

II Peter 3.17, 18
24 January 2010

Beloved, are you growing spiritually? Are you growing in your resistance to sin? Are you growing in faith so that more and more you are trusting in God? These questions are important that elders often will ask them at family visitation for they are responsible for your souls. Faithful husbands and fathers are concerned with the spiritual growth of their wife and children. As a Christian, you should be asking yourself if you are growing spiritually. Spiritual growth is the concern of elders, fathers, husbands, and Christians because when there is life there is normally growth. The Christian life is never stagnant, either he is growing or falling backward. This concern for spiritual growth is scriptural for the Word of God says, in II Peter 3.17, 18, Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfast. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

The theme is: an admonition to grow in grace. First, the exhortation. Secondly, the manner and thirdly, the urgency.

First the exhortation. We are exhorted to grow in grace. What is spiritual growth? It is an increase in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This means that when we increase in knowledge we also grow in grace. Increase in grace takes place when there is increase in knowledge of Christ. Firstly, grace is a perfection of God, which means that He is lovely and beautiful. God is infinitely beautiful in the glory of His perfections or attributes. He is beautiful in His holiness, righteousness, and grace. Secondly, this beauty of God is manifested in an attitude of undeserved favour for His people. Grace is God's blessing of salvation which are undeserved. which is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. We are sinners deserving only the fulness of God's fiery wrath in hell. But, God in grace, in His favour towards us, send Jesus Christ to deliver His sheep from the punishment of sin by His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. Grace is not only an attitude, but also His saving work through Jesus Christ. Thirdly, grace is also God's power in our lives so that the Holy Spirit enables us to hate sin and to live in godliness. That we grow in divine strength to walk in holiness. We need grace to walk to obey the Lord from our hearts, without murmuring or complaining for without this power, we are unable to live out the Christian life.

What does it meant to grow? The tree grows with a seed implanted into the ground. And with sunshine, rain and earth, the seed grows into a sapling and then into a huge tree – this is growth and it comes from that seed. The roots in the ground are long and digs deeper into the ground. The branches are extending further. And the leaves also grow in greater abundance. In reality, spiritual growth is seen in our lives, when there is a deepening understanding of God's gracious favour upon us. And an important part is knowing our unworthiness. The testimony of elderly saints is not about how holy they have become or what great works have they done for God, but in deep humility they confess their great sinfulness. And for the saints who are growing spiritually, they confess, "Oh, my sins, my sins. My terrible sins. I am the chief of sinners. I am a wretched sinner, for all my life I have walked in sin, but God has been so gracious to me". In light of his sins, the child of God sees more and more of God's

beautiful and amazing grace. And with this deepening knowledge of the grace of God in our lives is a firm resolve to live no longer to self but unto Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. When there is growth in grace, progress is made in holiness and the increase of the virtues of faith, hope, and righteousness.

To grow spiritually presupposes life. For where there is growth, there must first be life. This is true for a newborn baby. It is obvious that he can grow because there is life in him; a dead baby cannot grow though you feed him or talk to him. The child of God grows spiritually because he has received spiritual life at the time of regeneration. Regeneration is the implanting the incorruptible seed of the life of Christ into the heart of the elect sinner. This is the work and power of God's grace. The Spirit of Christ effectually implants Christ's life into our hearts. Where there is spiritual life, there is a personal, living knowledge of God, a personal knowledge of sin and a desire to walk according to all the commandments of God. God demands growth, verse 18, "grow in grace". A command to grow seems strange. Children grow, not because parents tell them to grow. A farmer does not stand in the fields demanding that his crops grow. But, God commands His people to grow! And God causes His people to grow in the way of commanding them to grow. Although God commands us to grow, our spiritual growth is the sovereign, effectual work of God. Just as God causes growth in the creation, so also God causes spiritual growth. Growth in Christ is the gradual work of God in our lives. Never does this growth come to a completion in this life so that we can say that we are fully matured. No matter how young or old we are, there is always much room for growth because in this life we struggle daily against the old man of sin. Throughout our earthly pilgrimage there is a daily struggle with sin and unbelief. There are times of spiritual backsliding because of sin. This is why we desperately need the reminder of the command for spiritual growth. Just as God causes the living things of his creation to grow through the means of sunlight, water and nutrition, so also God uses means for our spiritual growth. And that means is the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour of Jesus Christ. We grow in grace as we increase in the knowledge of Christ.

To grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is a knowledge of faith. This is not a knowledge of mere facts, but it is a certain knowledge when a child knows his father intimately. When there is growth in the knowledge of Christ, there is growth in the confidence of salvation. The child of God experiences a closer relationship to God in Christ, and trusting in Him for all things. The key to spiritual growth is in the knowledge of the truth, and that is why doctrine is very important in the church. There are things that will poison the Word. As you cannot be too careful to keep your milk pure, free from dilution with water. Remember in China, where many children were sick and many died because melamine was added to them. So must we keep the Word of God pure, for truth mixed with false doctrine will be poison to our souls and will stunt our growth. And without this truth, there will be no growth, Hosea 4.6.

We need this knowledge of our Lord. He is our necessary food and drink. This is taught to us in John 6.51 to 55, 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. 52 The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *his* flesh to eat?

53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. 54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. The flesh of Christ is meat indeed and his blood is drink indeed. And through his broken body and shed blood which was sacrificed on the cross, He saved us from our sins and from eternal death and give unto eternal life. And whosoever eat his flesh and drink his blood, which means to believe in Him shall have eternal life. And through this life, we live in Christ. And we have been given this heavenly life, in order to grow in grace. And we grow by the use of means. Just as God causes the living things of his creation to grow through the means of sunlight, water and proper nutrition, so also God uses the means for our spiritual growth. The chief means God uses for our spiritual growth is the preaching of the gospel, through which we receive the knowledge of Him. And through the preaching of God's Word, God gives all the spiritual nutrients needed for growth. I Peter 2.2 teaches us, "as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word there ye may grow thereby". This means that in order for growth in grace and knowledge of Christ to take place, there must be the feeding on the preached Word. We, as children of God spiritually are like newborn babies, which need mother's milk. For newborns, mother's milk is the best thing because it provides all the nutrients babies need to be healthy. This milk is the picture of preaching. We need sincere milk which means pure or unadulterated, and anything else would be harmful for the child of God.

Obedying the command to grow in grace and knowledge demands a desire for God's Word. This means that every child of God must attend church regularly in order to grow. He arrives at the worship services Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon with a gigantic appetite that can only be satisfied with the truth of God's Word. We know our need for preaching, without it, we will shrivel up and die. The same thing will happen to us who misses the spiritual feasts of the preaching on the Lord's day. Let me apply this truth to you. And to adults, let me renew the call to you to attend the both services of the Lord's Day. Come to worship God twice a Lord's Day. Why are you absent from the worship services? Before the Lord, what are your reasons for doing something else besides the worship of God? Are your reasons biblical? How are you feeding on God's Word by your absence? Or are you feeding on the pleasures of the world? For if you do, then you will die spiritually. Attend the Adult covenant Instruction classes. By learning on God's Word, you can grow in grace, without it, you become weak and scrawny, spiritually. To Covenant youths, if you wish to benefit from the preaching, then, you must prepare yourself sleep early and so that you will come refreshed and you will be able to concentrate on the sermon. Even if you are don't feel like coming because you are spiritually dry, obey God's command to worship him and hear his word. Attend to the means of grace to take heed to the preaching and pray that God will speak to you and that His Word will be cold springs that we refresh your soul. Read the Scriptures daily and make time for it. Don't say that you don't have time. And if you don't read the Scriptures, how can you grow? And to covenant children, are you attentive to the preaching of God's Word? Are you writing down plenty of notes? Are you memorising God's Word? Are your teachers giving you sufficient verses to memorise? Come to learn.

