

# 2 Peter 3:17-18 Commentary

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2 Peter 3:17 You **therefore, beloved, knowing** this **beforehand, be on your guard so \*** that you are not **carried away** by the **error of unprincipled men and fall** from your **own steadfastness**, ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [Humeis oun, agapetoi, proginoskontev \(PAPMPN\) phulassesthe \(2PPMM\) hina me te ton athesmon plan sunapachthentes \(AAPMPN\) ekpesete \(2PAAS\) tou idiou sterigmou.](#)

**Amplified:** Let me warn you therefore, beloved, that knowing these things beforehand, you should be on your guard, lest you be carried away by the error of lawless and wicked [persons and] fall from your own [present] firm condition [your own steadfastness of mind]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** As far as you are concerned, beloved, you have been forewarned. You must, therefore, be on your guard not to be carried away by the error of lawless men and so to fall from your own foundation ([Daily Study Bible](#))

**NET:** Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard that you do not get led astray by the error of these unprincipled men, and fall from your firm grasp on the truth. ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT:** I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends, so that you can watch out and not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people. I don't want you to lose your own secure footing. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** But you, my friends whom I love, are forewarned, and should therefore be very careful not to be carried away by the errors of wicked men and so lose your proper foothold. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** As for you, therefore, divinely loved ones, knowing [these things] beforehand, be constantly on your guard, lest having been carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness.

**Young's Literal:** Ye, then, beloved, knowing before, take heed, lest, together with the error of the impious being led away, ye may fall from your own stedfastness,

**YOU THEREFORE BELOVED KNOWING THIS BEFOREHAND****BE ON YOUR GUARD:** [humeis oun agapetoi: proginôskontes \(PAPMPN\) phulassesthe \(2PPMM\):](#)

- 2 Peter 1:12; Pr 1:17; Mt 24:24,25; Mk 13:23; Jn 16:4
- Be on guard - Mt 7:15; 16:6,11; Php 3:2; Col 2:8; 2Ti 4:15
- [2 Peter 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [2 Peter 3:17-18 Guarding, Growing, Glorifying](#) - Steven Cole
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**Therefore (oun)** (always query this strategic **term of conclusion**) looks back over all that has been said and forms the basis for Peter's concluding exhortations to his "**beloved**" (used 4 times in this letter) readers, urging them to beware of falling and to continue growing in grace. These last two verses instruct the reader how to avoid being swept away into error and destruction.

**Beloved (27)** (**agapetos** from **agapao** = to love) means beloved, dear, very much loved. **Agapetos** is love called out of one's heart by preciousness of the object loved. **Agapetos** is used only of Christians as united with God or with each other in love. In Scripture, this term is never applied to non-believers. God the Father uses this same word describing Jesus declaring that

This is My **beloved** Son, in whom I am well-pleased (Mt 3:17)

## FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

**Barclay** - The Christian is a man who is **forewarned**. That is to say, he cannot plead ignorance. He knows the right way and its rewards (Mt 6:19-21-note); he knows the wrong way and its disasters (Pr 14:12). He has no right to expect an easy way, for he has been told that Christianity means a Cross (Mk 8:34-35), and he has been warned that there will always be those who are ready to attack and to pervert the faith. To be **forewarned** is to be **forearmed**; but to be **forewarned** is also a grave responsibility, for he who knows the right and does the wrong is under a double condemnation. ([2 Peter - Daily Study Bible](#))

**Knowing...beforehand (4267)** (**proginosko** from **pró** = before + **ginosko** = know; see more detail on foreknowledge in study of **prognosis**) literally means to know about something prior to some temporal reference point or to know about an event before it happens or prior to some temporal reference point.

**Proginosko** - 5x in 5v in the **NAS** - Acts 26:5; Ro 8:29; 11:2; 1Pet. 1:20; 2Pet. 3:17 and is rendered in the NAS as foreknew(2), foreknown(1), knowing beforehand(1), known previously(1).

**Related Resource:** [The Meaning of Proginosko](#) - Thomas R. Edgar

**Knowing beforehand** - What? That there will be those who will come along twisting and distorting the Scripture and that you can be destroyed by misusing scripture. **Proginosko** means "previous knowledge" or "foreknowledge based upon prior experience" and so they are without excuse for misunderstanding Peter or Paul on this subject. Peter gives a final admonition to faithfulness. Although there is no expressed object of what the readers knew beforehand, clearly in context Peter is referring to the danger of the false teaching. Their advance knowledge gave them an advantage. Paul wrote a parallel thought to the Thessalonians "you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief." (1Th 5:4)

To be forewarned is forearmed. The known danger (knowing beforehand) and the resultant duty (guard) go together.

**Be on guard (5442)** (**phulasso** from **phulax** = watchman) is a military term that denotes the activity or office of a watchman whose job it was "to protect" those who are asleep from harm during the night and prevent loss or theft. The soldier on watch was accountable with his own life to protect that which was entrusted to his care. **Phulasso** is not only a notice against dangers from without, but an admonition to watchfulness from within.

**Phulasso** is present tense, imperative mood indicating a command to make this the habit of your life - **keep on guarding yourselves**". The middle voice conveys a reflexive sense, "you guard yourself" being the idea.

Paul gave a similar command (although using a different verb, prosecho) to the Ephesian elders to

**Be on guard** (present imperative = command that calls for this to be the elder's continual mindset. Why? Because the attacks on the truth will be unceasing!) for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and **from among your own selves** (an "inside job") men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:28, 29, 30).

Peter used **phulasso** in (2Pe 2:5-note) to explain how God **preserved Noah** through the flood.

**Phulasso** - 31x in NT - Matt. 19:20; Mk. 10:20; Lk. 2:8; 8:29; 11:21, 28; 12:15; 18:21; Jn. 12:25, 47; 17:12; Acts 7:53; 12:4; 16:4; 21:24f; 22:20; 23:35; 28:16; Rom. 2:26; Gal. 6:13; 2Th 3:3; 1 Tim. 5:21; 6:20; 2Ti 1:12, 14; 4:15; 2Pet. 2:5; 3:17; 1Jn. 5:21; Jude 1:24-note

A cursory look at some of the other 31 NT uses gives one an even better sense of the meaning of phulasso.

Luke uses **phulasso** to describe the shepherds "**keeping watch** (phulasso) over their flock by night." (Lk 2:8)

In some of his last words (always important to here and heed) **Paul** instructs Timothy to

**Guard** (phulasso in the **aoist imperative** = conveys a sense of urgency! Do this now!) through the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." (2Ti 1:14-note; see also 1Ti 6:20)

And again **Paul** warned Timothy to

**Be on guard** (phulasso in the **present imperative** = calls for continual vigilance.) against (Alexander the coppersmith) yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. (2Ti 4:5-note)

**Paul** reminded the saints at Thessalonica that God is able to see them through to the end and has no equals...

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and **protect** (phulasso) you from the evil one. (2Th 3:3, cf Jesus' prayer - Jn 17:15-17)

In one of the most beautiful benedictions in the Bible **Jude** writes...

Jude 1:24-note Now to Him Who is able to **keep** (phulasso) you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy:

**Phulasso** then refers specifically to deliberate and conscious watching, being on the alert, carrying out sentinel functions, to guard (one assigned to protect or oversee another) or to protect by taking careful measures. Adam was commanded by God to **keep** the Garden of Eden, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT using **phulasso** to translate "keep" (Ge 2:15)

**Phulasso** was used of the garrison of a city guarding it against attack from without. This gives us a picture of our heart which like a citadel must be guarded against deceivers from without and within...

**Watch** (noun related to phulasso - phulake = one keeping watch at a guard post) over your heart with all diligence, **for** (**term of explanation** - always seek to know what the author is explaining, why is he explaining it, why now, etc) from it flow the springs of life. (Pr 4:23-see note)

Each time you listen to a tape, each time you hear a sermon, each time you read an article...each time you need **to be on guard** so that the Word of Truth is preserved.

**LEST BEING CARRIED AWAY BY THE ERROR OF UNPRINCIPLED MEN: hina mête ton atthesmon plane sunapachthentes (APPMPN) te ton atthesmon plane te tôn atthesmôn:**

- 2Peter 2:18, 19, 20; Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22; Ro 16:18; 2Co11:3, 11:13, 14, 15
- [2 Peter 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [2 Peter 3:17-18 Guarding, Growing, Glorifying](#) - Steven Cole
- [2 Peter 3:14-18 Living in Anticipation of Christ's Return Pt 2](#) - John MacArthur

Here is the danger they need to guard against -- being led astray from the right path by wrong men.

**Barclay** - The Christian is a man with a basis for life. He ought to be rooted and founded in the faith. There are certain things of which he is absolutely certain. James Agate once declared that his mind was not a bed to be made and remade but that on certain things it was finally made up. There is a certain inflexibility in the Christian life; there is a certain basis of belief which never changes. The Christian will never cease to believe that, "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11); and he will never cease to be aware that there is laid on him the duty of making his life fit his belief. ([2 Peter - Daily Study Bible](#))

**Be carried away** ([4879](#)) (**sunapago** from **sun** = together + **apágo** = lead or carry away by a thing) means literally to carry away together with and is used mostly in a bad sense meaning to be led astray or be seduced.

**Sunapago** - 3x in NT - Rom. 12:16; Gal. 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:17

**Sunapago** means to cause someone else in addition to change from belief in what is true to belief in what is false. To be carried along with as by a flood which sweeps everything along with it & then to give one's self up to. This picture is clearly exemplified by Paul in [Galatians 2:13] where he wrote that "even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy" (pretended piety) of the wavering Jewish believers during the crisis at Antioch. This is the son of encouragement giving a "discouraging" example! The Passive Voice indicates that the action of being carried away is exerted by an outside "force". In context that outside "force" is "error" which brings about the "carrying away". The word "error" (plane) refers to a wandering out of the right way and in the present context specifically a straying from sound doctrine or orthodox teaching.

**Error** (4106)(plane from **planos** = deceitful, root idea = has idea of wandering; See related verb **planao**) describes a roaming or a wandering and then figuratively a going astray or a wandering out of the right way. The verbal form **planao** means to cause to wander off the path, to cause someone to hold a wrong view and so to mislead or deceive. Vincent says plane is an "error which shows itself in action...It may imply deceit as accompanying or causing error"

**Unprincipled** (113) (**athesmos** from **a** = without + **thesmós** = law, custom referring not to a law enacted by lawmakers but that which became prevalent by custom and was expected to be observed as if law) pertains to refusing to be subjected to legal requirements and thus refers to men who are lawless, unruly, unprincipled, not complying with law.

**Athesmos** - 2x in NT - 2 Pet. 2:7; 3:17

By implication **athesmos** refers to those who are wicked or morally corrupt not ordering their steps in conformity to acceptable custom (**thesmós**).

And so Peter stamps these men as individuals who are rebellious and unprincipled in conduct, defying the restraints of law and custom. Their victims are the untaught and the unstable who distort the Scripture. But the ones who lead the distortion are the unprincipled men, the false teachers. In (2Pe 2:7-see note) Peter used this term to describe the wicked men of Sodom. These men are in the same category as those in Sodom.

