

"Growing In Grace"

Holiness

2 Peter 3:17-18

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Bruce: Lord Jesus, You have saved us by Your grace. And then You called us to grow in Your grace and the knowledge of who You are in Your Person and Your work. Father, we pray that we would set aside all the frustrations of life, the difficulty we have as we look over at our life experience and our pilgrimage, that you would draw us closer to Yourself by opening our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly for Christ's sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Turn in your Bibles, please, to the book of 2 Peter. We're coming to a close in our study on the theme of holiness as found in 1 and 2 Peter. Ted Wood, I want to thank you for your excellent job last week. What a wonderful review! That was quite excellent, and we appreciate it very much, buddy. Thank you.

Participant: It's a great handout.

Bruce: I call your attention to the passage we're going to look at today, found in 2 Peter chapter 3, verses 17 and 18.

"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people, and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen and Amen."

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: One of my responsibilities at PNC, at the time when I was there, was that I managed a group called Private Foundation Management Services. It was my responsibility to serve as the executive director of thirty different family foundations throughout the country. My responsibility was to help them give their money away according to the mission statement of their individual family foundations. So we dealt with the arts, education, health, youth and social services.

Oftentimes, I was asked to teach a course, or to help people write a good grant. I reviewed about fifteen grant proposals every year. I did a lot of reading. Some of them were wonderful. Some of them were just quite poor in their writing.

And so I came up with a little thing to teach people how to write a good grant. And I called it "Writing a Good Grant From a Grant Maker's Perspective," from a dummy's perspective. So I was going to give them some information.

This is what I'm looking for. When you submit a grant to me, this is what I need to know, if you're going to get a grant from the foundation you're applying to.

One of the things I taught them was this. Spend a lot of time on your summary statement.

The first thing that I read, in a six- or eight-page application to a foundation, the first thing I went to was the last page, to read those summary statements, because I wanted to

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see that they really summarized, in that one statement, everything they were going to tell me in those six or seven pages that I read.

It's very, very important to read the summary statement of an application, because it really tells you this. Did they really tell you the thing they wanted to tell you, because that's the most important thing that they're going to remember. I'm going to remind myself of and remember that very summary statement.

Now that wasn't a genius thing that I came up with. I really borrowed it from Peter, because that's exactly what Peter does in these verses. Now go back and read these verses. This is Peter's summary statement of chapter 3, chapter 2 and chapter 1 of the whole book. This is his summary statement.

And he basically says this. "I've told you this before. Remind yourselves not to give yourselves to lawless men who err, and grow in grace."

He says these things. One is negative and one is positive. The negative is to guard against error. And the positive is to grow in grace. Now that's his summary statement.

Now if you're ever going to write a grant, make sure that you spend time on your summary statement, because that's what Peter does. And we want to explore Peter's summary statement.

What does he mean when he says this? Guard against error. And the second thing is to grow in grace. That's everything he taught us in the three chapters of the book. This is Peter's summary statement. So we want to examine this today and look at Peter's summary statement. And that would be to guard against error, which we've talk about, and to grow in grace. That's what we're going to spend our time on today.

In growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we'll look at four things that Peter is going to teach us from this particular passage. First of all, *what are the characteristics of growth?* What do we mean when we say, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?" What does that look like? What does it mean? How is it defined?

Secondly, *what are the conditions of growth in grace?* What do we need to do to put ourselves in a position to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And remember, Peter's summary statement is this. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't say, "grow in your experience," or in your emotions, or in your feelings, or in your knowledge. He says, "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." That's what we grow in. What does that look like? What are the conditions to make that a feasible activity in our lives?

Thirdly, Lord willing, we want to examine this. *What are the causes of growth?* What are the things that cause a person to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? That's what our growth is to be in.

So the characteristics of growth, the conditions of growth, the cause of growth. And lastly, *what are the confirmations of growth?* Are there certain things that are evidential in your life that really say, "Yes, I am growing in grace; yes, I am growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?" What are the indicators that this is a fact that's really happening in your life? Lord willing, we'll go through those four things today. And if we don't cover them all, we'll pick it up next week.

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So first of all, let's take a look at this. *What are the characteristics of growth?* When we say that we're growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, what does that mean?

