

## Growing In Grace

If I were to ask the question, "Are You Saved?" I might get a variety of answers. Some would say "yes"; a few might say, "*I don't think so*" or "*no, I'm not*"; but I expect most of you would say, "*I hope so*". The scripture is clear that the saving grace of God hath appeared to all men. ***Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, (12) Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*** God provided a plan whereby you and I can be saved. This is why Paul writing to the Ephesians said, ***Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith;*** The term "*faith*" in that passage is speaking of the system of faith, the gospel. It carries the same meaning as in ***Galatians 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law...*** Faith in that passage refers to the gospel system. Before the gospel of Christ came, people were kept under the Law of Moses. Paul was contrasting two systems.

So Ephesians 2:8 says ***For by grace are ye saved through faith*** (obedience to the gospel); ***and that not of yourselves: it*** (the gospel) ***is the gift of God:*** So we are saved by God's gift; we are justified through the gospel system. Simply stated, God provides a system, we obey that system, and because of our obedience, He saves us. We need to tell men what God did for them before we tell them what to do. Some have said that we are saved by grace only, but God's grace simply provides the system by which you can be saved.

The problem many have is that they think they are not doing enough to get to heaven. Somehow we need to do more and more to be pleasing to God. Because of this attitude, many get discouraged about trying to live the Christian life. So for the next few minutes, I want us to consider the matter of growing in the grace of God.

***2 Peter 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*** Here we are given the command to grow and since it is a command, it's important that we understand what that growth entails. Back in his first letter, Peter wrote ***1 Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*** There is no doubt that that Lord expects us to grow. If grace provides the plan of salvation that was brought to us by the Son of God, which it was; and if you have obeyed that plan of salvation, then what can you do to try to grow in grace? We can't earn our way into heaven because that price was already paid at Calvary. **ACTIVITY IN THE KINGDOM DOES NOT EQUATE TO GROWTH.** So how does one grow spiritually; what does it mean to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord?

Some try to equate growth to goodness and say things like, "*I hope I'm good enough to go to heaven.*" This view is in contrast with 1 John 5:13 which says we can know we are saved. ***1 John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*** So let's consider this matter of growing in grace and as we do, let's begin by noting what it isn't. Turn to Col. 2:10 as we begin to discover how we grow in grace.

**First let me suggest that growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not necessarily connected to the fact that I've been converted and am Christian.** Look at Colossians 2:10. To

those Christians, Paul wrote: **Colossians 2:10a** *And ye are complete in him, ...* . He didn't say that you are "becoming" complete or even you "will be" complete. To the saints and faithful brethren in Colossae he said you "are" complete.

Hold this thought and turn over to 2 Corinthians 5:17. **Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:** He's not becoming a new creation, he is a new creation. The lesson is when we bring a man up out of the baptismal water, his sins are washed away and he's a Christian. If he remains faithful for fifty years, he is still a Christian. He's a new creature when he comes up out of the water and he remains a Christian; his longevity will not get him a better place in heaven.

Consider the phrase sometimes used. *"I'm trying to be a better Christian."* Think about that a minute. This is sorta like the man talking about his blue tick coon dog saying that he has a "hound dog." Now the German word for dog is "hound." So he was in essence saying he had a "dog dog." What do we mean by the phrase "better Christian?" Are you saying that there are degrees of Christians; good, better, best? When you come up out of that water, you are a Christian; you are complete and in respect to salvation, growing doesn't make you any better than that. Now you can mature as a Christian, but that doesn't make you more of a Christian. When the Lord added you to the church and made you a Christian, He made you a Christian.

So are we trying to grow to get a better seat in heaven? No, in heaven there will be no front and back row seats. You are a Christian. 1 John 3:2 tells us that we are "**sons of God**" and as sons of God we will have a heavenly inheritance. Those of you that have a son know that your son in no more of a son as an adult than when he was born. He has always been a son regardless of the age.

**No. 2. Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not necessarily connected to how much God loves us.** Let's read together Rom 5:6-8 and see if you get the message held by some that *"I'm trying to work real hard so God will love me."* Or *"I'm afraid if I slip up one time then I'm out of here."* Some live the Christian life like walking a tight rope and that God has his finger on the delete button and one bobble either way He will get rid of you. **Romans 5:6-8** *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.* We see this in our public servants and soldiers. **(8) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

What this is saying is before you ever became a Christian, God loved you as much as He is ever going to love you. God commends His love toward us. He extended His grace toward us by offering us salvation. His love is a constant, universal, never changing love. So if you are working really hard, studying more in the Bible, praying more in an attempt to earn some of God's love, then you are trying to earn your way into heaven, and this is contrary to what the Bible teaches. God loved us while we were yet sinners. So what a comfort it is to know that I don't have to work to earn God's love.