#### YOU FALL FROM YOUR OWN STEADFASTNESS: **ekpesete (2PAAS) tou idiou sterigmou**

- 2Pe 1:10,11; 2:18, 19, 20, 21, 22; Acts 2:42; 1Co 15:58; Eph 4:14; Col 2:5; Heb 3:14; 1Pe 5:9
- [2 Peter 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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Here is the danger against which Peter is warning his readers and his statement implies the possibility of this tragic occurrence. Peter is not referring to losing one's salvation for that is eternally secure in Christ. Once the Spirit has taken you out of Adam and placed you into Christ, this glorious exchange by faith can never be reversed irrespective of teaching you might have heard to the contrary! On the other hand Peter is speaking of the believer's fall from stability in regard to things like doctrine, truth, conviction, confidence.

**Fall** (1601)(**ekpipto** from **ek** = from + **pipto** = to fall.) depicts an act of falling away from or out of a desired position and into a less desired position or condition (cf Gal 5:4).

**Ekpipto** - 10x in NT - Acts 12:7; 27:17, 26, 29, 32; Ro. 9:6; Gal. 5:4; Jas. 1:11; 1Pet. 1:24; 2Pet. 3:17

In Acts Luke uses **ekpipto** to describe a ship about to "run aground on a certain island." (Acts 27:26)

Paul uses **ekpipto** in his warning to the **Galatians** -

(Gal 5:4) You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you **have fallen** from grace.

**Own (idios)** speaks of their individual **steadfastness**.

**Steadfastness** (only NT use) (4740) (**sterigmos** from **sterizo** = to establish, fix) means a setting firmly, stability, for instance of the stars. This word indicates describes the stability in mind and faith of Peter's readers. Their own security lies in their firm commitment to God's revealed truth. Their security lies not in their own strength or perseverance but in their unswerving adherence to the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who are duped are described as "unstable" (2Pe 3:16). Stability or being firmly established in the faith is clearly a quality which Peter greatly esteems. It is easy for the unsuspecting to be swept off their feet by the error of the wicked and to lose

their spiritual balance.

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**Beware** - Daily life is hazardous to your health. That's the thesis of Laura Lee's book 100 Most Dangerous Things In Everyday Life And What You Can Do About Them. It's a tongue-in-cheek look at the unnoticed threats in life, such as shopping carts (which annually cause 27,600 injuries in the US) and dishwashers (which harm more than 7,000 Americans and 1,300 Britons each year). One reason for writing this book, the author says, was "to poke fun at the culture of fear."

In contrast, Jesus Christ calls His followers to a courageous lifestyle of faith in which our goal is not to avoid personal harm but to pursue the mission of God in our world.

The apostle Peter vividly described the day of the Lord, which will bring the end of the earth as we know it (2Peter 3:10). But instead of fainting with apprehension, Peter said we should be filled with anticipation (2Pe 3:14). Then he warned of those who twist the Scriptures, and said, "Beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2Pe 3:17).

Proper concern helps protect us, but excessive alarm leaves us paralyzed. We should be most afraid of failing to live with complete confidence in God.—David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Living for Jesus a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;  
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me. —Chisholm  
© Renewal 1945, The Rodeheaver Co.

**The power of Christ within you is greater  
than the power of evil around you.**

2 Peter 3:18 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. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [auxanete](#) (2PPAM) [de en chariti kai gnosei tou kuriou hemon kai soterou iesou Christou. auto e doxa kai nun kai eis hemeran aionos. amen.](#)

**Amplified:** But grow in grace (undeserved favor, spiritual strength) and recognition and knowledge and understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (the Messiah). To Him [be] glory (honor, majesty, and splendor) both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (so be it)! ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** rather, you must see to it that you grow in grace and in understanding of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. ([Daily Study Bible](#))

**NET:** But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day. ([NET Bible](#))

**NLT:** But grow in the special favor and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all glory and honor, both now and forevermore. Amen. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** On the contrary, you should grow in grace and in your knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ - to him be glory now and until the dawning of the day of eternity! ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** But be constantly growing in the sphere of grace and an experiential knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and to the day of eternity.

**Young's Literal:** and increase ye in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to him is the glory both now, and to the day of the age! Amen.

**BUT GROW IN GRACE:** [auxanete](#) (PAM) [de en chariti](#)

- Ps 92:12; Ho 14:5; Mal 4:2; Ep 4:15; Col 1:10; 2Th 1:3; 1Pe 2:2)

- [2 Peter 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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**But (de)** (pause and ponder this **term of contrast**) counterbalances the "negative" duty of being on guard with the positive duty of growth in grace. Continuing spiritual growth is the most effective safeguard against falling. Continued progress in divine things is a great protection against the peril of false teachers. I ride bicycles for exercise and have noted that the time when I am most danger of falling (because I have done so repeatedly!) is when I am "not making progress," that is, when I am not pedaling forward. The Christian life is very similar. If you begin to miss time in the Word and time in prayerful communion with your Lord, you can rest assured (or alarmed) that you are not far from some "misstep!" Growth in grace and the knowledge of Jesus is the best defense against going astray.

**Barclay** - The Christian must daily experience the wonder of grace, and daily grow in the gifts which grace can bring; and he must daily enter more and more deeply into the wonder which is in Jesus Christ. It is only on a firm foundation that a great building can tower into the air; and it is only because it has a deep root that a great tree can reach out to the sky with its branches. The Christian life is at once a life with a firm foundation and with an ever outward and upward growth. ([2 Peter - Daily Study Bible](#))

**Grow (837) (auxano [word study])** means to cause to grow, to increase, to enlarge. **Auxano** is **present imperative** which is a command that calls for this to be the believer's continual *passionate* (emphasis on *passionate* mine) pursuit. Why? Because if we are not growing, we are ever in danger of being carried by error that results in further spiritual instability. Trees with shallow roots are easily uprooted (I am not saying a genuine believer can lose his or her salvation -- that is impossible [cp Jn 10:27, 28, 29, 30, 1Jn 2:19, 5:13, Jude 1:24-note, 1Pe 1:5-note, Heb 7:25-note, Php 1:6-note] -- but that their roots can become "loosened" and they be easily blown hither and yon by every wind of doctrine!) The only way to prevent falling is to grow; the tree that grows will not fall over. As someone has noted...

If you go into a plantation, at a certain time of the year, you may see a great number of trees that have no leaves upon them; how are you to know which are alive, and which are not? Well, you would soon know if you could look at their roots. If a tree has been growing, if its roots have taken hold upon the soil, you may pull it, but you will not stir it. There it stands; and, in like manner, growth in grace brings fixity in grace. You who have faith, pray God that you may have growing faith. A living faith is a growing faith, and a growing faith is a living faith. Pray, therefore, that you may "grow in grace."

**Auxano** - 23x in NT - Mt 6:28; 13:32; Mk. 4:8; Lk. 1:80; 2:40; 12:27; 13:19; Jn. 3:30; Acts 6:7; 7:17; 12:24; 19:20; 1 Co. 3:6f; 2Co. 9:10; 10:15; Ep 2:21; 4:15; Col. 1:6, 10; 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18 and is rendered in the NAS as causes growth(1), causing growth(1), full grown(1), grew(1), grow(8), growing(2), grows(2), increase(2), increased(2), increasing(2), spreading(1).

Peter is calling for spiritual growth to be the believer's lifestyle. This command brings one back to Peter's charge in chapter 1 where Peter taught that

if these qualities are yours and are **increasing**, (pleonazo - abounding; present tense = continually increasing more and more) they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (see note 2 Peter 1:8).

The **present tense** calls for the readers to "keep continually growing in grace". The Christian life should never be static. A car stuck in neutral does not fulfill its prescribed function. One must go forward or he will go backward. Harry Ironside said that continuing growth is "the unfailing panacea for all spiritual ills."

Peter used this same verb **auxano** in his first epistle to exhort his readers to "grow in respect to salvation" which he informed them called for an attitude like newborn babes so that they would "long for the pure milk of the word" (1Pe 2:2-note).

**Hiebert** notes that

"this command to keep on growing is an appeal to the will. But growth, in the spiritual as in the physical realm, does not arise from an assertion of the will. Yet the human will does play a decisive part in the experience of spiritual growth. For effective growth we must will to remove hindrances to growth (cf 1Pe 2:1-note to the next verse 1Pe 2:2-note) while actively fostering the conditions which promote growth. When the individual maintains the conditions for spiritual growth, the divinely implanted life (cf 2Pe 1:4-note) will assuredly grow and mature."

**John Piper** adds this helpful note:

"The antidote to deception and destruction is growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The contrast

between 2Pe 3:17 and 2Pe 3:18 is between, on the one hand, a tree which does not grow and so loses its stability in the earth and is blown over by a wind of false teaching and dies, and, on the other hand (v18), a tree which keeps its roots planted in God's grace and so grows and stays healthy and stable and does not get blown over by false teaching." ([Grow in Grace and in the Knowledge of Our Lord](#))

**C H Spurgeon** in his wonderful devotional **Morning and Evening** comments that we are to...

**"Grow in grace"**—not in one grace only, but in all grace. Grow in that root-grace, faith. Believe the promises more firmly than you have done. Let faith increase in fulness, constancy, simplicity. Grow also in love. Ask that your love may become extended, more intense, more practical, influencing every thought, word, and deed. Grow likewise in humility. Seek to lie very low, and know more of your own nothingness. As you grow downward in humility, seek also to grow upward —having nearer approaches to God in prayer and more intimate fellowship with Jesus. May God the Holy Spirit enable you to **"grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour."** He who grows not in the knowledge of Jesus, refuses to be blessed. To know Him is "life eternal," and to advance in the knowledge of Him is to increase in happiness. He who does not long to know more of Christ, knows nothing of Him yet. Whoever hath sipped this wine will thirst for more, for although Christ doth satisfy, yet it is such a satisfaction, that the appetite is not cloyed, but whetted. If you know the love of Jesus—as the deer pants for the water-brooks (Ps 42:2), so will you pant after deeper draughts of his love. If you do not desire to know Him better, then you love Him not, for love always cries, "Nearer, nearer." Absence from Christ is hell; but the presence of Jesus is heaven. Rest not then content without an increasing acquaintance with Jesus. Seek to know more of Him in His divine nature, in His human relationship, in His finished work, in His death, in His resurrection, in His present glorious intercession, and in His future royal advent. Abide hard by the Cross, and search the mystery of his wounds.

**An increase of love to Jesus, and a more perfect apprehension of his love to us is one of the best tests of growth in grace."** (Bolding added)

#### **IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD & SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST: en chariti kai gnōsei tou kuriou hemon kai soterou lesou Christou:**

- 2Peter 1:3,8; 2:20; John 17:3; 2Co 4:6; Ep 1:17; Php 3:8; Col 1:10; 3:10
- [2 Peter 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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**In (en)** is locative case which depicts the areas (or spheres) of growth **-grace and knowledge of Jesus**. The locative of sphere means the limitations are logical, one idea (growth) being confined within the limits of another (grace and knowledge). Imagine yourself to be a fish in a fish bowl filled with "grace" -- you will have great difficulty living the Christian life (the "Christ" life, the supernatural life) when you are separated from (eg, by unconfessed sin, grieving of His Spirit of Grace, etc) the supernatural supply of God's grace.