Let me give you a definition for your consideration. To grow in grace is to increase in a spirit of conformity to the will of God, and to govern our conduct more and more by the same principles that Christ would do. Let me give you that again. To grow in grace is to increase in a spirit of conformity—key word—in a spirit of conformity to the will of God, and to govern our conduct more and more by the same principles that Christ would do. That's the definition we're going to use for our consideration for growing in grace. Conformity to the will of God is essentially what it means.

Now at the outset, let me say this: that dead things cannot grow. Something that is dead cannot grow. Those of you *"who have been made alive by Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins—it is by grace you have been saved"*—that is the person who can grow. If there is no regenerated life, you cannot grow in grace. There must be new life before you can grow in grace. The real issue is do I have new life in Christ? Have I been saved by the grace of God? Only those who *"have been made alive in Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins"*, who have been saved by grace—those are the only ones who can grow in grace and conform to the will of God.

And the great Giver of life must first implant the seeds of regenerated life in the human soul. And then afterwards, those seeds can grow and germinate and grow in grace. Something has to happen before we can grow in grace, and that is regeneration.

I would have to say this, men, just to be very, very clear. To those of you who are dead in your transgressions and sins this passage has no application to you, because there must be life before there can be growth in grace. You cannot grow in grace because you are still under the curse of the law and under the wrath of God. If that is your case today, men, then plea for God's mercy. Tremble before Him, repent and trust Christ. And may God have mercy on your soul, because you cannot have growth in grace unless there is a regenerated life. And men, if you're not in Christ today, repent and come to him and ask God to be merciful to your soul so you can begin the process of growing in grace. There must be life before there can be growth.

So what are some of the characteristics—characteristics of the growth that we're talking about, conformity to the will of God and operating by the principles of Christ's life? First of all, I'll offer for your consideration three things about growth. First of all it is *silent*. Secondly, it is *slow*, and thirdly, it's *specific*.

What do I mean when I say that it's *silent*? Of all things, growth that is the most calm, the most quiet, the most dignified is our growth in grace. It is silent. Whatever else may give rise to agitation or emotion, or commotion and excitement, that is not necessarily spiritual growth. Just because you're experiencing some wonderful phenomena of emotion or commotion or something like that, that does not necessarily mean that it's spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is silent. It's calm. It's very, very quiet. It's most dignified, because something is happening inside your soul. Growth is external; it's not external. The external is the expression of something that manifests itself. But growth that is silent takes place in the depths of your soul. It's internal. And so it's silent.

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So you've got to understand this, men, that activity must not be confused with spiritual growth. It's not activity, but it's progress. I remind you of Luke chapter 17 verse 20, where Jesus said that the Kingdom is spiritual and it's internal.

Transcriber's Note: Luke 17:20-21. *"Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.'"*

Bruce: So Christian growth is going to be silent—something that is happening inside your soul because of the grace of God that has given you a new, implanted life.

Notice this. That growth is silent, and therefore it's not the product of our effort. That doesn't mean we don't work at it. That's not what I'm saying. All I'm saying is this—that growth is not the product of effort. But it's the product of life, because spiritual growth consists most in growth of the root, which is out of sight. You see, when God implanted you with a regenerated life, that's the root of your whole existence. And that is a silent growth. And just because you have external activity or emotion, or feelings or commotion, that does not necessarily mean that it's growing in grace. Growing in grace is silent because it's internal. God has implanted His life within you and that is now the root of your new soul through regeneration by the work of the Holy Spirit. And that is something that is going to be silent in your life. It's going to be calm. It's going to be quiet. It's something that is very, very dignified, because something is happening to you internally. And men, it is not a function that you make happen. That is something that God's grace does in you through the work of the Holy Spirit.

So the first indication would be this. We need to consider that it is silent. Silently the Holy Spirit helps us grow from the storehouse of His Biblical truth the nourishment that is needed to sustain and strengthen our lives that has been given to you by His grace. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, I would say that it is not only silent, but it is *slow*. Growth in Christ is slow. It's gradual. It's a gradual process.

Oftentimes, people become discouraged because of the littleness of their spiritual growth. They say, "I don't feel anything. I don't sense anything. I don't have any emotion in all this." Well, that may not be bad, because, men, the growth is silent. It's calm; it's serene; it's dignified, because something is happening to you internally.

Take an example from nature. The progress of the corn stalk, which comes to maturity in several months, can be scarcely visible at the end of the first week. (*Unclear.*) You don't see anything happen the first week. There's an element of slowness in it. It takes some time.

