

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
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2 PETER 3 V 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."

Both the Epistles which the Apostle Peter wrote were, according to his word in the first verses of this chapter, epistles of remembrance. "This second Epistle beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance", and we need reminding continually of things which are important, and which we are apt to forget. The Apostle reminds us of dangers. He reminds of mercies, but reminds us of dangers, and the dangers that surround us are of two sorts. First, the dangers which are in us. These, so to speak, do surround us. Every heresy that is in the world, in the professing world, we have the very root and seed of in our own hearts. It may not be apparent to some of you, but it is to some here, I am sure. It is this that gives such an attraction to the things that are wrong without that exposes us to such a fall as we are warned against. It is good therefore to remember what Solomon says - "Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life", and also to remember the gracious words of Jesus Christ - "Abide in Me." "If a man abide in Me he shall bring forth fruit". And abiding in Christ is cleaving to Him by precious faith and following Him whithersoever He goes. Look well within, not to see how good you are - O that were a fruitless search - look well within, watch the motions of your hearts, beware of the subtlety of your hearts. It is declared in the Scripture by Jeremiah - "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it." But look well to things within. If you are heedless of what is within, you certainly are not likely to be heedful of what is without. It is this inward working of sin that deals us such blows and brings such damage to us. We get hurt by a vile thought, while we may pass by the most flagrant wickedness outside untouched. Mind internal defilement; mind the heresies of your own hearts, the impieties of your own spirits. Watch

and see how you run, what you run after, the objects of your desires, your pursuits. Remember that solemn word - "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." Not what you seem to be to others, not what you say you are, or hope you are, or want to be, but what you think really. The thoughts that you nurse, that you love, that you live in, that you delight in, these declare what you are in the sight of God. If this is so we need to be continually warned and exhorted. Exhortations addressed to people in a case for them are seemly; there is a fitness in them. There is an incongruity, there is an imbecility, in exhorting one dead in trespasses and sins to perform the function of spiritual life, but if we have spiritual life then it is very seemly and fit that we should have addressed to us exhortations that speak to that life, that fit that life, that are like that life, that direct that life. Then the Lord give us wisdom and grace to take very particular heed to what is within. You see enough - and often you see it as you are diligent - to shock you, to depress you, to make you understand how hopeless your case is as you regard yourself, in yourself. But it will be a means in the hands of the Holy Ghost of turning you to the Lord Jesus and then He will be your hope, your life, your strength, your treasure, your glory. Also the warnings and exhortations have respect to things outside of us, things in the world and things not only in the profane world, but in the religious world. Peter says, of your own selves there shall be false teachers among you. Paul says it shall be so too. The whole Scripture is in this direction, that the Church shall be more or less infested with false teachers who shall privily bring in damnable heresies; and beware of these. Do you say, O but we are secure? It is a false thing for you to think and a wrong thing for you to say. Secure? Against what are you secure? Standing alone, can you withstand the blast of the terrible ones? Can you resist a heresy that pleases your own fallen nature? No. How shall we take heed then? How shall we watch? How shall we be careful? By prayer and supplication. "Call upon Me", "Come to Me". If afflicted come to Me. "If there is any among you afflicted let him pray" Do the outside things trouble you as they did David? "Rivers of water run down mine eyes because they keep not Thy law". O do watch these things as you must know the evils that are abroad. Watch and see if, by the help and grace of God, you are counted worthy to escape them. Why should you escape, why should I escape those terrible things, while others, no worse, no more wicked,

no more ignorant of God than we are in our nature, are left to be ensnared and destroyed?

