

2 Peter 3, we will be looking this morning at verses 14 through 22. 2 Peter 3, 14 through 22. As the book of 2 Peter comes to a close, he brings up the ways in which Christ's return should influence your living. And the reason he brings up this idea of how the future return of Christ should influence your living is because the false teachers, as you will remember, denied that there was going to be a future coming of Christ.

And the result in their daily lives of denying the future return of Christ was that they said you could live however you want. They said, in essence, there's no judgment day coming. There's no Christ who will be returning. And so you can go ahead and live any way you please.

And so as Peter is drawing his letter to a close, by divine inspiration, he is calling his readers to live in light of the return of Christ. Well, this in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless now the reading and preaching of his word. O God, we come before your word not as masters, but as servants, as those who are not above it, but underneath it. And we come unto you and say, speak, O Lord, for your servants are listening. Teach us that we might be taught. Show us thy ways, and by your grace, we might walk in your ways. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Second Peter chapter 3 verses 14 through 22. This is the Word of God.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace, and count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. as he does in all his letters, when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. 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 whom be the glory both now and the day of eternity. Amen. Lessons Reading of God's Holy Word. May he bless the reading and now the preaching of it to our lives. Well, beloved, the future is constantly pressing in on our minds. You wake up on Monday morning and the future is immediately pressing on your mind.

You think, do I need to go to the grocery store or do I already have what I need to make for supper tonight? Should I go to that grandchild's ball game later this week or not? Do my children remember that we're supposed to have Thanksgiving at our house this year?

Immediately, all sorts of thoughts about future events begin to flood your mind. And you begin to live or be influenced by these future things that you're anticipating. You make various decisions based on these future things that you're trying to determine.

And this is not all bad. If you're trying to decide if you have what you need to make supper that night, that's not a bad thing, to think about that, to be influenced by that, and to make decisions based on whether or not you think you have what you need for supper that night. That's not a bad thing. But here is where we often go wrong.

We are all pretty easily influenced by the future of tomorrow, or the future of next week, or even the future of next year at some level. But how influenced are you by the return of Jesus Christ? That is a future event that is supposed to be influencing our daily lives according to the Scriptures. And this is what Peter is urging upon his readers as he brings this letter to a close. He wants them to understand that the reality of the future return of Christ should be influencing their lives. And he suggests to them, really, in our text, that there are three ways in which it should be influencing them. Christ's return should influence your waiting, your listening, and your growing. Your waiting, your

listening, and your growing. So first, Christ's return should influence your waiting. You see this in verse 14. He writes, Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, Be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace." The Christian, according to verse 14, is to be actively waiting for the return of Christ.

This sort of waiting is not a passive waiting. It's not the sort of waiting that maybe you've experienced if you've ever been to the DMV You sit there and you wait and slowly one more person gets up and one more person gets up and you just sort of passively sit back. Or maybe you've ever experienced a power outage and you're just waiting passively for the power to come back on. So you just sort of passively sit back. No, this is not that sort of waiting.

This is the waiting of what you might think of a hunter who is convinced that his dream buck is about to come around the corner. He is actively waiting. He is attentive and eagerly expecting this buck to come so that he might shoot him. It's a very engaged sort of waiting. And this is why the text uses this word, diligent. He says, therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent. You see how it's this active sort of waiting.

And it says you're waiting for these in verse 14. What are the these for which you are to be waiting? Well, the these in verse 14 refers back to the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwell in verse 13. And when are these new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells going to come? They will come when Christ returns.

And so you are actively waiting and preparing for that day when Christ returns. The analogy that always comes to mind when I think of this sort of reality in scripture is the way a bride waits for her wedding day. It may be months away, but there is not a day that goes by when that engaged bride-to-be is not thinking upon her wedding. waiting, actively trying to prepare in one way or another for that great wedding day. And she's not doing this because she thinks if everything's not just right, her bridegroom is going to leave her. certainly hope that's not her motivation, but it's more of the fact that she simply loves him so much that out of love for him, she wants to be as prepared as possible for that day because she loves her bridegroom and she wants to show that by her preparedness on the day of their wedding. Well, similarly, Your affection for Christ ought to stir up for you a desire to live for him as you wait for him to return. What does it look like to diligently prepare for Christ's return or wait for Christ's return?

Well, the text tells you in verse 14, to be found by him without spot or blemish. Now this does not mean that when Christ returns you must be morally perfect in yourself, that you are morally without any error or sin in your life. As one commentator observes, there's always a call to be confessing your sins as a Christian. But this does mean that you are to be striving for holiness as you prepare for Christ's return. You want to be as sanctified as a saved sinner can be on the day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. And he says you want to be found at peace. And Calvin argues that this peace here is really referring to peace of conscience. When you live in light of Christ's return, You will want to be regularly confessing your sins. You will want to be regularly confessing your sins so that you have peace of conscience knowing that Jesus Christ is coming.