Another example would be the progress of an oak tree, which comes to maturity in a century or more. It's hardly visible the very first year. You see, it may be slow in its process.

How are we to look at spiritual growth, which will not be completed until the cycles of returning have run its course? You've just got to realize that God is at work in you. We need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because He is at work in us to cause us to do the things that He wants us to do, and that may take some time.

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So don't be discouraged by comparing yourself to somebody else who says, "Oh, I'm really growing in grace. I'm growing in my spirituality." Don't compare yourself with somebody else, because comparison will lead to two things—discouragement and pride.

You're going to say this. "Oh, I'm growing faster than they are." That's going to produce pride. That's not good for you. Secondly, you might say, "I'm not growing as much as she is." That will discourage you. Don't compare yourself. Remember this. Growth in you is silent. It's calm. It's dignified and slow. And it's silent because God is working in your heart internally, manifesting the evidence of His regenerative life in your soul. And that may take some time.

Now how is it that we are to look at ourselves in this? One of the key expressions for us to understand growth in grace would be this, men. Romans 8:1. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Your life and growth is not to be measured by your last mistake. Your life in Christ and your growth in Christ is not to be measured by your last mistake or your last failure.

How often do we look at our failures and say, "Look what's happening!" You've got to take a look at the life of Samson, or the life of David.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You see, it's the whole tenor of our lives. David is described as what? *"A man after My own heart."* It wasn't that He made that statement after his last mistake or his last sin. He looked at the whole tenor of his life. God looks at the whole tenor of our lives, men, as He takes us through the process of spiritual growth. So don't get wrapped up in Satan's attack that says, "I just blew it." Remember this. There is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: To understand growth, we must have our gaze be in the future. And that means this: that growth is not only silent. Growth is not only slow. But growth is also going to be *specific*. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. It's interesting to me that even the apostle Paul in Colossians 3 said, "I haven't attained yet."

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: You know, "not looking behind, but looking forward to those things, I press on." He even admits that he hadn't even attained to where he wanted to be.

Bruce: That's a great transition, Don, because that's where I talk about being specific. And what I mean by being specific is this. Growth always develops in a very specific or definite direction. It's specific in its direction.

Growth is silent, it's slow, and it's specific because it will always be growing in a right direction. That's what Don just mentioned in his reference to Paul's epistle, Colossians chapter 3. "I haven't attained it yet, but I'm moving in that direction." As we look at our spiritual growth, we have to always be looking forward. Sometimes, if you want to see what God's work for your life is, you look backwards and see where He has brought you, and that will give you some indication of where He is taking you forward. When we look at our specific growth in grace, it's always moving in a certain direction.

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And nature is our model here also, if I can use nature as a model for us. The growth of seeds must conform to their own type. That means this. The acorn becomes an oak. A tomato tree produces tomato plants. A regenerated spiritual life is moving in one direction, and that is conformity to the Person and work of Christ. That's the direction that we're moving in.

That's how I understand the characteristics of my Christian growth. It would be this. It's silent. It's slow. And it's specific in conforming me to the Person and work of Christ. That's the model, because life breeds its own necessity. And as seeds must conform to their own type, God has regenerated us, and the type now is that we are becoming conformed to the image of Christ.

And so it is with us as followers of Christ. Spiritual growth is always moving in a specific direction—conforming to the image of Christ. Any other direction verifies that it is not spiritual growth. Men, if we're not becoming more Christlike, then we know this—that it's not growing in grace. If we're not becoming more Christlike, we're not growing in grace.

One of the things that was most helpful to me was this. Remember several years ago, when we had that little wrist band that said, "What has Jesus done?" I think a better one than "what would Jesus do?" would be "What has Jesus done?"—WHJD, what has Jesus done? When you focus on what Jesus has done, that gives you the impetus to think about what He's going to do for me, because I know what He has done. He has redeemed me by the blood of the Lamb. God has regenerated me. He has planted a new life within me. And now I can work out my salvation with fear and trembling and work with that, and do my responsibilities, and realize this—that growth is going to be silent in my conforming to Christ. It's going to be slow in my conforming to Christ. And it's going to be specific in the direction of conforming to Christ. Yes, Ted?

Ted: I'm thinking that the growth of the seed must conform to its own type. And it must conform to its own DNA, because an oak seed does not become a stalk of corn.

Bruce: Correct.

