

Intro:

I want to take our Sunday afternoons along in a slightly different direction for a while. We have been considering what it means to have liberty and walk in the Spirit. We emphasized especially the concept of crucifying the flesh.

It seems to me that crucifying the flesh is much lacking in the current preaching in most churches today. In fact, if anything, Christians are taught to indulge the flesh, not crucify it.

But I want to go beyond this concept. I want to encourage something else in your life.

We are going to talk about Christian growth. My mission for each one of you is to see you grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. I want you to follow Him. I want you to be serious Christians, zealous for spiritual growth.

Well, how do you go about growing spiritually?

I use a discipleship book with some people called *Growing in Grace*. That title comes from a phrase in 2 Peter. As I took a look at it, I was reminded of a little feature in 2 Peter 3 that fits in to this theme of Christian growth, or 'growing in grace'. So let's turn to the chapter.

A long time ago and far away, I once had a teacher call our attention to the "beloved be's of 2 Peter 3". There are four of them:

1. Beloved be mindful (1-2)
2. Beloved be not ignorant (8)
3. Beloved be diligent (14)
4. Beloved be ware (17)

Each of these exhortations has something to do with the mind. And each of them has something to do with Christian growth.

In fact, we might refer to these four things as components of Christian growth.

Today we are going to look at the first of them:

Beloved Be Mindful
... *be mindful of the Word* ...

Read 2 Pt 3.1-2

Proposition: The first foundational component of Christian growth is the Word given by prophets and apostles.

I. Constant apostolic ministry

A. Present active verbs indicate continuing activity

1. 'I am writing'
 - a. Often in epistles 'I wrote' referring to what is just then being written
 - b. Sense Peter is caught up in his task, an eagerness for his subject
2. 'I am stirring up your minds'
 - a. The specific meaning of this word is to 'rouse from sleep'
 - b. Used metaphorically, as if their minds are sluggish

Certain members of our household are held to be rather sluggish in rising by one member of our household. They are sluggish and lethargic in the morning.

- They need *stirring up*.

We all need *stirring up*, spiritually speaking. When people first believe in Christ, they often are very excited and zealous to know everything they can. I suppose that is true with any new thing – we are all over it, checking every feature we can think of.

- Time wears on
- We get used to the features of the new life
- We forget details
- We need someone to stir us up

That is what Peter is doing with this letter, stirring up believers.

- He is writing to Christians in Northern Turkey [no record in Acts when these Christians were evangelized or who did it]
- The time is probably about AD 67, just before Peter's death
- He knows he has little time, so he is busy doing what he can for their spiritual lives

B. Second letter indicates ongoing activity

1. This is the second letter Peter is writing to the same people
2. Likely, 1 Peter is the first letter, written about AD 64
3. The two letters probably written from Rome where Peter spent last decade of his life, part of it as a prisoner

C. Written words as a reminder indicate final activity

1. These words are written as a reminder – Peter isn't teaching something new
2. Consider the content of the letter:
 - a. 1.1-11 exhortation and direction about Christian growth [we'll go to this passage later]
 - b. 1.16-21 instruction of the superior value of God's Word, better than experience
 - c. 2.1-22 warnings concerning false prophets
 - d. 3.1-18 instruction concerning end times, interspersed with exhortations
3. Personal note also a reminder (1.12-15)
 - a. These disciples already know the truth, but Peter is always ready to remind them — it's the right thing to do (12-13)
 - b. Peter's diligence in reminding them is especially due to his knowledge of his nearing the end of his life on earth (14)
 - c. His diligence is so that after he dies, they will be able to recall what he has taught them

It is ironic that much of the New Testament writings were the result of imprisonments – it seems that when the apostles were busy evangelizing they were too busy to write.

The reason I have carefully gone through these details is to emphasize the importance Peter is attaching to his writing ministry (and those of others)

II. Reliable written content

- A. His desire is for them to remember the written word (3.2)
1. The words spoken before by the holy prophets (Old Testament)
 2. The commandments of the Lord Jesus by the apostles (New Testament)
 - a. Note that the apostles assert that their words are the commandments of Jesus
 - b. Note that the apostles see their words as equal to the writings of the prophets
- B. The surety of the written word (1.16-21)
1. Peter's eyewitness testimony to Christ's glory (16-18)
 2. Peter's testimony of a more sure record: the written word (19-21)
 - a. You will do well to pay attention (19)
 - b. You should know that no Scripture is one man's opinion (20)
 - c. You should know that holy men spake as they were moved by the Spirit (21)

I want you to notice here an elevated sense of the importance of the written Word.

Peter wants you to be reminded of this – how will that happen?

- Only if you read it!
- Only if you hear it in a Bible preaching church!

And you need to be reminded of the written Word a certain way...

III. Received by sincere minds

- A. The kind of mind that receives and is reminded and is stirred up to the Word of God: a 'pure' mind [KJV] (3.1)

What is a pure mind? Does anyone really have one?

1. Better translated 'sincere'
 - a. Sincere is from a Latin root, meaning 'without wax'

- b. Originally used of pottery – sincere pottery did not have cracks filled with wax to make it look whole
 - c. Cover-ups like this could be detected by holding the pot up to the light of the sun so any cracks might be visible as some sunlight shone through the wax. A good pot was ‘sine cera’, *i.e.* ‘without wax’
 - d. It was also called ‘sun-judged’ = the Greek word that we have here in our text
2. A sincere mind: a mind that is sincere, judged by the light to have no cover-ups
- a. No faking it in the Christian walk
 - b. No pretense
- B. The production of a sincere mind (Phil 1.9-10)
1. Paul here is praying for the Philippians (9)
 - a. Prays that their love might abound still more (fruit of the Spirit)
 - b. Prays specifically that their love might abound *in knowledge and discernment*
 2. Purpose of the prayer (10)
 - a. That they might be able to discern what is excellent
 - b. And thus to be *sincere* and blameless until the coming of Christ

Note Paul’s concern with the coming of Christ, exactly as Peter is in 2 Pt 3.

How is sincerity developed? Through *knowledge* and *discernment* motivated by love.

- Two ‘mind-related’ words
- You develop your mind by exposing it to truth
- You remove the pretenses
- You conform to the image of Christ (love abounds by loving God and loving others, as the Lord commanded)

This is Christian growth

Conclusion:

Growth comes from the Word.

Proposition: The first foundational component of Christian growth is the Word given by prophets and apostles.

We must be in the Bible every day!

We must take time to memorize the Bible.

We must be certain to take advantage of every opportunity to take in the Word by way of preaching (buy an iPod! Download sermons!)

Christian growth comes by regular, faithful, constant exposure to the Word. The apostle's continue their ministry to us through the written word.