Then the Apostle also exhorts to a third thing, that is to an exercise of soul. "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren" - that is idle, as you will see in the margins of your Bibles; the word is ye shall be neither idle in spirit nor barren in your heart and life - "nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure..... for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." What a mercy it is to be enabled to take heed to such an exhortation as this. "Give diligence". "Keep thy heart with all diligence". And I think this diligence may be summed in three words. First with respect to prayer, confession of sin, of felt ignorance, of weakness, of a constant tendency, a powerful tendency to evil. And if we are led to be diligent in this good exercise of prayer, it will issue well; we shall find good. "The diligent soul shall be made fat". It is great indeed to be brought to this. Give diligence in prayer and supplication. Prayer is adoration, admiration, confession, supplication and all will go up acceptable to God if presented through and in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly it may be in reading the Scriptures, not cursorily, but closely, carefully. Why, I think if God will help you, all of you, to read carefully these two Epistles at your leisure, you might find great good thereby. The Apostle exhorted Timothy while he, the Apostle, was absent from him, to give himself to reading, and may we be enabled to give ourselves to reading the Holy Scriptures diligently. That will be one of the best antidotes against the denial of the doctrine of the perfect inspiration of the Scriptures, for if we should read them frequently and God should speak to us by them and cause us to feel their power, we should realise then the inspiration of them is by the Holy Ghost. The third word about diligence is this, meditation. It is a great thing to be enabled to say with the Psalmist - "My meditation of Him shall be sweet". You may meditate

upon many things profitably, as upon your own weakness. This will only rightly depress; it will bring you to the arm of the Lord. Meditate upon your own ignorance; this will lead you to pray for instruction. Your own disposition to do evil and this will lead you to entreat the Lord to preserve you in the prayer of Jabez - "O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me." Meditate my friends. If we are enabled to give ourselves to prayer, to reading the Scriptures and to meditation, we shall find good, but it wont be easy. Nothing that is spiritual is easy to men who are sinful. There is an opposition in us to spiritual things. We want naturally just nature, nothing else, and nature as it would suit our depravity, nothing better. Hence we say to God - "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways". Yes, you may find much opposition to prayer, much opposition to waiting on God. Conscience says, the Bible says, the Spirit says - "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore". But unbelief, a carnal mind enmity with God, desire for something in your hand to touch, something tangible; all will say what is the use of it. What profit is there if we should pray unto the Almighty. Nor is this opposition just a bit of straw in our way; it is a mighty thing, mighty in its arguments, subtle in its reasonings, powerful and constant in its standing up against God. Therefore, he who is enabled to exercise this diligence, to walk in humble obedience to the exhortation of the Scripture, he is a good man, and favoured of God. Suffer this word of exhortation then my brethren, and remember who has exhorted you; not a sinful man like yourself, but the holy, blessed God who will have His people follow on to know Him. He speaks to them as His people, as the Apostle in these Epistles does. He says - writing to the dispersion - he says, To the strangers scattered throughout those places he names; "Elect" he calls them, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ .... begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". And to these he speaks the exhortations. Good people, that is gracious people born again have a nature that the exhortations suit; there is a fitness between them; there is no rejection of them by the new man, the hidden man of the heart; he feels them to be suitable; they direct him to objects which he

desires. they direct him to the heaven he longs for, to the Saviour he fain would possess; they direct him to depart from evil which he hates. They come to him as a man that is saying, Woe is me, Woe is me for I am undone. To a man who says with the Apostle - "The good that I would I do not and the evil that I would not that I do; O wretched man that I am", I am brought into captivity - these words speak. And the Apostle Peter here speaks to the Lord's children and he says, now seeing that you look for new heavens and a new earth, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. And holy conversation is not simply talk but walk. Our conversation is in heaven; our walk is there, our hearts are there, for our treasure is there. "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also". And do you look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness? And seeing you look for these, seeing too that there are times when you can use for yourself the language of Paul to the Corinthians - "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." For in this we groan being burdened "not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life". Look for those new heavens and this new earth, and for this blessed immortality which Christ has brought to light by the gospel. This living, meditating, and following after will be a strong opposition to the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. And then he says, "Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless". And it seems to me that this is not to be confined only to the blessed standing of a soul in Christ - that is untouchable; that can never be more blessed, never less blessed, always the same; the standing of the Church in Christ is an eternal standing; it is by the choice of the Father giving the Church to Christ; it is by the redemption work of Christ, suffering in the stead of His people - but this seems to me to respect the walk, the conduct of the Lord's people, in this evil day. See - because you look for such things, "for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" - see that you be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace. We may have a little light on this by the help of God if we look at the seven churches in Asia, some of which were much corrupted. When Christ came to them and sent letters by the Angels He did not find all of them in peace with Himself, and walking in peace and equity, did He? He says to one - "Thou hast fallen from