Ted: So if and when an oak seed becomes a stalk of corn, it means that it really wasn't an oak seed in the first place.

Bruce: Correct. Exactly right. That's what I mean by that. A seed must grow according to its own type. If God has regenerated us and implanted the life of Christ within us, what is it going to look like? It's going to look more like Christ. If that is not happening, then maybe you have to realize that maybe I don't have that seed of Christ in me at all. Maybe I've not been regenerated. Maybe that hasn't happened yet because of this. There can only be growth where there is life.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: If there is not new life in Christ, we cannot grow in grace. So nature is our great example. Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: Isn't the reverse also true—that where there is life, there will be growth?

Bruce: There will be evidence of it, absolutely. When you see that there is life, there will be evidence of something that happens to you. And that's why it's important that we

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understand this. There is no condemnation for those of us in Christ. Don't base your life on your last failure. If that were the case, we would all be defeated. It's slow, it's silent, and specific in the direction of being conformed to Christ.

Growth that is silent, slow and specifically in the direction of Christ is the best protection against false teachers. That's what Peter is saying. Remember, there are two things. The negative is to guard against error. What's the greatest guard against error? Growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's the greatest activity in guarding against error. It's growing in grace. And remember this. It's slow, it's silent and it's very specific.

So what are some of the *conditions* of growing in grace? Well first of all, I would say *in grace*. We are growing in grace. Remember this. Grace is *God's resources at Christ's expense*. We are growing and understanding more of God's resources at Christ's expense. That's why it's so important that we understand WHJD. What has Jesus done? We need to understand the history of what Christ has done for me because that is the means by which I came into saving faith. And the knowledge that I must have is this. What has Jesus done for me and for God's glory? That is the basis of our growing in grace. God's grace is defined as this: God's resources at Christ's expense.

You see, we might as well expect a corn seed to grow into an oak tree as to expect that a person who is destitute of the life of God to grow in that direction. It just can't happen.

So then, what conditions become necessary for us to grow in grace? I want to give you a couple things.

I think the favorable conditions are our *surroundings*. What are the surroundings that you put yourself in?

I remember that years ago a friend of mine came to my church, and he was really hurting and in pain. He had gone through some very difficult situations in his marriage. And my pastor said, "You know, you just need to come to church and just grow and absorb grace. Don't get involved in anything. Just come and absorb grace."

You see, sometimes we just need to absorb the grace of God. That is what saved us. Now we just need to live in grace and grow in it and absorb it.

So we need to be concerned about 5 several things, men. Those are the conditions of what I would call *favorable surroundings*. You need to put yourself in favorable surroundings so you're exposed to grace, so you can absorb it. That's why you come to church, why we have fellowship in the church. That's why we have our Bible study here on Fridays. We come together in favorable conditions so that you can grow in grace. And certain things make that happen when you have these favorable conditions. I would offer these for your consideration. Here are the ways in which God reveals Himself.

You see, if you're really going to get to know someone, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, remember that learning does not lead to knowledge. Learning should lead to living and living should lead to loving. So we don't stop at just knowledge. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you really want to get to know someone, what do you have to do to get to know that person? You have to put yourself in a favorable condition for how they can reveal themselves to you. I might have a desire to get to know someone. But if he does not

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choose to reveal himself to me, I cannot get to know him. I need to put myself in a favorable condition so the person who I want to know will reveal himself. Let me offer for you what I would consider to be four favorable conditions to allow the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself to us.

First of all, it would be this: *communication*. That would be prayer. You must speak with Him and He must speak with you. We must speak with Him and He must speak with us. That's one of the ways in which God in Christ is going to reveal Himself. It is through the communication of our prayer life. So the first favorable condition is to have communication through a prayer life. However the Lord is pleased to have you do that, that's a critical component of our getting to know and grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, as He is revealed to us through our prayer life.

Secondly, *contemplation*. That would be the study of the Scripture, Bible study, being taught the Scripture, divine revelation. By a divine revelation in the study of God's word, that's the influence of the understanding of the heart, the will and the conscience. There has to be contemplation of God's word.

Now you can do that in many ways—certainly in your church, listening to sermons, certainly coming to our Bible study on Friday, to the Brave Men. There are other ways you can do that. But you've got to be exposed to contemplating the word of God, the Scripture, because that is the primary means by which God reveals Himself, through the Scripture.