#### **Related Resource:**

- See study on meaning and significance of locative of sphere

**Grace** ([5485](#)) (**charis** [word study]) is free and unmerited favor of God bestowed upon guilty man in and through Jesus Christ.

As **Hampton Keathley** says

since grace is at the very heart, indeed, it is the very foundation and fountain of true Christianity, we should have a better grasp of this important word and its truth.... Furthermore, the doctrine of God's Grace in Christ is multi-sided. As a doctrine of the Word it touches every area of truth or doctrine in one way or another. Every aspect of doctrine is related to grace. It is no wonder grace is an important word and one that Paul desires to be experienced by all. It is a fountain from which we must all drink deeply, but it is one that runs counter to our own natural tendencies. Rather than drink from God's fountain, we tend to build our own broken cisterns. (Jer 2:13)

**A Basic Definition—lexical:** The Greek word for grace is charis. Its basic idea is simply "non-meritorious or unearned favor, an unearned gift, a favor or blessings bestowed as a gift, freely and never as merit for work

performed.”

**Expanded Definition—theological:** Grace is “that which God does for mankind through His Son, which mankind cannot earn, does not deserve, and will never merit”<sup>1</sup>

Grace is all that God freely and non-meritoriously does for man and is free to do for man on the basis of Christ’s person and work on the cross. Grace, one might say, is the work of God for man and encompasses everything we receive from God. see [Grace and Peace](#))

I would add given the truth that we begin this race of salvation by grace, run daily by grace and finish by grace, it behooves every Christian runner to understand some of these practical truths about how he or she is enabled to run with endurance the grace race that is set before us.

Someone has devised the following acronym which is not a bad "definition" of grace...

**G** (God's), **R** (Riches) **A** (At) **C** (Christ's) **E** (Expense)

**Grace** is God’s saving love and favor. We deserve God's judgment but He instead showers favor on those have no way to earn it.

See sermon by Puritan **Thomas Watson** with 12 excellent applications - [The Beauty of Grace](#)

**Hendriksen** writes that "God’s grace is his active favor bestowing the greatest gift upon those who have deserved the greatest punishment."

**Knowledge (1108)(gnosis)** emphasizes here that not only do believers need the transforming power of God's grace but also God's truth. Growth in knowledge obviously calls for study of and subjection to God's truth, by which believers are progressively sanctified or set apart, becoming more and more like the Savior.

**Gnosis** - 29x in NT - Lk. 1:77; 11:52; Ro. 2:20; 11:33; 15:14; 1 Co. 1:5; 8:1, 7, 10f; 12:8; 13:2, 8; 14:6; 2 Co. 2:14; 4:6; 6:6; 8:7; 10:5; 11:6; Eph. 3:19; Phil. 3:8; Col. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:20; 1 Pet. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:5f; 3:18

Christian growth must also take place in the realm of **knowledge**. and **grace**. If we are growing in knowledge, we should also be growing in grace. If not our "heads" may be growing in size, becoming "puffed up" because of all the Bible facts we know.

The source and fountain of both **grace** and **knowledge** is Jesus Christ. To know Christ is to live and to grow in that acquaintance is to grow in the Spirit (Php 3:10-note).

**John Piper** adds some practical notes how we **grow in grace** which he first defines as

"the wealth of God's kindness, the riches of his mercy; the soothing ointment of his forgiveness; the free and undeserved, but lavishly offered hope of eternal life. **Grace** is what we crave when we are guilt-laden. **Grace** is what we must have when we come to die. **Grace** is our only ray of hope when the future darkens over with storm clouds of fear. And how shall we receive this grace? Where shall we send our roots down? To what sunshine shall we turn up our leaves? To the promises given to us when the Master bought us by his death (2Pe 2:1-note). The best fertilizer for our hope and godliness is the **knowledge of our future in God's grace**.

So Peter says, "May grace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God," and closes with the command to grow "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord."

If we but knew a fraction of the future God is making for us; if we could begin to feel that all our deepest longings will be satisfied, that every beauty of this world will be preserved and heightened; that every good affection will soar; that every proper relationship will be restored forever; that all pain and frustration and ugliness will vanish; that the fish will bite before the worm hits the water and Jesus will fill the world with golden light -- if we could believe what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him (1Cor. 2:9), our hearts would be freed from the greed and fears that cause us to sin. We would escape from the corruption that is in the world and become partakers of the divine nature (2Pe 1:4-note).

The message of 2 Peter is that the **joy of hope** is the **power of godliness**.

The **knowledge of God's promises** is the pathway of **His power** (2Pe 1:3, 4-note).

And the promises, the power, the hope and the godliness are all because of his grace." ([Sermon](#)) (Bolding added)

**Lord (2962) (kurios)** means lord, master, owner or the one who has absolute ownership power. Jesus is referred to as **Savior** only



10 times but as **Lord** some seven hundred times! He is the One Who is Supreme in Authority. **Kurios** translates Jehovah (LORD in OT) some 7000 times in Septuagint (LXX).

**Martin Luther** puts "**Lord**" in an interesting perspective noting that...

"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.

**Savior:** (4990)(**soter** [word study] from **sozo** = rescue from peril > from **saos** = safe; delivered) refers to the agent of salvation or deliverance, the one who rescues, delivers, saves and preserves. Anyone who saves or delivers can be called a deliverer or rescuer (a **soter**).

The **Exegetical Dictionary** notes that

In secular Greek usage the gods are deliverers both as helpers of human beings and as protectors of collective entities (e.g., cities); this is the case with Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon, the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux, Heracles, Asclepius as the helper of the sick, and Serapis; it is true also for philosophers (Dio Chrysostom Or. 32.8) and statesmen (Thucydides v.11.1; Plutarch Cor. 11, also in inscriptions and elsewhere). In the Hellenistic ruler cult "theos soter" (god our savior) is attested in writings and inscriptions as a title of the Ptolemies and Seleucids. Inscriptions in the eastern part of the Empire called Pompey "Soter and Founder," Caesar "Soter of the World," and Augustus "Soter of Humankind." Hadrian had the title "Soter of the Kosmos" ([Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. . Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans](#))

Greeks used **soter** as a title of divinities such as Asclepius, the god of healing. Soter was used by the mystery religions to refer to their divinities. At an early date **soter** was used as a title of honor for deserving men, e.g., Epicurus (300BC) was called "soter" by his followers. As discussed below, soter was used as a designation of the "deified" ruler, e.g., Ptolemy I Soter (323-285BC).

**Thayer** writes that the name **soter**...

was given by the ancients to deities, especially tutelary deities, to princes, kings, and in general to men who had conferred signal benefits upon their country, and in the more degenerate days by way of flattery to personages of influence;

**Soter** was used of **God** as the source of salvation - the Deliverer, the Preserver, the Protector, the Healer, the One Who rescues man from danger or peril and unto a state of prosperity and happiness.

**Soter** was used of **Jesus Christ** as the agent sent by God to bring deliverance to sinful mankind.

**Kenneth Wuest** writes that the name **soter**

"was given by the ancients to deities, to princes, kings, and in general, to men who had conferred signal benefits upon their country, and in the more degenerate days, by way of flattery, to personages of influence." ([Wuest, K. S. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Eerdmans](#))

The Romans looked upon their emperor as a "**savior**" in that he held mankind together under the great Roman power, providing peace and order, prosperity and protection. In the Cult of Caesar, the state religion of Rome, the emperor was actually known as the "**Saviour of the world**" (at least 8 Roman emperors carried this title)! He was a "Saviour" in that he held mankind together under the great Roman power, providing peace and order, prosperity and protection. In contrast to the Cult of the Caesar, was the "Cult of Christ", in which the Lord Jesus was worshipped as the Saviour God. The former ruled over the temporal affairs of his subjects and was one of their gods. The latter was Saviour in the sense that He saved the believer's soul from sin and exercised a spiritual control over his life. To recognize our God as the Saviour of the world instead of the Emperor was a capital offense, for this recognition was a blow at the very heart of the Roman Empire and explains the reason for the bloody persecution of Christians.

Physicians who healed others were referred to in the Greek culture as "**saviors**". Human physicians might be able to heal physical sickness but only the Great Physician can heal sin sickness. As alluded to above, in Greek mythology various gods were called **soteres** (plural) an epithet applied especially to Asclepius, the "god of healing". How tragic to call mere mortals and figments of men's imagination "saviors". God pronounced judgment long ago on those who worship these so-called "saviors" declaring that "They have no knowledge, who carry about their wooden idol, and pray to **a god who cannot save** (Hebrew word is yasha from which is derived Yeshua the Hebrew equivalent of "Jesus"!)." (Isa 45:20b)

**Christ** (5547) is a transliteration of the Greek word **Christos** (from **chrío** = to anoint, rub with oil, consecrate to an office) which is equivalent to the Hebrew word which is translated "**Messiah**", the Anointed One.

In the Gospels **the Christ** is not a personal name but an official designation for the expected **Messiah** (see Matthew 2:4, Luke 3:15). As by faith the human Jesus was recognized and accepted as the personal Messiah, the definite article ("the") was dropped and the designation "**Christ**" came to be used as a personal name. The name "**Christ**" speaks of His Messianic dignity and emphasizes that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises concerning the coming Messiah.

**TO HIM BE THE GLORY BOTH NOW AND TO THE DAY OF ETERNITY [AMEN]: autōi te doxa kai nun kai eis hēmeran aiōnos**

- Jn 5:23; 2Ti 4:18; 1 Pe 5:10,11; Jude 1:25; Rev 1:6; 5:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
- [2 Peter 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [2 Peter 3:17-18 Guarding, Growing, Glorifying](#) - Steven Cole
- [2 Peter 3:14-18 Living in Anticipation of Christ's Return Pt 2](#)- John MacArthur

Peter closes the epistle by giving glory **To Him** which specifically addresses this "doxology" to "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (this full title used here in 2Pe 3:18, 1:11, 2:20, 3:2) and as such is the only NT doxology unquestionably addressed to Jesus Christ. To give Jesus Christ the glory due Him is to acknowledge He is God. Why? Because the OT quotes God saying

I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. (Isa 42:8).

This brings the high Christology of this epistle to a fitting climax. To Christ, the beginning, the process, and the fulfillment of our great salvation, is ascribed eternal praise for He is God. This is the ultimate purpose for our existence—to glorify Jesus Christ. Everything else is designed to that end.

**Glory** ([1391](#))(**doxa**) expresses all that He is in His Being and in His nature, character, power and acts. He is glorified when He is allowed to be seen as He really is. To be where God is will be glory. To be what God intended will be glory. To do what God purposed will be glory.

**Eternity** ([165](#))(**aion** [word study]) in this context refers to time, the Greek literally reading "unto the day of the ages".

**Amen** or so be it (only in the KJV - 2Pe 3:18KJV).

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Pastor and author **A. W. Tozer** observed this about the early church:

Conversion for the early Christians was not a destination; it was the beginning of a journey.... In [the early church] faith was for each believer a beginning, not a bed in which to lie while waiting for the Lord's triumph. Believing was not a once-done act. It was an attitude of heart and mind which inspired and enabled the believer to follow the Lord wherever He went.