In addition, He is willing to forgive you. **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* God knows that you are not going to be perfect and he knows that you will sin; but he loves you and is willing to forgive you.

**No. 3. Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not necessarily connected to being busy.** Now it's good to be busy for the Lord, but we need to understand just being busy does not

equate to spiritual growth. Years ago when I was in Greenville, there was a man that was always busy. Before worship he would welcome guest and open the door for members; during worship he would count attendance, sit in the office and answer the telephone. He was always busy, but he never really worshipped with the body. Now some of the busiest people that you can read about in your N.T were the Pharisees. In fact they would at time announce their business. They would get people's attention and let them know that they were about to pray or give of their alms. Just because we are busy might not mean that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is a real danger for preachers. Doing a lot of things does not necessarily mean you are pleasing to God.

**No. 4. Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not necessarily connected to Bible knowledge.** Now don't misunderstand me. Knowing the word of God is extremely important. The Israelites were instructed to teach their children the word of God during every aspect of the day. Now they didn't have the written word before them, so to teach God's word to their children, they would have had to memorize it. I wonder how many of us memorize scripture so we can teach it to our children. But spiritual growth is not necessarily connected to how much Bible I know. There are some atheists that have knowledge of the Bible, but just having facts does not equate to spiritual growth. We can become frustrated when we consider the matter of growing in grace and we wonder if we are doing enough.

**Look at the end of 2 Peter 3:18 for a key phrase in understanding this passage.** The end of the verse says, To *him be glory both now and for ever*. Here is the answer to why I try to learn the Bible; why I do personal work; why I change my behavior; it's to bring glory to Him. The Lord wants me to become a Christian – why; He wants me to grow in the grace – why; he wants me to grow in knowledge – why; because it gives Him glory. Recall what the Lord said *Matthew 5:13-16 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. (14) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. (15) Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. (16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,* (it doesn't stop here) *and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* Paul expressed the same sentiment. *1 Corinthians 6:19-20 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (20) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.* This concept changes my entire concept on Christianity. So when we don't try to study; when we don't try to grow; we are taking away the glory from our Father.

**But how do we grow in grace?** Grace is unmerited favor from God and it's not something that we can add to or increase. It's something given to us and not something we do. Let me suggest that to grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ means to mature in your appreciation of the salvation system that He put into place. The more we grow as a Christian, the better we understand and appreciated the magnitude of what Jesus did on the cross.

We are also instructed to grow in knowledge our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is to grow in your understanding of the inspired writings made available to us. And the purpose of both is to bring glory to the Father.

There are some people that should never tell anyone that they are members of the church of Christ because they live in such a way that it brings reproach on God. But that faithful brother or sister that brings glory to God is growing just for that reason.

There is a statement that is frequently used that came out of the mouth of our Lord that is closely related to this matter of growing. Thinking in terms of growing helps us understand what Jesus meant when he said **(John 14:15) If ye love me, keep my commandments.** Notice that our Lord didn't say if you are afraid of me, keep my commandments. He didn't say if you are afraid of going to hell, keep my commandments. He didn't even say if you want to go to heaven, keep my commandments. No, he said, IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS. People say all the time that they love Jesus and make no pretense to keep his commandments.

*I heard of a soldier that was deployed after a recent marriage. He said that after he had gotten settled in that his new bride wrote his letters every day, sometimes twice a day. Do you think he tossed those letters up on a shelf and will get around to reading them sometime later? Not at all; he said he read every one of those letters as soon as he received them and sometimes he read them several times. Why did he do that? Because he loved the source of those writings.*

People don't study their Bibles because they don't have a love for the one that wrote it. So when we think about growing, let us think about giving our Father in Heaven glory because he loved us so much. It's hard to think about the second person of the godhead left heaven to come down to earth so that I can go to heaven. Theologians call that *"the humiliation of Christ."* Some speak of it as the evidence of God's love. I call it God's grace.

So it's not so much as what you do as a Christian as it is why you do what you do. God saved me and now I'm trying to give him the glory because of it.

Have you accepted the grace of God? Are you in God's family?

Invitation.