So communication in prayer, contemplation through Scripture study, understanding the word of God because that will influence the understanding of the heart, the understanding of the will and the understanding of our consciences.

Thirdly would be what I would call *commemoration*. And that would be participating in the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Baptism, because they are wonderful examples of the ministry of what Christ has done for us. And we need the reminder.

So when somebody is being baptized, look back and think about your own experience. Don't just look at that and say, "Oh, isn't that a nice thing that's happening!" Go back and contemplate your own experience, and participate in that baptism experience just by your own mind, saying, "I've been baptized into the Person and work of Christ. I identify with the Person and work of Christ." See value in the baptism when somebody else is being baptized. Make that your own experience and go back and think about what it means for you to be baptized into the Person and work of Christ.

And the Lord's Supper. Those are two things that remind us of what Christ has done—WHJD. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are very important for us to participate in—the ordinances and the sacraments that God has given us. Those are means of our cultivating the remembrance of His work in you.

The last thing I would say is this. *Conversation*. Conversation with other believers is a means of increasing our faith and the desire and the capacity for more enjoyment of Christ. That's why we get together with the Brave Men on Fridays, because we come to enjoy one another. We talk about the Person and work of Christ in our lives. And we have communication with each other and we have conversation with one another in Christ. Yes, Don?

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Don: Bruce, last week Ted said that Satan works on the young, the weak and the separated.

Bruce: Correct.

Ted: That's because Bruce said it.

Don: Oh, okay. *(Laughter.)* Well anyway, the point is that when we are separated from the means of grace, whether it be prayer, Bible study or fellowship, you're not going to grow.

Bruce: Absolutely. You see, that's why it's important that we have fellowship as part of our conversation with one another. What are the things that we talk about?

Now I'm not picking on anybody. But normally, what do we do after we go have lunch or go have breakfast today? When we get together, what do we talk about?

Participant: Sports.

Bruce: Exactly. We talk about the Penguins, the Pirates, the Steelers. Now there's nothing wrong with that. But that can't be the focus of our lives, men! There's much more to our lives than just the Steelers, the Pirates or the Penguins.

Participant: Now wait a second! *(Laughter.)*

Second Participant: What about the Midshipmen? What about the Coats?

Bruce: They're a different category. *(Laughter.)* That's legitimate. *(Laughter.)*

My point is this, men. We need to have conversation about what's going on in our lives in Christ. Share that with each other.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Be an encouragement to one another. That's important for us to do that, to have conversation about this. This is what God has done in my life. What is God doing in your life? What are the indicators of your growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Here's something I experienced that was a good evaluation for me. Let me just tell you one thing that I do every day that I would encourage you to do because it really helps me. There's a thing called "Grace Gems."

Participant: Oh, yes.

Bruce: Gracegems.org.
<http://www.gracegems.org>

It has a little five-minute devotional from the Puritan works. Grace Gems has a little three- to five-minute devotional expression, and there's always a little one-page article, two or three paragraphs long. It takes you about five minutes. Just something like that is so encouraging. That's what we need to do for each other. We have to have that type of conversation about what's going on in our lives. It's what we would call fellowship in Christ.

So those are what I would call four favorable conditions. They would be communication through prayer, our contemplation of Bible study, our commemoration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper—participating in those as a reminder of what God has done for us, and lastly, conversation and fellowship about the Person and work of Christ in our own lives.

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Christ is the Source of our grace. He's the Object of our knowledge. And now do you get the idea that all of our Christian growth, at its deepest level, consists in permeating more deeply into Christ and what He has done? It's getting to know Him more clearly, more personally and more deeply. Remember, it's growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory.

And so in summary of this particular section, men, I would offer this. The degree of growth a person experiences and expresses is always in proportion to the degree of a person's present knowledge of the Person of Christ. And that is this. If we're lacking in benevolence, what do we need to study? The benevolence of Christ. If we're lacking in obedience, what do we need to study? The obedience of Christ. If we're lacking compassion, what do we need to study? The compassion of Christ. Study that area of Christ and that will produce the same response in you that He models for us in His life. Study that particular attribute of Christ, and it will become a model for you in your own life. Yes, Thomas?

Tom: You mentioned that people always say that Christ came because He loves me, and He died for me because He loves me. And yet we read that Christ said, "I came to do My Father's will."

Bruce: Amen.

Tom: He was obedient to His Father, to death.