thy first love." To another - "Thou hast them with thee that I hate". To another - "Thou hast a name to live, but thou art dead." To another He said - "Repent lest I come quickly and remove thy candlestick out of his place." When Christ comes sometimes to His children in providence by His Spirit with rebukes and with solemn dealings, He does not find them all in peace, peace with Himself. No, He says to them - "I have somewhat against thee". Thou hast done this, thou hast done that. If He were to come to you, as you are now, not to take you away from time into eternity, but to deal with your consciences and to bring you to His footstool, how would He find you? Would it be in peace? Are you at peace with Him as to His dealings with you in providence? Are you at peace with Him respecting His blessed work?, respecting the Scriptures? Are you walking according to the holy precepts and commandments of the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Conscience may answer; if it does answer listen to it. Let conscience do its office in you, resist it not, but be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, without a certain spot. Jude speaks of spots in your feasts of charity, spots on your conscience, spots on church character, spots on the minister's character, spots on deacons, spots on members, and spots on professors. And spots are solemn things; they mean corruption, they mean guilt, they mean some leprosy, and the Apostle here speaks of these things. Be diligent that ye may be found without spot and blameless. "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not" There are some men who, born of God, led of the Spirit, blessed with precious faith, look to, lean on, follow after the Lord Jesus, and in these respects they can be said to be blameless, as in the Church, one of the seven Churches, Christ says "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments. These shall walk with Me in white for they are worthy." There was no prevailing iniquity. They had that prayer perhaps put into their hearts and had it answered - "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me". They had found also mercy in that Scripture in the Romans - "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace" You find this word "faultless" spoken of as to substance as regards certain kings. He followed the Lord with all his heart; he followed the Lord fully; he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. And yet you have "buts" and "neverthelesses" connected with these very people; the high places were not taken away. "Be diligent". May the Lord make us

so. If there is one person in this chapel needs the exhortation more than others it is the poor speaker. Idleness of hands has brought much poverty to some of us. Fullness of bread has deceived some of us. Mark these things, mark them well brethren. Listen to this word of exhortation as given to you by the Holy Spirit. You may be a long way from full assurance, but you may be enabled to walk tenderly in the fear of God and as you are so blessed you will find an approving smile. Not payment of a debt, but acknowledgement of grace freely given. Grace sweetly acknowledged by the Giver of it. Victory over sin is given by the Lord. Victory over sin is rewarded to him who has it. "His reward is with Him" and He gives it to His people. "To him that overcometh will I give to him to sit with Me in My throne even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne." If I could, I would gladly set before you the fitness, the seemliness, and even the blessedness of exhortations as they appear to me now; I see them to be full of God's goodness and mercy.

Then coming to the text or the word immediately preceding it, Peter says - Ye therefore beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness". The Spirit recognises what was good in these people; He recognises that there was a stedfastness in them. They were strangers in the earth and the Lord had not hid His commandments from them, as the Psalmist prays - "I am a stranger in the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me." These people, strangers of the dispersion, the Jews scattered abroad, had grace and they were rejoicing betimes in their inheritance to come. They believed in the Lord Jesus as the Apostle tells them and in an inheritance that was given to them. They rejoiced therein although they were suffering tribulation. So here the Spirit recognises their stedfastness. If you cleave to God He will recognise it. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope." The Giver of grace loves grace. He loves its exercises; He is pleased with it. Why, if any sinner here this morning is enabled to come to Christ for mercy, for forgiveness, looking to the blood of Christ stedfastly, through his guilt and fears and stumblings, that sinner has a stedfastness that pleases the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus will certainly acknowledge it. "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt". You

