at together is chapter 3, verses 15 to 18. What I'd like to do to begin is mention six brief points that I want to focus on, and then we'll look at them one at a time. First, from verse 15, we should regard the time in

which we live before the Second Coming as a time of salvation.

Second, from verses 15 and 16, the Apostle Paul also taught this, and Peter puts Paul's writings in the same category as he does the inspired scriptures of the Old Testament. Third, from verse 16, the inspiration of Paul's letters nevertheless do not mean that they are all easy to understand. There are some hard things in them to understand.

Fourth, from verse 16, the misinterpretation of scripture can lead to destruction. Fifth, from verses 17 and 18, therefore, guard yourself from error and from destruction by growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Sixth, and finally, the last sentence of the book, the one with which we will leave our friend Peter, the great goal of God in your life and mine is that Jesus Christ be glorified both now and forever.

Let's look at those six things just briefly. First of all, verse 15, count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. Now, that's a continuation of the thought of verse 9. In verse 9, Peter had said that the reason the Lord is waiting to return, the reason he is forbearing and withholding the second coming is that the full number of God's people might be saved, that time might be given for repentance.

Therefore, when Peter says in verse 15, count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation, he's telling us how to interpret the period of time in which we live from the first coming to the second coming of Jesus. The human mind desires very much to have meaning and direction and coherence in history. We want to look at times and see what they mean so that we give, for example, names to periods.

We call them the Dark Ages or the Renaissance or the Enlightenment or the Age of the Industrial Revolution, etc. We give names to them because we want them to have meaning. And in general, as we do that, we key off of man and we give meaning to history in terms of the progress of humanity or the achievements of man.

But there's one group of people in the world who ought to be keying off of God, namely the church, us. We ought to be keying off of God and viewing history the way God views it. And when we do that, what we see in verse 15 is that we are to interpret this time in which we live as a time of salvation.

And that's vastly more important than whether we can assign relative designations of Renaissance or Enlightenment or Industrial Revolution and so on. When we look back from the perspective of eternity on these 2,000 years or so in which we have lived between the first and second coming of the Lord, the relative conditions of man from the Dark Ages to the period of moon landings and television wristwatches are going to be very insignificant in comparison to the one overarching meaning of the time in which we live. Namely, its distinguishing mark is that it is a time when people can be saved.

We will look back with Jesus Christ and the only thing that will stand out as significant is the history of missions and its offshoots in sound doctrine and holy living. And the only biographies that are going to be cherished in the age to come are the lives of the saints. The people who knew that the times in which they lived were the times of salvation.

The Savior has come. His judgment is being postponed. The space in between is the time and the only time in which we can be saved.

When he comes, the time is over and the day of salvation is at an end. And therefore, let us be a church who know the time and who count the forbearance of the Lord as salvation. Second, notice that this is also what Paul taught.

Peter says in verses 15 and 16. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him. Speaking of this, as he does in all his letters, there are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their destruction as they do the other scriptures.

Lumping Paul's letters together with the scriptures. So Peter says, count the forbearance of the Lord as salvation. Paul says in Romans chapter two, verse four, do you presume upon the kindness and forbearance and patience of God? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? In other words, both Peter and Paul taught that the postponement of judgment is precisely designed to give occasion for repentance and to summon people to salvation and repentance.

And then Paul says even more clearly in second Corinthians chapter six, verse two. Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, today is the day of salvation.

It will end, but as long as we are here, it's the day of salvation. So by calling in Paul's support here, Peter shows to the false teachers and to the church that the apostles are united. The false teachers may say there's no second coming of Christ in any physical or glorious sense, but the apostles are united.

He is coming and the delay of his coming has this meaning. It is to create a day of salvation and to extend the occasion of repentance to God's people. When Peter lumps then at the end of those verses, when he lumps Paul's letters together with the other scriptures, he's doing something tremendously important that we need to understand and hear.

Jesus himself, you remember, taught that the Old Testament scriptures were the authoritative word of God in Matthew 5:17, for example. They were God's word. Peter then taught, remember back in chapter one, verses 20 and 21, that every prophetic scripture, and I think he would include all the Old Testament, is given by inspiration.