Bruce: If you're lacking obedience, study Christ's obedience. Let him produce the same result in you, because you're growing in what?

Participant: Grace.

Bruce: Grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we're doing.

So let me give you some *causes* of growth. What are some of the causes of growth? Well, I would go back to nature's example, if I may, because nature's examples are the same as those of Christian growth.

There are four things that are important for growth in nature, and they would be *light, heat, moisture* and *air*. And that's analogous to our Christian growth. Those things are necessary for us to cause us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First of all, let's take a look at *light*. The word of God is to be for the growth of the soul what light is to vegetation. What light is to vegetation the word of God is to our souls. That must light up our lives.

Now in my book on light and heat, the title is *Light in God's Word and Heat in the Work of the Holy Spirit*. Two things for vegetation life are necessary—light and heat. It's the same thing in our Christian life. Light and heat are necessary—light from God's word and heat from the work of the Holy Spirit motivating and teaching us in our lives. So there must be heat.

Truth without love is like a frosty moonlight—beautiful, but it's cold to be in. There must be a love for God and a love for man. Do you see what happens when you're exposed to truth? You develop a love for God. That's why we have a love for one another. The love that we have for one another is directly proportional to our love for God. The

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more we love God, the more we love mankind. That's where we get the work of the Holy Spirit and heat.

Thirdly would be *moisture*. Without rain and dew there is no growth. What moisture is to vegetation the Holy Spirit is to us. He is the One who nurtures our souls and causes moisture in our lives to grow in grace.

And lastly, there must be *air*. Air is the most common of all the necessities of plant life in nature. Fellowship with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit will determine the character of our growth. We must be in the Word. We must be in love. We must be in the Holy Spirit, and we must be in fellowship.

Look at nature: light, heat, moisture and air. Those are the four things that we need that are analogous to our own Christian growth.

Now lastly, what are some of the *confirmations* of our growth in Christ? First of all, let me give you some false ones.

The more effective use of our gifts does not necessarily mean that we're growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes when we do things repeatedly, we just get better at what we do naturally. So just because I'm becoming more effective in the use of my spiritual gifts does not necessarily mean that I'm growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may just be getting better by doing it more repeatedly. That is what I would call a false confirmation of growth.

Another one I would suggest is this. An increase in knowledge does not necessarily mean growth. An increase in knowledge does not mean growth, because notice this. Learning should not stop at knowledge. Learning must go on to living and living must go on to loving. Stopping at knowledge does not necessarily mean that you're growing in grace, if it stops there. There has got to be activity in your life as a result of that. I have no doubt that people grow in knowledge, but they certainly don't grow in grace.

Zeal is not necessarily a sign of growth, because there must be zeal "*according to knowledge*." Just because someone thinks that he's growing in grace does not necessarily mean that he's growing in grace. Other people might see that he is deteriorating. So just because you think you are doesn't necessarily mean that you are. Those are some of the false things that I would say we need to be careful of that are false indications of what we're defining as spiritual growth in grace.

Now let me give you the rest of these. Here are some that I would suggest for your consideration. I'm not saying that this is an exclusive list. But here are some things that I would suggest that are important indicators that would be confirmations of our spiritual growth as I've defined it.

First of all, it would be this. *Increased humility*. Humility is seeing that which is perfect and realizing that I can't accomplish it. Humility is seeing that the only perfection is the Person and work of Christ, and I realize that I can't accomplish that. That produces humility. A person who knows God well will be humble. A person who knows himself well cannot be proud. Increased humility is one indicator of spiritual growth.

Also, I would suggest *singleness of heart*. What is your heart's desire? Is it singleness in getting to love God more deeply, to know Him more deeply, to serve Him more obediently? What is the primary focus of your heart? It's what I would call singleness of

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heart. That's an indicator of our true spiritual growth, being conformed to the image of Christ.

Thirdly I would suggest this: *purity of motives*. What are your motives? You have not been given the responsibility of checking other people's motives. We just need to check our own motives. What's my motive in doing this? What's my motive in saying this? What's my motive in not doing that? What's the motive behind what I'm doing? We need to check the purity of our motives. Are they consistent indicators that I'm growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

#4 that I would offer for your consideration would be this: *that we're more governed by principle and less by emotion and feelings*. Now I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with emotions or feelings. But those aren't what guide us. What guides us are the principles of understanding God's word. That's what guides our direction in life. And I'm governed more by that than I am my emotions and my feelings.