Since the Christian life is a journey that begins the day we receive Christ as Savior, how well we follow Christ after conversion is vital to our spiritual well-being. Peter's final instruction to his readers, and to the church, centered on the importance of a believer's continued growth in the faith. (Today in the Word)

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Twenty Years? A teacher with twenty years' experience was passed over for a promotion. Going to the administrator, she demanded, "Why did you choose that new young man who only had four years of experience at this job, when I have twenty years of experience?" The man answered, "Because you do not have twenty years of experience. You have one year of experience twenty times. You're still teaching the same things in the same way as you did when you were first hired. You haven't grown in the job."

The knowledge of Christ's love for us should cause us to love Him in such a way that it is demonstrated in our attitude, conduct, and commitment to serve God. Spiritual maturity is marked by spiritual knowledge being put into action. (Edward Bedore)

Those who know God the best are the richest and most powerful in prayer. Little acquaintance with God, and strangeness and coldness to Him, make prayer a rare and feeble thing. (E. M. Bounds)

The work of Japanese painter Hokusai spanned many years before his death in 1849 at age 89. But toward the end of his life, the artist dismissed as nothing all the work he had done before age 50. It was only after he reached 70 that he felt he was turning out anything worthy of note. On his deathbed Hokusai lamented, "If heaven had granted me five more years, I could have become a real painter." (Today in the Word)

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In **Morning and Evening Spurgeon** comments - Heaven will be full of the ceaseless praises of Jesus. Eternity! thine unnumbered years shall speed their everlasting course, but forever and for ever, "to him be glory." Is he not a "Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"? "To him be glory." Is he not king for ever?-King of kings and Lord of lords, the everlasting Father? "To him be glory for ever." Never shall his praises cease. That which was bought with blood deserves to last while immortality endures. The glory of the cross must never be eclipsed; the lustre of the grave and of the resurrection must never be dimmed. O Jesus! thou shalt be praised for ever. Long as immortal spirits live-long as the Father's throne endures-for ever, for ever, unto thee shall be glory. Believer, you are anticipating the time when you shall join the saints above in ascribing all glory to Jesus; but are you glorifying him now? The apostle's words are, "To him be glory both now and for ever. " Will you not this day make it your prayer? "Lord, help me to glorify thee; I am poor, help me to glorify thee by contentment; I am sick, help me to give thee honour by patience; I have talents, help me to extol thee by spending them for thee; I have time, Lord, help me to redeem it, that I may serve thee; I have a heart to feel, Lord, let that heart feel no love but thine, and glow with no flame but affection for thee; I have a head to think, Lord, help me to think of thee and for thee; thou hast put me in this world for something, Lord, show me what that is, and help me to work out my life-purpose: I cannot do much, but as the widow put in her two mites, which were all her living, so, Lord, I cast my time and eternity too into thy treasury; I am all thine; take me, and enable me to glorify thee now, in all that I say, in all that I do, and with all that I have.

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty,  
Hold me with thy powerful hand; Bread of heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more.  
--WILLIAM WILLIAMS

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**Gradual Growth** - I'm privileged to know several Christians who are recovering from addictions. One such person feels extremely frustrated over the amount of time it's taking him to recover and rebuild his life after years of destructive choices. His reason for such impatience? He says, "I've already wasted too many years of my life, and I don't want to waste any more." But is gradual growth ever a waste of time?

The apostle Peter opened his second letter to believers by emphasizing that it takes time and diligence to cultivate a range of disciplines in our daily lives (2Pe 1:5, 6, 7, 8-notes). He concluded his letter with this command: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). Although the Lord's goal for us all is complete perfection, He doesn't expect the end without the means, which involves our diligence in the lifelong process of growth.

In his book Psalm 23: The Song of a Passionate Heart, David Roper writes:

Everything worthwhile takes time, but time is on our side. We have the rest of our lives to grow. God is wonderfully patient. He will never give up on us until His work is done. . . . We are unfinished--but one day very soon God will finish. . . . And that's good enough for me.

Is it good enough for you? —Joanie Yoder

Every day more like my Savior,  
Every day my will resign,  
Till at last Christ reigns supremely  
In this grateful heart of mine. --Brandt

There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity

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**Keep Reaching For The Top** - Jon Krakauer, author and mountain climber, was determined to reach the "roof of the world," the peak of Mt. Everest. In an arduous ascent that killed some of his fellow climbers, he persevered. On May 10, 1996, he reached the summit.

"I understood on some dim, detached level that [the sweep of earth beneath my feet] was a spectacular sight," wrote Krakauer of that moment. "I'd been fantasizing about this moment, and the release of emotion that would accompany it, for many months. But now that I was finally here, standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, I just couldn't summon the energy to care."

Temporal goals can never fully satisfy. We see this in the ministry of Paul. He told the believers in Philippi: "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14-notes). It is the goal "for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Phil. 3:12-notes). He will "transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21notes).

That goal can provide the most powerful incentive. It inspires us to become more and more like Jesus. Every upward step gives us joyful soul-satisfaction. How diligently are we striving to reach that goal? — Vernon C. Grounds

I'm pressing on the upward way,  
New heights I'm gaining every day—  
Still praying as I'm onward bound,  
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground." —Oatman

Don't let contentment with earthly goals prevent you from attaining eternal gains.

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**Let's Get Growing** - Several years ago my interest in flowers had our home resembling a nursery. There's something about the presence of growing plants that I find very enjoyable. As I daily inspected their progress, I gained from my little green friends a new appreciation of the joy and necessity of the wonderful process of growth.

As Christians, we too are like plants. We should put down our roots, break up through the earth, spread out our branches, and burst into blossom. Such a thriving condition, however, isn't always evident in our lives. It's so easy to become bored and listless in the bland routine of our daily activities. Often we just hang on and merely exist without moving steadily toward maturity and fruitfulness.

At such times we are at a spiritual standstill and must allow Jesus the "Sun of Righteousness" (Mal 4:2) to warm our hearts anew with His love. We must send our roots deep into the Word of God by meditating on it day and night (Ps 1:2-notes). Then we will be like a fruitful tree planted by rivers of living water, and our branches will extend outward in an ever-increasing influence and witness. They will be filled with blossoms that reflect the beauty of righteous living. If we've become dormant, let's get growing! - M De Haan

If God can make a tiny seed  
Into a flower so fair,  
What can He make, O soul, of thee  
Through study, faith, and prayer? -Anon.

**When growth stops, decay begins.**

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**Get To Know Jesus** - In his book *The Call*, Os Guinness tells a story about Arthur Burns, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board during the 1970s. Burns, who was Jewish, became part of a Bible study held at the White House at that time. One day, those in the group listened in surprise as Burns prayed, "O God, may the day come when all Jews will come to know Jesus." But an even bigger surprise came when he prayed for the time "when all Christians will come to know Jesus."

Burns hit on a profound truth we all need to wrestle with. Even if we claim the name of Jesus Christ, it may not be evident to others that we really know Him. Do we have a personal relationship with Him? If so, are we striving, praying, and working to know Jesus more intimately each day?

Peter, a man who knew Jesus well, said that "the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" will bring us multiplied "grace and peace" (2Peter 1:2-notes). Knowing Jesus gives us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2Pe 1:3-notes). And knowledge of Jesus will help us develop character traits that show the world that we are connected to Him (2Pe 1:5, 6, 7, 8-notes).

Can you and I honestly say, "I know Jesus better today than I did yesterday"? — Dave Branon

No knowledge gained through arduous quest  
Has made my heart so free  
As this great fact of time and space—  
That Jesus died for me! —D. De Haan

**The better you know Jesus in your heart,  
the more the world will see Jesus in your life.**

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**Measure Me** - "Can you measure me today?" Caleb, our paperboy, asked.

It was not the first time he had made that request. A few years ago I had mentioned to him how tall he was getting. Since then, we've often measured his height on the siding of our house. After all this time, he still wants me to measure him.

Measurements can be indicators of growth. And it's a good idea to measure our spiritual growth. For instance: Do I spend time reading God's Word and talking with Him each day? Do I look forward to fellowshiping with the Lord? What "fruit of the Spirit" is apparent in my life? Do I talk about Jesus with people who don't know Him? How am I using my spiritual gift or gifts? Do I have a generous and giving spirit? How much better do I know God today than I did a year ago? These questions are good indicators of spiritual growth.

A child seems to grow up all of a sudden, but it's actually a continual process. Just as Jesus grew in both wisdom and stature, we as believers are to continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Peter 3:18). We are no longer to be children, but to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Ep 4:14,15-notes). Have you measured yourself lately? — Cindy Hess Kasper

The child of God who reads the Word  
And heeds the messages he's heard  
Will grow in grace from day to day  
And share with others on life's way. —Hess

**Salvation is the miracle of a moment; growth is the labor of a lifetime.**

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**The Highest Goal** - What are you living for in your few fleeting years here on this earth? Anything other than fame, wealth, or influence?

When Thomas Naylor was teaching business management at Duke University, he asked his students to draft a personal strategic plan. He reports that "with few exceptions, what they wanted fell into three categories: money, power, and things -- very big things, including vacation homes, expensive foreign automobiles, yachts, and even airplanes." This was their request of the faculty: "Teach me how to be a money-making machine."

That's not exactly an exalted ambition! No thought of humanitarian service, and no thought of spiritual values! Yet, what those students wanted was what many people want -- maybe what MOST people want.

The apostle Paul's overriding ambition was totally different. His consuming desire was to know Jesus

and become increasingly conformed to His holy example (Phil 3:10-note). He wanted to serve Him by proclaiming the life-changing good news of God's grace. What is our highest goal? Do we want to be a money-making machine, which can never buy lasting happiness? Or do we want to become more like Jesus? -V C Grounds

His Spirit fill my hungering soul,  
His power all my life control;  
My deepest prayer, my highest goal,  
That I may be like Jesus.-- Chisholm

A wise person sets his earthly goals on heavenly gains.

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**How A Tree Grows** - An impatient college student went to the president of the school and asked if he could take an accelerated course that would allow him to graduate sooner. "Yes," the president replied, "but it depends on what you want to be. When God wants to make an oak, he takes a hundred years. But when He wants to make a squash, He takes 6 months."

Like that student, we sometimes get frustrated with the rate of our spiritual growth. We'd like to see ourselves a lot closer to maturity than we are. We're disappointed that we fall back into childish behavior we thought we had outgrown. We want "school" to be over.

But growth takes time, and it often comes in spurts. Trees grow rapidly during a 4 to 6 week period in early summer, when woody fibers appear between the bark and the trunk. During the remainder of the year, these fibers solidify into the sturdy wood from which furniture is built, which will last several lifetimes.

Not growing as fast in your Christian life as you'd like? Perhaps you're "solidifying." It's a vital part of the process that the One who

began a good work in you will bring to completion (Phil. 1:6-note). Be patient. God isn't finished with you yet. --D C Egner

May I never run on ahead of Thy plan,  
Nor tarry, a laggard, behind.  
O order my steps, precious Lord, that each one  
With Thy steps may be perfectly timed. --Bowser

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**How Tall Are You?** - When it comes to how tall we stand, inherited genetic factors establish a ceiling that limits our height. Regardless of diet and exercise, physical growth ceases at a certain point. No matter how hard we may try, when that limit is reached we can't grow anymore (vertically that is, though many of us have a tendency to continue to expand horizontally).

Our potential for spiritual advancement, however, is unlimited. How "tall" we become depends on our own desire and how much we draw on the provisions of our heavenly Father. We're not held back by the genes we inherited from our earthly parents. The sky's the limit.