That is, as men are moved by the Holy Spirit, carried along by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when Peter puts Paul's letters in the category with the Old Testament scriptures, he is saying the Apostle Paul is an inspired spokesman of the living God and his letters have authority to guide you in your life and in your doctrine. He confirms just what Paul himself taught in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 13, when Paul said, we impart this teaching in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit.

So Peter is simply putting his stamp of approval on what Paul claimed, and I believe what Jesus said would be the case with his apostles. Now, the implications of that for us today are tremendous. That's why the Bible stands at the center of the Christian life.

Oh, how impressed I have been in these last weeks of visiting people that those who grow old and do not love the Bible are crotchety, self-reliant, crabby old people. And those who grow old in love with the Bible, like a Ruth Fast or a Dr. Wyden, to visit those people is a radically different experience. The Bible is in them and the message of the Bible flows out of them and life is beautiful even as they wear out.

So I want it to be the center of our life at this church. The reason the pulpit is at the center in the Protestant churches is because the Bible is at the center. The reason the pulpit is high and lifted up is because the Bible stands over us to judge us.

That's the rationale for this architecture. It is no mistake. It is not an exaltation of the preacher, but the word of God and the preached word insofar as it is faithful to that word.

John Wesley wrote in his preface to the standard sermons, I am a spirit come from God and returning to God just hovering over a great gulf till a few moments. Hence, I am no more seen. I drop into an unchangeable eternity.

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven. He has written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book at any price.

Give me the book of God. I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me.

Let me be homo unius libri, a man of one book. And my prayer is that we as a people might be a people of the book. Blessed is the people who walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.

But their delight is in the law of the Lord. And you, oh, I hope, meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. The apostles are united with the Old Testament in one grand book of God.

And the more we read it, the more we will see history with the eyes of God. Third, nevertheless, even though this book is inspired, it is not all easy to understand. Verse 16 says, there are some things in them hard to understand.

I'd love to spend an hour talking about the implications of that for Christian education and for preaching. But let me just give you the outline to that sermon. It would have five points.

Point number one, being inspired, the Bible being inspired, the scripture reveals the mind of God. Point number two, the mind of God is vastly greater than my mind. And therefore, I don't expect that I will always perceive the mind of God to be familiar and simple, but rather often will perceive it to be strange and complex.

Third, therefore, the scriptures will sometimes be hard to understand, strange and complex. Fourth, therefore, continual selection only of what is simple in the Bible would be a sin in the regular preaching of the church. Because Hebrews 5.13 says, everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness and is still a baby.

And point five would be, therefore, preaching which aims to deliver the whole counsel of God and does not presume to be wiser than the apostles, will be demanding on the humility and the mental effort of the hearers sometimes. Now, I know that I preach to people who are visually oriented and who for the past 30 years have had televisions in your home. Ninety-eight percent plus of you have at least one television.

In 1971, the average adult in this country watched 23.7 hours of television a week. I doubt that it's gone down, children more. I believe John Stott is right in his new book on preaching when he says, lengthy exposure to television tends to produce physical laziness, intellectual flabbiness, emotional exhaustion, psychological confusion, and moral disorientation.

I'm expecting that in the church, people don't watch as much as those outside the church, and I may be very naive in that. Now, what this means for preachers is this, especially for this preacher, we must improve in our ability to communicate and hold attention to people who are glued to the television as a rule. We have no antics, we have no stringed orchestras, we have no violence, I have no sex to offer, just the word.

Maybe I can throw an arm now and then or something. But, whatever is called from me by way of skills in communication, the fact that I live in an age of television and visual media does not mean, cannot mean, that I abandon my calling to preach the whole counsel of God, including the things that are hard to understand. Therefore, since television and radio shoot at about age 12 and 13, and therefore tax you not in the least, you may expect to be taxed more on Sunday morning than at any other time in the week, unless you are given to exposing yourself to other kinds of weighty matters.

I cannot see how it will be otherwise unless I am wiser than the apostles and can make clear and simple what they couldn't. Think, please, about the implications of the statement, some things in them are hard to understand for education and preaching. Fourth, and this ties in, the misinterpretation of scripture can lead to destruction.

Verse 16, the ignorant and unstable twist them to their own destruction. Another way to put it would be to say, the interpretation of scripture is a matter of life and death. There is no playing games in Sunday school and in preaching and in Christian education in general.