How many times have you heard somebody say, "Boy, the Holy Spirit was really there last night!" (*Laughter.*) "Why look! You see the people jumping up and down; a lot of enthusiasm." Well, you can get that at a Steeler pep rally. That does not necessarily mean that we've got a good work at that point.

So what is it that really governs your conduct? Character precedes conduct, because who we are determines what we do. What governs your conduct? Is it principle, or is it emotion and feeling? There's nothing wrong with emotion and feeling. But that doesn't govern our lives. This indicator would be that we're more governed by principle than by emotion and feelings.

For #5 I would offer this, men. *More love to God*. Do I have a more loving attachment to God than I did before? The more I read the Scripture, the more I hear the Scripture taught, do I develop a greater love attachment to Him? That's an indication of our true spiritual growth in grace.

How about *more love to and compassion for other people*? Am I critical of other people all the time? If you're ever critical of somebody, who is it going to be? Be critical of yourself, not of other people. You've got to have compassion, more compassion. That's an indicator of true spiritual growth, in my judgment.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: How about *increased holiness in our conversation*? "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*" Why do I talk about the things that I talk about? Why do I use the words that I use? Do I use these colloquialisms just to be understood by somebody, to make them feel comfortable with me? Is there more holiness in my conversation? What do I talk about? The words that I use, the phrases that I use—why do I say those things? You see, it's really a reflection of your heart. If you're growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is dealing with what? Your heart. That ought to be reflected in the words you use and the conversations you have.

How about this one? #8. *Increased abhorrence of sin*. Do you tolerate sin, or do you abhor it? Start with yourself, sin in yourself. This is not picking on other people. Look at your own sin in your own life.

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Sometimes, when I look at myself, I just see how sinful I am. And my very best moments of what I do to please the Lord are very tainted. Everything I do is tainted because of sin. Do I really hate that?

I've got to be honest with you, men. (*Unclear.*) But when I choose to sin—sin is a choice. The bottom line is this. I love my sin more than I do Christ! If I want to grow in grace, I've got to learn to abhor the sin in my life. When I don't make those choices, when I love Christ more, that becomes the motive of my decision making—my love for Christ. Jesus said in John 14, "If you love Me, you'll obey Me." We need to abhor the sin in our own lives. That's an indicator of true spiritual growth.

How about this one? *Do we exercise a more forgiving spirit?* How forgiving am I? Do you realize this, men—that there are only two kinds of people who don't make it to heaven? Those who are unforgiven and those who are unforgiving. Those are the two kinds of people who never make it to heaven—the unforgiven, because they have never been forgiven of their sin. And Jesus says this, "If you don't forgive others, I won't forgive you." That means that if you're not forgiven, you're not forgiven.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: Two kinds of people who will never make it to heaven—the unforgiven and the unforgiving! Do you and I possess an increasingly forgiving spirit? We ought to, because that's an indicator of our true spiritual growth. A more forgiving spirit, because look at what Christ has forgiven me! How can I not forgive him this time, when He has forgiven me all the time? How could I not forgive him this time for something so small, when Christ has forgiven me of something so huge? If I don't forgive, Christ doesn't forgive me? Do we exercise more of a forgiving spirit?

Do we have less anxiety and resentment? I think that another indication of true spiritual growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ would be having less anxiety and resentment.

There are three things that I think sometimes deter our Christian growth. Those would be *guilt*, *resentment* and *anxiety*. I define guilt as somebody thinking that what God provides is not enough, and he goes outside His rules to get it. What God gives me is not enough, and I go outside to get it. And what do we experience? Guilt, because I went outside the boundaries of our Christian growth.

I define *resentment* as someone saying, "My needs are threatened by something that was allowed to happen to me." And we have resentment. And I would define *anxiety* as this: fear that something I need will not be provided.

And men, I think this. When we grow in grace, we will have less guilt, less resentment and less anxiety, because you're growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And lastly, *am I more willing to confess my own faults*, because I'm dead to my old life?

So Peter tells us that the greatest defense against being led astray by false teachers is to be constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The more you grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, the more you will be assimilated into His glorious image, conformed to the image of Christ. The more you

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grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more you will cheerfully worship Him, because praise, men, is never out of season. It's a function of growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter's summary statement is this. The best defense in guarding against error is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be glory forever, until He returns. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Thank you, men. (*Applause.*)