Christian maturity doesn't just happen. Our "diet" has to be right and we must "exercise" our faith regularly. Unless we feast on God's Word, there'll be no progress. Unless we obey it, we'll never realize our full potential.

How tall and strong are you in God's sight? How much have you developed this year? Whatever your answer, you can stand even taller. Remember the secret of growth control, and then do something about it. The Bible commands, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). --R W De Haan

Dear Jesus, take my heart and hand  
And help me, this I pray,  
That I through Your sweet love may grow  
More like You day by day. --Garrison

**Drawing close to Christ produces a growing Christlikeness.**

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**A W Pink - I asked the Lord that I might grow** (from his excellent article [Experimental Preaching](#))

Make Your ways known to me, Lord; teach me Your paths. Guide me in Your truth and teach me. Psalm 25:4-note, Ps 25:5-note

There are two ways of learning of Divine things. The one is to acquire **letter knowledge** of them from the Bible, the other is to be given an **actual experience** of them in the soul, under the Spirit's teaching.

Many suppose that by spending a few minutes in a concordance, they can discover what **humility** is; that by studying certain passages of Scriptures, they may obtain an increase of **faith**; or that by reading and re-reading a certain chapter, they may secure more **love**.

But that is not the way those graces are **experimentally developed**.

**Humility** is learned by a daily smarting under the plague of the heart, and having its innumerable abominations exposed to our view. (Ps 107:12-note, Pr 11:2, 29:23)

**Repentance** is learned by feeling the load of guilt, and the heavy burden of conscious defilement, bowing down the soul. (1Jn 1:6, 7, 8, 9)

**Faith** is learned by increasing discoveries of unbelief and infidelity. (also by Ro 10:17-note)

**Love** is learned by a personal sense of the undeserved goodness of God to the vilest of the vile.

**Patience** cannot be learned from books--it is acquired in the furnace of affliction! It is thus with all the spiritual graces of the Christian.

Ah, my reader, we beg the Lord to teach us--but the fact is, that we do not like His method of teaching us! **Ed:** Amen or O my!) Fiery trials (1Pe 1:6-note, 1Pe 1:7-note), storms of afflictions (Ps 119:67-note, Ps 119:71-note, Ro 5:2-note, Ro 5:3-note, Ro 5:4, 5-note), the dashing of our carnal hopes--are indeed painful to flesh and blood; yet it is by them that the heart is purified (Jas 4:8, Ps 51:7-note, Titus 2:14-note, 1Jn 3:2,3).

We say that we wish to live to God's glory--but fail to remember that we can do so only as SELF is denied and the Cross be taken up. God's ways of teaching His children are, like all His ways, entirely different from ours!

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I asked the Lord that I might grow,  
In faith and love and every grace,  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly His face.

It was He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He I trust has answered prayer.  
But it has been in such a way,  
As almost drove me to despair!

I hoped that in some favored hour,  
At once He'd answer my request.  
And by His love's constraining power,  
Subdue my sins and give me rest!

Instead of this, He made me feel,  
The hidden evils of my heart.  
And let the angry powers of hell,  
Assault my soul in every part!

Yes, more with His own hand, He seemed,  
Intent to aggravate my woe.  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low!

"Lord, why is this?" I trembling cried.  
Will You pursue Your worm to death?"  
"This is the way" the Lord replied,  
"I answer prayer for grace and strength."

"These inward trials I employ,  
From self, and pride, to set you free;  
And break your schemes of earthly joy,  
That you may find your all in Me!"  
--John Newton

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The Puritan writer **Thomas Watson** on growth in grace...

## Growth in Grace

### "But grow in grace." 2 Peter 3:18

True grace is progressive—of a spreading and growing nature. It is with grace as with light; first, there is the daybreak; then it shines brighter to the full meridian. A good Christian is like the crocodile—which continues to grow as long as it lives. The saints are not only compared to *stars* for their light—but to *trees* for their growth. Isa 61:3, and Hos 14:5. A good Christian is not like Hezekiah's sun, which went *backwards*, nor Joshua's sun that *stood still*—but is always advancing in holiness, and increasing with the increase of God.

### In how many ways may a Christian be said to grow in grace?

(1.) *He grows in the exercise of grace.* His lamp is burning and shining; therefore we read of a living hope. I Pet 1:1. Here is the activity of grace. The church prays for the blowing of the Spirit, that her spices (that is—her graces) might flow forth. Song 4:16.

(2.) A Christian grows in the **degree** of grace. He goes from strength to strength, from one degree of grace to another. Psalm 84:7-note. A saint goes from faith to faith. Ro 1:17-note. His love abounds more and more. Phil 1:9-note.

### What is the right manner of a Christian's growth?

**(1.) It is to grow less in one's own eyes.** "I am a worm, and no man." Psalm 22:6-note. The sight of his corruption and ignorance, makes a Christian grow into a dislike of himself; he vanishes in his own eyes. Job abhorred himself in the dust. Job 42:6. It is good to grow out of conceit with one's self.

**(2.) The right manner of growth is to grow proportionately, to grow in one grace as well as another.** 2Pet 1:5-note. To grow in knowledge—but not meekness, brotherly love, or good works—is not the right growth. A thing may *swell* and not *grow*; a man may be swelled with knowledge—yet may have no spiritual growth. The right manner of growth is uniform, growing in one grace as well as another. As the beauty of the body consists in a *symmetry* of parts, in which not only the head grows—but the arms and legs. Just so, spiritual growth is most beautiful, when there is *symmetry* and *proportion*, and every grace thrives.

**(3.) The right manner of growth is, when a Christian has grace suitable to his several employments and occasions.** When corruptions are strong—and he has grace able to give check to them. When burdens are heavy—and he has patience able to bear them. When temptations are fierce—and he has faith able to resist them. Then grace grows in the right manner.

### Whence is it, that true grace *must* grow?

(1.) It is proper for grace to grow; it is an enduring seed, the seed of God. 1John 3:9. It is the nature of seed to grow: grace does not lie in the heart, as a *stone* in the earth—but as *seed* in the earth, which will spring up, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear.

(2.) Grace *must* grow—from its sweetness and excellence. He who has grace is never weary of it—but would have more. The delight he has in it causes thirst. Grace is the image of God, and a Christian thinks he can never be enough like God. Grace instills peace; a Christian, therefore, strives to grow in grace, that he may grow in peace.

(3.) Grace *must* grow—from a believer's engrafting into Christ. He who is a scion, engrafted into this noble, generous stock, cannot but grow. Christ is so full of sap, and vivifying influence, that he makes all who are grafted into him, grow fruitful. "From me is your fruit found."

### What MOTIVES or INCENTIVES are there to make us grow in grace?

**(1.) Growth is the end of the ordinances.** Why does a man lay out cost on ground, fertilize and water it—but that it may grow? The sincere milk of the word is given, that we may grow thereby. 1Pet 2:2-note. The table of the Lord is on purpose for our spiritual nourishment and increase of grace.

**(2.) The growth of grace—is the best evidence of the truth of it.** Things that have no life will not grow: a picture will not grow, a stake in the hedge will not grow; but a plant that has a vegetative life grows. The growing of grace shows it to be alive in the soul.

**(3.) Growth in grace is the beauty of a Christian.** The more a child grows, the more it comes to its maturity, and looks more ruddy. Just so, the more a Christian grows in grace, the more he comes to his spiritual maturity, and looks fairer. Abraham's faith was beautiful when in its infancy—but at last it grew so vigorous and eminent, that God himself was in love with it, and crowned Abraham with this honor, to be the "father of the faithful."

**(4.) The more we grow in grace—the more glory we bring to God.** God's glory is more worth than the salvation of all men's souls. This should be our design—to raise the trophies of God's glory; and how can we better do it, than by growing in grace? "Hereby is my Father glorified—if you bring forth *much fruit*." Though the least grain of grace will bring salvation to us—yet it will not bring so much glory to God. "Filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise of his glory." It commends the skill of the farmer—when his plants grow and thrive; it is a praise and honor to God—when we thrive in grace.

**(5.) The more we grow in grace—the more will God love us.** Is it not that which we pray for? The more growth, the more God will love us. The farmer loves his thriving plants; the thriving Christian is God's *Hephzibah*, or chief delight. Christ loves to see the vine flourishing, and the pomegranates budding. Cant 6:11: He accepts the *truth* of grace—but commends the *growth* of grace. "I have not found so *great* faith, no, not in Israel." Would you be as the beloved disciple, who lay in Christ's bosom? Would you have much love from Christ? Labor for much growth, let faith flourish with good works, and love increase into zeal.

**(6.) We need to grow in grace.** There is still something lacking in our faith. 1Th 3:10-note. Grace is but in its infancy and minority, and we must still be adding an inch to our spiritual stature. The apostles said, "Lord, increase our faith." Luke 17:5. Grace is but weak. "I am this day weak, though anointed king." So, though we are anointed with grace—yet we are but weak, and had need



arrive at further degrees of sanctity.

**(7.) The growth of grace—will hinder the growth of corruption.** The more health grows, the more the distempers of the body abate. Just so, in spirituals—the more humility grows, the more the swelling of pride is assuaged. The more purity of heart grows—the more the fire of lust is abated. The growth of flowers in the garden does not hinder the growing of weeds—but the growing of the flower of grace does hinder the sprouting of corruption. As some plants have an antipathy, and will not thrive if they grow near together, as the vine and the bay tree; just so, where grace grows, sin will not thrive so fast.

**(8.) We cannot grow too much in grace;** there is no excess there. The body may grow too great, as in the dropsy; but faith cannot grow too great. "Your faith grows exceedingly." Here was exceeding—yet not excess. As a man cannot have too much *health*; just so—he cannot have not too much *grace*. Grace is the beauty of holiness. Ps 110:3-note. We cannot have too much spiritual beauty; it will be the only trouble at death, that we have grown no more in grace.

**(9.) Such as do not grow in grace—decay in grace.** "Not to go forward in the Christian life is to turn back" Bernard. There is no standing still in piety—either we go forward or backward. If faith does not grow, unbelief will. If heavenly-mindedness does not grow, covetousness will. A man who does not increase his stock, diminishes it. Just so, if you do not improve your stock of grace, your stock will decay. The angels on Jacob's ladder were either *ascending* or *descending*. Just so, if you do not *ascend* in true religion, you *descend*.

**(10.) The more we grow in grace—the more we shall flourish in glory.** Though every vessel of glory shall be full—yet some vessels hold more than others. He whose pound gained ten, was made ruler over ten cities. Luke 19:17. Such as do not grow much, though they lose not their glory, they lessen it. If any shall follow the Lamb in whiter and larger robes of glory than others, they shall be such as have shone most in grace here.

**Use: Lament the lack of growth.** Religion in many, has grown into a *form* and *profession* only; this is to grow in *leaves*—not in *fruit*. Many Christians are like a body in an atrophy, which does not thrive. They are not nourished by the sermons they hear. Like the angels who assumed bodies, they ate—but did not grow. It is to be suspected where there is no growth—that a vital principle is lacking. Some instead of growing better, grow worse; they grow more earthly, more profane. "Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse." 2Ti 3:13-note. Many grow hell-ward; they grow past shame. Zeph 3:5. They grow more rotten.