will never have an exercise of grace, never cast a look of faith on Christ which He will not acknowledge. Says the Apostle "Beware", think not that you are secure. You are secured in Christ, but you know not what may yet befall you. Think of these heresies, think of the wicked about you, remember how on occasions your own hearts have been caught away. Beware lest you should fall from that stedfastness, lest some false philosophy should come to you and ensnare you and rob you. Lest you should be overtaken or met by thieves and be wounded and left for half dead somewhere. Beware lest ye should fall, not from grace altogether, not from Christ to whom union has been given you and union you have felt by faith; No. Not out of God's love; never. Not from that blessed oneness with Jesus Christ that God has given; but from your own stedfastness. "O foolish Galatians" says one, "who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" Do you want to come under the law again, says Paul? Will you put your necks again under that yoke? I testify, he says, I tell you plainly, that if you put yourselves under the law, you are fallen from grace. Your very profession of Him will soon be as a dead thing. "Be diligent". Says the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews again "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled." Be diligent, watch at every turn, watch everything, scrutinise every influence, listen with some discrimination as God may help you, to every voice. Examine every Scripture that may seem to come to your mind as to its power, its influence, lest you should fall into some dangerous error. O it is a great mercy in this day to be careful. There is a heedfulness in two respects which the Lord Jesus speaks about. First, "Take heed what ye hear" and second "Take heed how ye hear", and that is wonderful. "Take heed how ye hear" is mark what the things you hear do for you and mark their influence. If they deaden you Godward, O what an evil. If they make Christ less to you than He has been, then reject them. "Lest you fall from your own stedfastness". Stedfastness is wonderful in this respect because it answers, as I judge, to that exhortation of the Lord Jesus - "Abide in Me". There is no proper stedfastness that has not this for its bottom and its life and its strength.

Then we have the words of the text - But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". Then we have the beautiful ascription of glory to Him. "To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." "Grow in grace". The first thing to notice is, what is grace. What is that which we are exhorted to grow in. If it be good soil then the growth will be good if we are planted in it. This grace is the free unmerited favour of God expressed to His people in His love in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ in the Covenant of Grace; in the gift of the Holy Spirit. His free favour in the forgiveness of sins, in the justification of a sinner who believes in Jesus Christ through the redemption that is in Him. This is grace, the free, unmerited favour of God expressed in the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. Does this attract you? Does it seem to be soil, so to express it, in which you would fain be planted? God's favour to a sinner is better than life, because the sinner is a dead creature before God; dead in the law and dead in sin, and the favour of God to that sinner is the plucking of him out of that state and giving him to the Lord Jesus and giving to him and for him the Lord Jesus. Does this attract you? "Grace 'tis a charming sound". Grace is the opening of God's heart to the worthless, guilty people whom He eternally loved in His Son. Grace is that wondrous movement, affection and purpose of God to the Church whereby she is for ever delivered from her evil condition of sin and guilt and made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance that God has prepared for her before the foundation of the world. O who could expound this as it deserves to be; who can fully, adequately dilate upon grace, the free motion of God's heart, the free motion of His eternal will, the wondrous purpose He formed in Himself to sinners that nothing can turn Him aside from; a purpose that shall stand for ever and ever. My brethren this favour is better than life. We must needs die and be as water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again, but if embraced by this, if loved of God, if chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, what, O what is the death of this poor body but a fuller entrance into grace than ever could have been in this world. It is better than this life which is for a short time - "What is your life, it is even a vapour which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away". But this grace, which is the gift of life to a sinner in Christ, which is the gift of Christ to and for a sinner, this grace is imperishable, immutable; effectual; it is glory. If you have found grace in God's sight, O