This exhortation comes with urgency. The apostle says in verse 17, beware, lest you be led away by the error of the wicked. This urgent necessity comes because the

believers during Peter's day knew this before hand. What is this that the believers knew beforehand? He refers to all that he has written, not only about the coming of Christ but includes the heretics who denied the coming of the Lord. This is proven from what follows: beware, lest you may be led away by the error of the wicked, and fall from your own steadfastness. And because you know this, you are to beware. The word, "beware" in the original is to guard or to keep. It is a word used in the military, where the soldier is placed on guard as a sentry. If that sentry is not alert, watching and ready to fight the enemy, he may be killed and the camp he is guarding may perish with him. The apostle means to say that the power of the error of the wicked is so strong that if the child of God is not on guard he may be enticed to error, and so he would fall from the truth. This is true with the error which denies the coming of the Lord. Also the danger is that we would be turned from godliness to worldliness. Worldliness so affects the church because we have our sinful flesh who is a friend to the sinful world. Such awareness is necessary because, when we cling to this world of ungodliness, we will not grow for sin spoils the receiving of God's Word. When we are walking in sin willingly and have no desire to give up that sin, our ability to receive the Word will be affected. When we are in love with sin, we do not want to hear week after week that we are sinners in need of God's grace and will not grow when we are under sin's control. It is important that in our covenant home, we promote an atmosphere of spiritual growth. If the tv or the latest music of the world or the filth of the Internet dominates our home, there will not be an atmosphere that promotes spiritual growth. Our homes must be focussed on God's Word and living in conformity with God's Word. One who falls for the error will suffer the effects on the whole life. He will not live in hope. And he will become worldly – minded, and spiritually indifferent. Against this error of the wicked, we are to stand guard. And that means that we expect the enemy and we withstand him in the truth.

But if we not watching then the result will be that we will fall from our own steadfastness. To fall from your own steadfastness implies two things. First, that you have a place to stand. It means that your feet are firmly planted on solid ground. And that while you are firmly fixed, there are external forces bent on moving you from your place, against which you must take a stand in order to endure. The solid ground on which believers in Christ remain steadfast can only upon the truth of God's Word. That you depart from the Word of God, strictly speaking is impossible for the believer. This would certainly mean a falling away of the saints, which is impossible. The church viewed from her election in Christ cannot fall away. However, when the church is viewed organically, is composed of a two-fold seed: the righteous and wicked, elect and reprobate, it is expected that the reprobate will fall away, for they are not Israel which are of Israel. But, why then must the church be warned if it is the corrupt seed that will fall away. The answer is two-fold: first, the ungodly in the church must know that when they turn from the truth, they incur great condemnation. Always the Scriptures emphasise the truth that they who have known the truth and have departed from it shall be beaten with many stripes. Secondly, this warning is necessary for the true children of God. The old nature is always prone to the error of the wicked. So, it is necessary to sound this warning. And because of this danger, Peter says, grow in grace. To grow is the sure cure of not being led away by the error of the wicked and falling from your own steadfastness. To grow spiritually is the best defence against false doctrines. To be passive or spiritually stagnant is dangerous for you would be a prey for the wicked to attack. And so God speaks to each one of you, none is excluded, "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the apostle concludes the whole epistle by ascribing glory to Christ. When the apostle says, “to him be glory now ... The “him” is Christ and to give glory to Christ also means that we give glory to God for Christ is the revelation of God. Glory is the manifestation of the divine goodness and virtues and they are revealed fully in Christ. Each one of us gives glory to God in the present time, in the midst of the world, before the church as well as before the wicked, before believers and non-believers in every area of life. And we reveal that glory not only by our word but also by our walk in holiness. We also ascribe glory to Christ “forever”, that is, into the day everlasting. from the moment of the eternal day all the way through the everlasting day or age. Amen, and it will certainly be true that Christ will receive all the glory, now and into eternity. Amen.