**How shall we know whether we grow in grace?** For deciding this question, I shall show:

1. The signs of our not growing;
2. The signs of our growing.

### **I. The signs of our NOT growing in grace—but rather falling into a spiritual decline.**

**[1]** We are a spiritual decline—**when we have lost our spiritual appetite.** A consumptive person does not have that appetite for his food, as formerly. Perhaps, Christian, you can remember the time when you hungered and thirsted after righteousness, you came to the ordinances with such an appetite, as to a feast; but now it is otherwise, Christ is not so prized, nor his ordinances so loved. This is a dreadful presage that grace is on the decline; and you are in a deep decline. It was a sign that David was near his grave when they covered him with clothes, and he got no warmth, 1Kings 1:1. Just so, when a person is covered with the warm clothes of ordinances, and yet has no warmth of affection to spiritual things, it is a sign that he is declining in grace.

**[2]** We are a spiritual decline—**when we grow more worldly.** Perhaps we once mounted into higher orbs, we set our hearts on things above, and spoke the language of Canaan; but now our minds are taken off from heaven, we dig our comfort out of the lower mines, and like Satan, we *compass the earth*. This is a sign we are going down the hill apace, and our grace is in a decline. It is observable when nature decays, and people are near dying, they grow more *stooping*; and truly, when men's hearts grow more *stooping* to the earth, and they can hardly lift up themselves to a heavenly thought, if grace is not dead—yet it is ready to die. Rev 3:2-note.

**[3]** We are a spiritual decline—**when we are less troubled about sin.** Time was, when the least sin grieved us, as the least hair makes the eye weep; but now we can commit sin without remorse. Time was, when we were troubled if we neglected closet prayer; now we can omit family-prayer. Time was, when vain *thoughts* troubled us; now we are not troubled for loose *practices*. Here is a sad declension in piety; and truly grace is so far from growing, that we can hardly perceive its pulse to beat!

### **II. The SIGNS of our growing in grace.**

**[1] When we have got beyond our former measures of grace.** It is a sign a child thrives, when he has outgrown his clothes. That knowledge which would serve us before, will not serve us now; we have a deeper insight into Scripture, our *light* is clearer, our spark of *love* is increased into a flame; there is a sign of growth. That competency of grace we once had, is too scanty for us now; we have

outgrown ourselves!

**[2] When we are more firmly rooted in piety.** "Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith." Col 2:7-note. The spreading of the root, shows the growth of the tree. When we are so strongly fastened on Christ, that we cannot be blown down with the breath of heretics, it is a blessed sign of growth. Athanasius was called *Adamas ecclesiae* [the Adamant of the Church,] an adamant that could not be removed from the love of the truth.

**[3] When we have a more spiritual frame of heart.**

- (1.) When we are more spiritual in our **principles**; when we oppose sin out of love to God, and because it strikes at his holiness.
- (2.) When we are more spiritual in our **affections**. We grieve for the first rising of corruption, for the bubbling up of vain thoughts, and for the hidden spring which runs underground. We mourn not only for the *penalty* of sin—but for its *pollution*. Sin is a coal which not only *burns*—but which *blackens*.
- (3.) When we are spiritual in the performance of **duty**. We are more serious, reverent, fervent; we have more *life* in prayer, we put *fire* to the sacrifice. "Fervent in spirit." We serve God with more *love*, which ripens and mellows our duty, and makes it come off with a better relish.

**[4] When grace gains ground by opposition.** The fire burns hottest, in the coldest season. Peter's courage increased, by the opposition of the high priest and the rulers. Acts 4:8, 11. The martyr's zeal was increased by persecution. Here was grace of the first magnitude.

**What shall we do to grow in grace?**

**(1.) Take heed of that which will hinder growth**, as the love of any sin. The body may as well thrive in a fever, as grace can where any sin is cherished.

**(2.) Use all means for growth in grace.**

First. "*Exercise* yourselves unto godliness." The body grows stronger by exercise. Trading of money makes men grow rich. Just so, the more we trade our faith in the promises, the richer in faith we grow.

Secondly. If you would be growing Christians, be *humble* Christians. It is observed in some countries, as in France, the best and largest grapes, which make wine, grow on the *lower* sort of vines. Just so, the humble saints grow most in grace. "God gives grace to the *humble*."

Thirdly. *Pray* to God for spiritual growth. Some pray that they may grow in gifts. It is better to grow *in* grace, than *gifts*. Gifts are for *ornament*, grace is for *nourishment*. Gifts edify others; grace saves ourselves. Some pray that they may grow rich; but a fruitful heart is better than a full purse. Pray that God would make you grow in grace, though it be by affliction. Heb 12:10-note. The vine grows by *pruning*. God's pruning-knife is to make us grow more in grace!

**How may we comfort such as complain that they do not grow in grace?**

They make mistake; for they may grow, when they think they do not. "There is that makes himself poor—yet has great riches." Pr 13:7. The sight Christians have of their defects in grace, and their thirst after greater measures of grace—make them think they do not grow, when they actually are growing. He who covets a great estate, because he has not so much as he desires, thinks himself to be poor. Indeed Christians should seek after the grace they *lack*—but they must not therefore overlook the grace they *have*. Let Christians be thankful for the least growth. If you do not grow so much in *assurance*, bless God if you grow in *sincerity*; if you do not grow so much in *knowledge*, bless God if you grow in *humility*. If a tree grows in the *root*, it is a true growth. Just so, if you grow in the root-grace of humility—that is as needful for you as any other growth.

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J C Ryle has the following chapter related to 2 Peter 3:18 (from his book which I highly recommend [Holiness](#)) entitled...

## GROWTH

The subject of the text which heads this page is one that ought to be deeply interesting to every true Christian. It naturally raises the questions: "Do we grow in grace?" "Do we get on in our religion?" "Do we make progress?"

To a mere formal Christian I cannot expect the inquiry to seem worth attention. The man who has nothing more than a kind of Sunday religion—whose Christianity is like his Sunday clothes, put on once a week, and then laid aside—such a man cannot, of course, be expected to care about growth in grace. He knows nothing about such matters. They are foolishness to him (1Cor. 2:14).

But to everyone who is in downright earnest about his soul, and hungers and thirsts after spiritual life, the question ought to come home with searching power. Do we make progress in our religion? Do we grow?

The question is one that is always useful, but especially so at certain seasons. A Saturday night, a communion Sunday, the return of a birthday, the end of a year—all these are seasons that ought to set us thinking and make us look within. Time is fast flying. Life is fast ebbing away. The hour is daily drawing nearer when the reality of our Christianity will be tested, and it will be seen whether we have built on "the rock" or on "the sand." Surely it becomes us from time to time to examine ourselves and take account of our souls? Do we get on in spiritual things? Do we grow?

The question is one that is of special importance in the present day. Crude and strange opinions are floating in men's minds on some points of doctrine, and among others on the point of growth in grace as an essential part of true holiness. By some it is totally denied. By others it is explained away and pared down to nothing. By thousands it is misunderstood and consequently neglected. In a day like this, it is useful to look fairly in the face the whole subject of Christian growth.

As we consider this subject, I want to make mention of the reality, the marks or signs, and the means of growth in grace.

I do not know you, into whose hands this text may have fallen. But I am not ashamed to ask your best attention to its contents. Believe me, the subject is no mere matter of speculation and controversy. It is an eminently practical subject, if any is in religion. It is intimately and inseparably connected with the whole question of sanctification. It is a leading mark of true saints that they grow. The spiritual health and prosperity, the spiritual happiness and comfort of every true-hearted and holy Christian, are intimately connected with the subject of spiritual growth.

### **1. The REALITY of religious growth**

That any Christian should deny the reality of religious growth is at first sight a strange and melancholy thing. But it is fair to remember that man's understanding is fallen no less than his will. Disagreements about doctrines are often nothing more than disagreements about the meaning of words. I try to hope that it is so in the present case. I try to believe that when I speak of growth in grace and maintain it, I mean one thing, while my brethren who deny it mean quite another. Let me therefore clear the way by explaining what I mean.

When I speak of growth in grace, I do not for a moment mean that a believer's interest in Christ can grow. I do not mean that he can grow in safety, acceptance with God or security. I do not mean that he can ever be more justified, more pardoned, more forgiven, more at peace with God, than he is the first moment that he believes. I hold firmly that the justification of a believer is a finished, perfect and complete work and that the weakest saint, though he may not know and feel it, is as completely justified as the strongest. I hold firmly that our election, calling and standing in Christ admit of no degrees, increase or diminishing. If anyone dreams that by growth in grace I mean growth in justification, he is utterly wide of the mark and utterly mistaken about the whole point I am considering. I would go to the stake, God helping me, for the glorious truth, that in the matter of justification before God every believer is complete in Christ (Col. 2:10-note). Nothing can be added to his justification from the moment he believes, and nothing taken away.

When I speak of growth in grace, I only mean increase in the degree, size, strength, vigor and power of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer's heart. I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth, progress and increase. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage and the like may be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble, and may vary greatly in the same man at different periods of his life. When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply this—that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness more marked. He feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart. He manifests more of it in his life. He is going on from strength to strength, from faith to faith and from grace to grace. I leave it to others to describe such a man's condition by any words they please. For myself I think the truest and best account of him is this—he is growing in grace.

One principal ground on which I build this doctrine of growth in grace is the plain language of Scripture. If words in the Bible mean anything, there is such a thing as growth, and believers ought to be exhorted to grow. What says Paul? "Your faith grows exceedingly" (2Th 1:3). "We beseech you . . . that you increase more and more" (1Th 4:10-note). "Increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10-note). "Having hope, when your faith is increased" (2Co 10:15). "The Lord make you to increase . . . in love" (1Th 3:12-note). "That you may grow up into Him in all things" (Ep 4:15-note). "I pray that your love may abound . . . more and more" (Phil 1:9-note). "We beseech you, as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more" (1Th 4:1-note). What says Peter? "Desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:2-note). "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). I know not what others think of such texts. To me they seem to establish the doctrine for which I contend and to be incapable of any other explanation. Growth in grace is taught in the Bible. I might stop here and say no more.

The other ground, however, on which I build the doctrine of growth in grace, is the ground of fact and experience. I ask any honest reader of the New Testament whether he cannot see degrees of grace in the New Testament saints whose histories are recorded, as plainly as the sun at noonday. I ask him whether he cannot see in the very same people as great a difference between their faith and knowledge at one time and at another, as between the same man's strength when he is an infant and when he is a grown-up man. I ask him whether the Scripture does not distinctly recognize this in the language it uses, when it speaks of "weak" faith and "strong" faith, and of Christians as "new-born babes," "little children," "young men," and "fathers"? (1Pe 2:2-note; 1John 2:12, 13, 14.) I ask him, above all, whether his own observation of believers nowadays does not bring him to the same conclusion? What true Christian would not confess that there is as much difference between the degree of his own faith and knowledge when he was first converted, and his present attainments, as there is between a sapling and a full-grown tree? His graces are the same in principle; but they have grown. I know not how these facts strike others; to my eyes they seem to prove, most unanswerably, that growth in grace is a real thing.