what a favoured person you are sinner. Grace is the coming of Christ in the Scriptures. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, yet for your sakes' He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich." He came for this very purpose and, says the Apostle, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This is grace. Jesus came, Jesus placed Himself where His people were and snatched them out of that condition and put them, so to speak, into His own heart, and into the Covenant of Grace ordered in all things and sure. Jesus intervened and put Himself in precisely the condition in which His people had put themselves by their sins. This is grace. Ye know it, says Paul. You know this grace for Jesus Christ has come to you and given you of His wealth; even by His own poverty He has made you rich. Does this attract you? Would you fain be planted in the likeness of Christ's death? Would you be in that death that you may live for ever? Would you be persuaded in your conscience that His death is your life, that His cross is your healing and your beauty and your glory. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is manifested then in this we may say too, that grace is the coming to a sinner of the Holy Ghost in the new birth. The secret of true religion is regeneration. A very solemn fact this which takes away from the meddling hands of men all or any part in respect of the new birth. He is just passive in the reception of this. "Live" is the word of God. If you look into Ezekiel you have it where the child is cast out to the loathing of its person, dead and polluted and none to do any kind office for it, and this, said God, is a time of love. "I spread My skirt over thee and thy time was a time of love, and I said unto thee 'Live' ". This is the new birth expressed in those words. "I said unto thee 'Live' ". Yes, God makes His children live. This is not an invitation to Christ. It is a definite commandment, a definite act passed upon a sinner's soul, giving him a life that he never had before, whereby he comes to need, in his experience, God, and forgiveness of sins. This is the free grace of the Spirit. Uninvited, undesired He comes now to a grave and says "Live"; comes to a dead sinner and says "Live"; comes to a wicked person and imparts a holy principle to that person. Nothing could turn Him aside from this. The grace of God then is expressed in the work of each Person in the Godhead. The work of the Father in electing Christ and giving Him; in choosing sinners and giving them

to Christ. The work of the Son in freely giving Himself, in voluntarily coming according to God's decree. "I said, Lo I come to do Thy will O My God; Thy law is within My heart." And the grace of the Spirit in coming and giving a new life. And the Apostle says, "Grow in grace". Before the tree can grow it must be planted; it must be planted in soil in which it can grow. It is not planted on the beach, in the sand that is laid by the sea. It is planted in a soil suitable to it, from which it can draw all the virtue necessary to bear fruit. If a sinner is to be neither idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of God, he must be planted in suitable soil, and what is that but grace? This is the coming of God to a sinner, taking him and, using the figure that Paul uses in the Hebrews, respecting the Jews and the Gentiles, cutting one out of the wild olive and grafting him into the good olive that he may be a partaker of the fatness of the root. He is planted in Jesus Christ. O what an amazing thing it is to have any union with Christ. One of the greatest acts of God's love to a sinner is putting him into Jesus Christ. When you look at fruit on your trees, what do you see? You see the virtue of the soil and of the root. The fruit, so to speak, says, this comes from the root. The root bears me, the root has given me all this being, this sweetness, this suitableness for food. And when a sinner has peace in his conscience, love in his heart and humility in his mind, when his will is brought into a unison with the will of God, when he says - "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine", when his walk is according to his profession, when he is separated from the world, when he is crucified to it and the world to him, when he glories in the cross of Christ and says - God forbid that I should glory in anything else, what is all that? It is growth, it is fruit borne by virtue of the root, Jesus Christ. That is, it comes from grace; free, sweet, pure, unmixed grace; the grace of God which bringeth salvation, which has appeared to a sinner. This is it; grow in this. There is enough for you; there is enough for every poor dependent, depending sinner. Grow in this grace. If you think you will mortify this sin, you will overcome that lust, you will walk more cautiously in the future, and have no reference in those resolutions to the Spirit of Christ, to the blood of Christ, to the cross of Christ, you will fail still more and more, and you will fail grievously, perpetually. But if, with this sin overcoming you, and that lust troubling you, and that worldliness turning you aside, and the many evils of your heart, you can say, O there is no remedy for me

save God in Christ, no hope for me but by grace and in grace, then you will find that the Lord from time to time answers your desires and you will get something of this. "Grow in grace"; grow in this. There are two ways of taking root downward. One is when you get more knowledge of your sins, of your corruptions, of your utterly ruined condition, so as to say, my hopes now have gone; "I have seen an end of all perfection". I have no hope of any improvement in myself you say as I get older, rather grow worse, and though my conduct amongst men is not reproveable, yet my walk before God is painfully short and very wicked. Take that root downward; it is good my friends. But the second way of taking root downward is for your faith to strike her roots more deeply into the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus; for you to say, not only I am more and more wicked, but also more and more do I see and feel that Christ is my hope and Christ alone; that I have no expectation of ever improving, but I have an expectation of getting the victory and at the last entering into eternal rest and glory. This will do. As far as I have any judgement in the Scripture, and of the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, this will do. You will bear fruit to the praise and glory of God. Therefore, do seek dearly beloved friends, in the truth, do seek to grow in grace.

AMEN.