It is a matter of life and death how we interpret the scriptures. Peter or James said, let not many of you become teachers, brothers, because we will be judged with greater strictness. Why? Because the eternal destiny of the people hang on how they are taught in the scriptures.

Notice, it is the literally untaught and unstable who are prone to twist the scripture and be destroyed. These are the people who in chapter 2, verse 14, were swept off their feet by the false teachers, the novices in the faith who were just swept away by the false teachers. And 2 Peter, we have seen, is written to guard us from being swept away.

2 Peter is written to help that not happen to us. And that leads to point number 5, how does 2 Peter help us? How are we to avoid being swept away in error and misinterpretation and into destruction? Verses 17 and 18. Therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, that is, knowing that you can be destroyed by misinterpreting scripture, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The antidote to deception and destruction is growth in grace and in knowledge. The contrast, notice, between verses 17 and 18 is between, I think, a tree, on the one hand, that ceased to grow, begins to become diseased and is easily knocked over in a storm. And on the other hand, in verse 18, a tree which is planted in grace, got its roots in grace, and it is growing in that grace and in the knowledge of God, and it cannot be blown over by these false teachers and their inducements to follow them into sin and heresy.

Now, let me try to wrap it all up like this. You remember, ten weeks ago, I pointed out in the first message that at the beginning and the end, there are brackets in 2 Peter, verse 2 of chapter 1 and verse 18 of the last chapter, where the theme of grace and knowledge and grace and knowledge put parentheses around this letter and hold it all together. And I want you to see that again.

Verse 18, we just read, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And now back to verse 2 of chapter 1, way back ten weeks ago, it says, may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. And I said then, that's no accident, and I say it in conclusion, it's no accident that the text begins with grace and knowledge and ends with grace and knowledge.

The language is a little different, but the point is the same. Peter's grand desire for his people and for us today is that we experience lots and lots and lots and lots of multiplied grace. He wants us to send our roots way down into the soil of grace and suck it up.

He wants us to turn our leaves up to the sun of grace and soak it in and grow and grow by grace. That's what Peter wants more than anything in this letter, I think. After the word Jesus, grace is the sweetest word in all the Bible.

As Dr. Wyden would say, it is the greatest unused resource in the universe. It's the wealth of God's kindness. It's the riches of his mercy.

It's the soothing ointment of forgiveness. It's the free and undeserved yet lavishly offered hope of eternal life. Grace is what we crave when we are guilt-ridden.

Grace is what we have to have when we come to die. You felt that when some pain comes into your life and you say, I might die soon. One word matters, grace, at a time like that.

Grace is the only thing that gives a ray of hope when the clouds start to darken and fears come. We look into the future. And how shall we receive that grace according to 2 Peter? Where do we send our roots down? To what sunshine do we lift up our leaves? Answer to the promises given to us when the master bought us.

Chapter one, a great chapter. The best fertilizer of our hope and godliness is the knowledge of our future in God's grace. So Peter puts the two together.

May grace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God. And he closes, grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord. If we but knew a fraction of the future that God has for us.

If we could but feel what's going to happen. How all of our deepest longings are going to be satisfied by the Lord in the age to come. How every beauty in this world is going to be preserved and heightened and made perfect.

How every affection that we've ever had is going to soar. And that every proper relationship that you've ever enjoyed is going to be perfected and brought to completion. Every pain and frustration and ugliness is going to vanish off the earth.

And every fish is going to bite before the worm hits the water. And Jesus is going to make this world shine with golden light all through eternity. If we could but feel what God has prepared for those who love him.

Our hearts would be filled. Our hearts would be freed from greed and from fear. The two things that cause all our sins.

And we would, as Peter says, escape from the corruption that is in the world and share the divine nature. The message of 2 Peter then in conclusion is that the joy of hope is the power of godliness. The knowledge of God's promises is the pathway of his power.

And the promises and the power and the hope and the godliness are all built on grace. Amazing grace. And therefore it's fitting that he close his book and that we take our leave of this book with this doxology.

To him be glory. To him. To him be glory.

Both now and in the day of eternity. Amen. Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling.

And to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing. To the only God through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, dominion, authority and majesty before all time now and forever. Amen.

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