I feel almost ashamed to dwell so long upon this part of my subject. In fact, if any man means to say that the faith and hope and knowledge and holiness of a newly-converted person are as strong as those of an old-established believer and need no increase, it is a waste of time to argue further. No doubt they are as real, but not so strong; as true, but not so vigorous; as much seeds of the Spirit's planting, but not yet so fruitful. And if anyone asks how they are to become stronger, I say it must be by the same process by which all things having life increase—they must grow. And this is what I mean by growth in grace.

I want men to look at growth in grace as a thing of infinite importance to the soul. In a more practical sense, our best interests would be met with a serious inquiry into the question of spiritual growth.

**a. Let us know then that growth in grace is the best evidence of spiritual health and prosperity.**

In a child or a flower or a tree we are all aware that when there is no growth there is something wrong. Healthy life in an animal or vegetable will always show itself by progress and increase. It is just the same with our souls. If they are progressing and doing well, they will grow.

**b. Growth in grace is one way to be happy in our religion.**

God has wisely linked together our comfort and our increase in holiness. He has graciously made it our interest to press on and aim high in our Christianity. There is a vast difference between the amount of sensible enjoyment which one believer has in his religion compared to another. But you may be sure that ordinarily the man who feels the most "joy and peace in believing" and has the clearest witness of the Spirit in his heart is the man who grows.

**c. Growth in grace is one secret of usefulness to others.**

Our influence on others for good depends greatly on what they see in us. The children of the world measure Christianity quite as much by their eyes as by their ears. The Christian who is always at a standstill, to all appearance the same man, with the same little faults and weaknesses and besetting sins and petty infirmities, is seldom the Christian who does much good. The man who shakes and stirs minds and sets the world thinking is the believer who is continually improving and going forward. Men think there is life and reality when they see growth.

**d. Growth in grace pleases God.**

It may seem a wonderful thing, no doubt, that anything done by such creatures as we are can give pleasure to the Most High God. But so it is. The Scripture speaks of walking so as to please God. The Scripture says there are sacrifices with which "God is well pleased" (1Th 4:1-note; Heb. 13:16-note). The husbandman loves to see the plants on which he has bestowed labor flourishing and bearing fruit. It cannot but disappoint and grieve him to see them stunted and standing still. Now what does our Lord Himself say? "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman." "Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be My disciples" (John 15:1, 8). The Lord takes pleasure in all His people, but specially in those that grow.

**e. Let us know, above all, that growth in grace is not only a thing possible, but a thing for which believers are accountable.**

To tell an unconverted man, dead in sins, to grow in grace would doubtless be absurd. To tell a believer, who is quickened and alive to God, to grow, is only summoning him to a plain scriptural duty. He has a new principle within him, and it is a solemn duty not to quench it. Neglect of growth robs him of privileges, grieves the Spirit and makes the chariot wheels of his soul move heavily. Whose fault is it, I should like to know, if a believer does not grow in grace? The fault, I am sure, cannot be laid on God. He delights to give more grace; He "has pleasure in the prosperity of His servants" (James 4:6; Ps. 35:27-note). The fault, no doubt, is our own. We ourselves are to blame, and none else, if we do not grow.

**2. The MARKS of religious growth**

Let me take it for granted that we do not question the reality of growth in grace and its vast importance. So far so good. But you now want to know how anyone may find out whether he is growing in grace or not? I answer that question, in the first place, by observing that we are very poor judges of our own condition and that bystanders often know us better than we know ourselves. But I answer further that there are undoubtedly certain great marks and signs of growth in grace, and that wherever you see these marks you see a growing soul. I will now proceed to place some of these marks before you in order.

**a. One mark of growth in grace is increased humility.**

The man whose soul is growing feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness more every year. He is ready to say with Job, "I am vile," and with Abraham, "I am dust and ashes," and with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all Your mercies," and with David, "I am a worm," and with Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips," and with Peter, "I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Job 40:4; Ge 18:27; 32:10; Ps 22:6-note; Isa. 6:5; Luke 5:8). The nearer he draws to God and the more he sees of God's holiness and perfections, the more thoroughly is he sensible of his own countless imperfections. The further he journeys in the way to heaven, the more he understands what Paul meant when he says, "I am not already perfect," "I am not meet to be called an apostle," "I am less than the least of all saints," "I am chief of sinners" (Phil 3:12-note; 1Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8-note; 1Ti 1:15). The riper he is for glory, the more, like the ripe corn, he hangs down his head. The brighter and clearer is his light, the more he sees of the shortcomings and infirmities of his own heart. When first converted, he would tell you he saw but little of them compared to what he sees now. Would anyone know whether he is growing in grace? Be sure that you look within for increased humility.

**b. Another mark of growth in grace is increased faith and love towards our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The man whose soul is growing finds more in Christ to rest upon every year and rejoices more that he has such a Savior. No doubt he saw much in Him when first he believed. His faith laid hold on the atonement of Christ and gave him hope. But as he grows in grace, he sees a thousand things in Christ of which at first he never dreamed. His love and power, His heart and His intentions, His offices as Substitute, Intercessor, Priest, Advocate, Physician, Shepherd and Friend, unfold themselves to a growing soul in an unspeakable manner. In short, he discovers a suitableness in Christ to the wants of his soul, of which the half was once not known to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increased knowledge of Christ.

**c. Another mark of growth in grace is increased holiness of life and conversation.**

The man whose soul is growing gets more dominion over sin, the world and the devil every year. He becomes more careful about his temper, his words and his actions. He is more watchful over his conduct in every relation of life. He strives more to be conformed to the image of Christ in all things and to follow Him as his example, as well as to trust in Him as his Savior. He is not content with old attainments and former grace. He forgets the things that are behind and reaches forth unto those things which are before, making "Higher!" "Upward!" "Forward!" "Onward!" his continual motto (Phil. 3:13-note). On earth he thirsts and longs to have a will more entirely in unison with God's will. In heaven the chief thing that he looks for, next to the presence of Christ, is complete separation from all sin. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increased holiness.

**d. Another mark of growth in grace is increased spirituality of taste and mind.**

The man whose soul is growing takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world. He discharges faithfully, diligently and conscientiously every relation of life, whether at home or abroad. But the things he loves best are spiritual things. The ways and fashions and amusements and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them as downright sinful, nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell. He only feels that they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, spiritual conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing spirituality of taste.

**e. Another mark of growth in grace is increase of charity.**

The man whose soul is growing is more full of love every year—of love to all men, but especially of love towards the brethren. His love will show itself actively in a growing disposition to do kindnesses, to take trouble for others, to be good-natured to everybody, to be generous, sympathizing, thoughtful, tender-hearted and considerate. It will show itself passively in a growing disposition to be meek and patient towards all men, to put up with provocation and not stand upon rights, to bear and forbear much rather than quarrel. A growing soul will try to put the best construction on other people's conduct and to believe all things and hope all things, even to the end. There is no surer mark of backsliding and falling off in grace than an increasing disposition to find fault, pick holes and see weak points in others. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing charity.

**f. One more mark of growth in grace is increased zeal and diligence in trying to do good to souls.**

The man who is really growing will take greater interest in the salvation of sinners every year. Missions at home and abroad, efforts

of every kind to spread the gospel, attempts of any sort to increase religious light and diminish religious darkness—all these things will every year have a greater place in his attention. He will not become "weary in well-doing" because he does not see every effort succeed. He will not care less for the progress of Christ's cause on earth as he grows older, though he will learn to expect less. He will just work on, whatever the result may be—giving, praying, preaching, speaking, visiting, according to his position—and count his work its own reward. One of the surest marks of spiritual decline is a decreased interest about the souls of others and the growth of Christ's kingdom. Would anyone know whether he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increased concern about the salvation of souls.

Those high-flying religionists, whose only notion of Christianity is that of a state of perpetual joy and ecstasy, who tell you that they have got far beyond the region of conflict and soul-humiliation, such people no doubt will regard the marks I have laid down as "legal," "carnal" and "gendering to bondage." I cannot help that. I call no man master in these things. I only wish my statements to be tried in the balance of Scripture. And I firmly believe that what I have said is not only scriptural, but agreeable to the experience of the most eminent saints in every age. Show me a man in whom the six marks I have mentioned can be found. He is the man who can give a satisfactory answer to the question: "Do we grow?" Such are the most trustworthy marks of growth in grace. Let us examine them carefully and consider what we know about them.

### **3. The MEANS of religious growth**

The words of James must never be forgotten: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17-note). This is no doubt as true of growth in grace, as it is of everything else. It is the "gift of God." But still it must always be kept in mind that God is pleased to work by means. God has ordained means as well as ends. He that would grow in grace must use the means of growth.

This is a point, I fear, which is too much overlooked by believers. Many admire growth in grace in others and wish that they themselves were like them. But they seem to suppose that those who grow are what they are by some special gift or grant from God and that, as this gift is not bestowed on themselves, they must be content to sit still. This is a grievous delusion and one against which I desire to testify with all my might. I wish it to be distinctly understood that growth in grace is bound up with the use of means within the reach of all believers and that, as a general rule, growing souls are what they are because they use these means.

Let me ask the special attention of my readers while I try to set forth in order the means of growth. Cast away forever the vain thought that if a believer does not grow in grace it is not his fault. Settle it in your mind that a believer, a man quickened by the Spirit, is not a mere dead creature, but a being of mighty capacities and responsibilities. Let the words of Solomon sink down into your heart: "The soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Pr 13:4).

#### **a. One thing essential to growth in grace is diligence in the use of private means of grace.**

By these I understand such means as a man must use by himself alone, and no one can use for him. I include under this head private prayer, private reading of the Scriptures, and private meditation and self-examination. The man who does not take pains about these three things must never expect to grow. Here are the roots of true Christianity. Wrong here, a man is wrong all the way through! Here is the whole reason why many professing Christians never seem to get on. They are careless and slovenly about their private prayers. They read their Bibles but little and with very little heartiness of spirit. They give themselves no time for self-inquiry and quiet thought about the state of their souls.

It is useless to conceal from ourselves that the age we live in is full of peculiar dangers. It is an age of great activity and of much hurry, bustle and excitement in religion. Many are "running to and fro," no doubt, and "knowledge is increased" (Da 12:4). Thousands are ready enough for public meetings, sermon hearing, or anything else in which there is "sensation." Few appear to remember the absolute necessity of making time to "commune with our own hearts, and be still" (Ps 4:4-note). But without this, there is seldom any deep spiritual prosperity. Let us remember this point! Private religion must receive our first attention, if we wish our souls to grow.

#### **b. Another thing which is essential to growth in grace is carefulness in the use of public means of grace.**

By these I understand such means as a man has within his reach as a member of Christ's visible church. Under this head I include the ordinances of regular Sunday worship, the uniting with God's people in common prayer and praise, the preaching of the Word, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. I firmly believe that the manner in which these public means of grace are used has much to say to the prosperity of a believer's soul. It is easy to use them in a cold and heartless way. The very familiarity of them is apt to make us careless. The regular return of the same voice, and the same kind of words, and the same ceremonies, is likely to make us sleepy and callous and unfeeling. Here is a snare into which too many professing Christians fall. If we would grow, we must be on our guard here. Here is a matter in which the Spirit is often grieved and saints take great damage. Let us strive to use the old prayers, and sing the old hymns, and kneel at the old communion rail, and hear the old truths preached, with as much freshness and appetite as in the year we first believed. It is a sign of bad health when a person loses relish for his food; and it is a sign of spiritual decline when we lose our appetite for means of grace. Whatever we do about public means, let us always do it "with our might" (Eccl

9:10). This is the way to grow!

**c. Another thing essential to growth in grace is watchfulness over our conduct in the little matters of everyday life.**

Our tempers, our tongues, the discharge of our several relations of life, our employment of time—each and all must be vigilantly attended to if we wish our souls to prosper. Life is made up of days, and days of hours, and the little things of every hour are never so little as to be beneath the care of a Christian. When a tree begins to decay at root or heart, the mischief is first seen at the extreme end of the little branches. "He that despises little things," says an uninspired writer, "shall fall by little and little." That witness is true. Let others despise us, if they like, and call us precise and over careful. Let us patiently hold on our way, remembering that "we serve a precise God," that our Lord's example is to be copied in the least things as well as the greatest, and that we must "take up our cross daily" and hourly, rather than sin. We must aim to have a Christianity which, like the sap of a tree, runs through every twig and leaf of our character, and sanctifies all. This is one way to grow!

**d. Another thing which is essential to growth in grace is caution about the company we keep and the friendships we form.**

Nothing perhaps affects man's character more than the company he keeps. We catch the ways and tone of those we live and talk with, and unhappily get harm far more easily than good. Disease is infectious, but health is not. Now if a professing Christian deliberately chooses to be intimate with those who are not friends of God and who cling to the world, his soul is sure to take harm. It is hard enough to serve Christ under any circumstances in such a world as this. But it is doubly hard to do it if we are friends of the thoughtless and ungodly. Mistakes in friendship or marriage engagements are the whole reason why some have entirely ceased to grow. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (1Co 15:33; James 4:4). Let us seek friends who will stir us up about our prayers, our Bible reading, and our employment of time, about our souls, our salvation, and a world to come. Who can tell the good that a friend's word in season may do, or the harm that it may stop? This is one way to grow.

**e. There is one more thing which is absolutely essential to growth in grace, and that is regular and habitual communion with the Lord Jesus.**

In saying this, let no one suppose for a minute that I am referring to the Lord's Supper. I mean nothing of the kind. I mean that daily habit of communion between the believer and his Savior, which can only be carried on by faith, prayer and meditation. It is a habit, I fear, of which many believers know little. A man may be a believer and have his feet on the rock, and yet live far below his privileges. It is possible to have "union" with Christ, and yet to have little if any "communion" with Him. But, for all that, there is such a thing.

The names and offices of Christ, as laid down in Scripture, appear to me to show unmistakably that this communion between the saint and his Savior is not a mere fancy, but a real true thing. Between the Bridegroom and His bride, between the Head and His members, between the Physician and His patients, between the Advocate and His clients, between the Shepherd and His sheep, between the Master and His scholars, there is evidently implied a habit of familiar communion, of daily application for things needed, of daily pouring out and unburdening our hearts and minds. Such a habit of dealing with Christ is clearly something more than a vague general trust in the work that Christ did for sinners. It is getting close to Him and laying hold on Him with confidence, as a loving, personal Friend. This is what I mean by communion.

Now I believe that no man will ever grow in grace who does not know something experimentally of the habit of communion. We must not be content with a general orthodox knowledge that Christ is the Mediator between God and man, and that justification is by faith and not by works, and that we put our trust in Christ. We must go further than this. We must seek to have personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus and to deal with Him as a man deals with a loving friend. We must realize what it is to turn to Him first in every need, to talk to Him about every difficulty, to consult Him about every step, to spread before Him all our sorrows, to get Him to share in all our joys, to do all as in His sight, and to go through every day leaning on and looking to Him. This is the way that Paul lived "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." "To me to live is Christ" (Gal. 2:20-note; Phil. 1:21-note). It is ignorance of this way of living that makes so many see no beauty in the book of Canticles. But it is the man who lives in this way, who keeps up constant communion with Christ—this is the man, I say emphatically, whose soul will grow.

Although much more could be said on this weighty subject, let us now turn to some practical applications, keeping in mind its tremendous importance.

**1. This text may fall into the hands of some who know nothing whatever about growth in grace.**

They have little or no concern about religion. A little proper Sunday church—going or chapel—going makes up the sum and substance of their Christianity. They are without spiritual life, and of course they cannot at present grow. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are in a pitiable condition.

Years are slipping away and time is flying. Graveyards are filling up and families are thinning. Death and judgment are getting nearer to us all. And yet you live like one asleep about your soul! What madness! What folly! What suicide can be worse than this?

Awake before it is too late; awake, and arise from the dead, and live to God. Turn to Him who is sitting at the right hand of God, to be your Savior and Friend. Turn to Christ, and cry mightily to Him about your soul. There is yet hope! He that called Lazarus from the grave is not changed. He that commanded the widow's son at Nain to arise from his bier can do miracles yet for your soul. Seek Him at once: seek Christ, if you would not be lost forever. Do not stand still talking and meaning and intending and wishing and hoping. Seek Christ that you may live, and that living you may grow.

## **2. This text may fall into the hands of some who should know something of growth in grace but at present know nothing at all.**

They have made little or no progress since they were first converted. They seem to have "settled on their lees" (Zeph 1:12). They go on from year to year content with old grace, old experience, old knowledge, old faith, old measure of attainment, old religious expressions, old set phrases. Like the Gibeonites, their bread is always moldy and their shoes are patched and clouted. They never appear to get on. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are living far below your privileges and responsibilities. It is high time to examine yourself.

If you have reason to hope that you are a true believer and yet do not grow in grace, there must be a fault, and a serious fault somewhere. It cannot be the will of God that your soul should stand still. "He gives more grace." He takes "pleasure in the prosperity of His servants" (James 4:6; Ps 35:27-note). It cannot be for your own happiness or usefulness that your soul should stand still. Without growth you will never rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4-note). Without growth you will never do good to others. Surely this want of growth is a serious matter! It should raise in you great searchings of heart. There must be some "secret thing" (Job 15:11). There must be some cause.

Take the advice I give you. Resolve this very day that you will find out the reason of your standstill condition. Probe with a faithful and firm hand every corner of your soul. Search from one end of the camp to the other, until you find out the Achan who is weakening your hands. Begin with an application to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Physician of souls, and ask Him to heal the secret ailment within you, whatever it may be. Begin as if you had never applied to Him before, and ask for grace to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye. But never, never be content if your soul does not grow. For your peace's sake, for your usefulness' sake, for the honor of your Maker's cause, resolve to find out the reason why.

## **3. This message may fall into the hands of some who are really growing in grace but are not aware of it and will not allow it.**

Their very growth is the reason why they do not see their growth! Their continual increase in humility prevents them feeling that they get on. Like Moses, when he came down from the mount from communing with God, their faces shine. And yet, like Moses, they are not aware of it (Ex. 34:29). Such Christians, I grant freely, are not common. But here and there such are to be found. Like angels' visits, they are few and far between. Happy is the neighborhood where such growing Christians live! To meet them and see them and be in their company is like meeting and seeing a bit of "heaven upon earth."

Now what shall I say to such people? What can I say? What ought I to say? Shall I bid them awake to a consciousness of their own growth and be pleased with it? I will do nothing of the kind. Shall I tell them to plume themselves on their own attainments and look at their own superiority to others? God forbid! I will do nothing of the kind. To tell them such things would do them no good. To tell them such things, above all, would be a useless waste of time. If there is any one feature about a growing soul which specially marks him, it is his deep sense of his own unworthiness. He never sees anything to be praised in himself. He only feels that he is an unprofitable servant and the chief of sinners. It is the righteous, in the picture of the judgment day, who say, "Lord, when saw we You an hungry, and fed You?" (Matt. 25:37). Extremes do indeed meet strangely sometimes. The conscience-hardened sinner and the eminent saint are in one respect singularly alike. Neither of them fully realizes his own condition. The one does not see his own sin, nor the other his own grace!

But shall I say nothing to growing Christians? Is there no word of counsel I can address to them? The sum and substance of all that I can say is to be found in two sentences "Go forward!" "Go on!"

We can never have too much humility, too much faith in Christ, too much holiness, too much spirituality of mind, too much charity, too much zeal in doing good to others. Then let us be continually forgetting the things behind, and reaching forth unto the things before (Phil. 3:13-note). The best of Christians in these matters is infinitely below the perfect pattern of his Lord. Whatever the world may please to say, we may be sure there is no danger of any of us becoming "too good."

Let us cast to the winds as idle talk the common notion that it is possible to be "extreme" and go "too far" in religion. This is a favorite lie of the devil and one which he circulates with vast industry. No doubt there are enthusiasts and fanatics to be found who bring an evil report upon Christianity by their extravagances and follies. But if anyone means to say that a mortal man can be too humble, too charitable, too holy or too diligent in doing good, he must either be an infidel or a fool. In serving pleasure and money, it is easy to go too far. But in following the things which make up true religion and in serving Christ, there can be no extreme.



Let us never measure our religion by that of others and think we are doing enough if we have gone beyond our neighbors. This is another snare of the devil. Let us mind our own business. "What is that to you?" said our Master on a certain occasion, "Follow you Me" (John 21:22). Let us follow on, aiming at nothing short of perfection. Let us follow on, making Christ's life and character our only pattern and example. Let us follow on, remembering daily that at our best we are miserable sinners. Let us follow on, and never forget that it signifies nothing whether we are better than others or not. At our very best we are far worse than we ought to be. There will always be room for improvement in us. We shall be debtors to Christ's mercy and grace to the very last. Then let us leave off looking at others and comparing ourselves with others. We shall find enough to do if we look at our own hearts.

Last, but not least, if we know anything of growth in grace and desire to know more, let us not be surprised if we have to go through much trial and affliction in this world. I firmly believe it is the experience of nearly all the most eminent saints. Like their blessed Master, they have been men of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and perfected through sufferings (Isa. 53:3; Heb. 2:10-note). It is a striking saying of our Lord, "Every branch in Me that bears fruit [my Father] purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). It is a melancholy fact, that constant temporal prosperity, as a general rule, is injurious to a believer's soul. We cannot stand it. Sicknesses and losses and crosses and anxieties and disappointments seem absolutely needful to keep us humble, watchful and spiritual-minded. They are as needful as the pruning knife to the vine and the refiner's furnace to the gold. They are not pleasant to flesh and blood. We do not like them and often do not see their meaning. "No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11-note). We shall find that all worked for our good when we reach heaven. Let these thoughts abide in our minds, if we love growth in grace. When days of darkness come upon us, let us not count it a strange thing. Rather let us remember that lessons are learned on such days, which would never have been learned in sunshine. Let us say to ourselves, "This also is for my profit, that I may be a partaker of God's holiness. It is sent in love. I am in God's best school. Correction is instruction. This is meant to make me grow."

I leave the subject of growth in grace here. I trust I have said enough to set some readers thinking about it. All things are growing older: the world is growing old; we ourselves are growing older. A few more summers, a few more winters, a few more sicknesses, a few more sorrows, a few more weddings, a few more funerals, a few more meetings and a few more partings, and then—what? Why, the grass will be growing over our graves! (A chapter excerpted from **J C Ryle's** book which I highly recommend [Holiness](#) )