So let me just simply ask this question of you this morning. Do you have peace in your conscience this morning? Do you have sins this morning that you are refusing to confess? Are there sins in your life this morning that keep you up at night because you are not confessing them and you have not confessed them?

A text like this is urging you to be as ready as you can be when Jesus comes, to encourage you to be confessing your sins so that you have peace of conscience when Jesus Christ returns. And when you confess your sins regularly, As a Christian, you can actually have peace of conscience. I'm not talking about sort of a fake peace that you put on in front of others. You can have sincere peace of conscience even when you're all alone, not because you know yourself to be morally perfect, but because you know that you really are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are confessing your sins to him such that you are living for him on a daily basis. So this is a call to regularly be confessing your sins as you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to return.

But secondly, Christ's return should influence your listening. So we saw that it influences how you wait. but now we see it influences how you listen. Verses 15 and 16 say, and count the patience of our Lord as salvation. Just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. As he does in all his letters, when he speaks in them of these matters, there are some things in them that are hard to understand. which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures." Well, here you see Peter, writing by divine inspiration, saying to them that the coming return of Christ should influence your listening.

The fact that Jesus Christ is returning should make you want to listen to his voice before he gets here. And where do you hear his voice? In the Bible. The Bible is where you most clearly hear God speak. This is where he tells you who he is and what he calls you to do.

Notice in our verse that Peter refers to the letters of Paul. And he calls Paul's letters Scripture. He is saying here that the letters of Paul that are found in your New Testament are just as much Scripture, the very Word of God, as is the book of Genesis.

The whole Bible is the very Word of God. You see, the Bible does not contain merely divine ideas. The Bible is the actual word of God written to his people. Think about it, in your hands when you hold your Bible, when you do your devotions, God himself is speaking to you. You should marvel that God has given you a Bible. God does not need us. God did not have to communicate to us in this clear and understandable manner, but in his great kindness, he has chosen to do it.

He gives you his very word in this book. And Peter says, essentially, it is to this book you are to be listening as you await Jesus's return. And he makes it clear that as you listen to the word, you're not supposed to try to twist it. or change it to mean what you want it to mean? He makes it quite clear, doesn't he, in verse 17, that as you listen to it, or rather verse 16, as you listen to it, you are to listen to it in a submissive manner, to be underneath it.

Now, this is not a call to intellectual suicide. This is not a call to check your brain at the door of Christianity. as if being a Christian and listening to the word of God requires you to be anti-intellectual or non-critical in your thinking. Instead, it's a call to think God's thoughts after him. It's a call to believe that the God of the universe, who made all things visible and invisible, actually knows more than you do And so you should listen to his word. I hope you see how that is not a call to intellectual suicide.

Listening to the word of God is a very reasonable thing to do. God has spoken. Far better to listen to what he says than what you think or what anyone else says. For God knows all things. And as you wait for Christ's return, you should want to be listening to his voice.

I've heard stories over the years of how a soldier during World War II would write letters to his wife back home. and how the wife upon receiving those letters would read them and reread them. And then how the wife might manage to get a letter back to her husband who's deployed. And how the husband would read and reread those letters from his wife. And this was the way that they could communicate during that time as they awaited being reunited. In the same sort of way, God has communicated to us in his Bible.

And as you wait for his return, don't you want to listen to what he's spoken to you? It would, of course, be very unreasonable and quite absurd to expect that that husband, if he received a letter from his wife or that wife received a letter from her husband, that they wouldn't want to read those letters and hear the voice of their loved one.

Well, God has given you his voice. Have you ever thought to yourself, I wish God would just speak to me? God has spoken to you in his Bible right here. He has given you his very word. So I ask you are you listening to his word? Are you making regular time to read his word and to hear what he has to say as you wait for his return?

If there's anything in your life here this morning that you do know is preventing you from listening to his word. then you need to reprioritize your life such that you are not neglecting his word. It should be of the utmost priority in your life. Regularly being in the word is more important than your friends and your family. Being in the word and in prayer is exceedingly valuable for the Christian life.

More and more in my own life over the years, I've seen how sins of omission, always lead to sins of commission. When I personally neglect the Word of God for a single day, I immediately begin to see the payoff in bad ways. Sometimes my wife, without even knowing whether I've been in the Word or not that day, will see my attitude and she'll say to me, have you been in the Word today? The answer, if she ever has to ask that question, is probably literally always no. Because she can tell what a single day, apart from sitting underneath the Word of God, does. Now, you know in your own experience that this doesn't mean every time you read the Word of God, it's a lightning bolt strike and you immediately see how your whole day is going to be great. But when you neglect it, I also suspect you know how quickly you realize that maybe God was working through it after all.

That simple, humble act of saying, I'm going to read the word. Now I acknowledge that you may not always have time to read as much as you want, or as deeply as you want, or as long as you want. That's okay. But it needs to be a priority in the life of the believer. You need to fight that temptation that says, I'm just too busy today. You need to find time. You need to make time to be in the Word of God as you listen to him, as you wait for his return. But then thirdly, Christ's return should influence your growing, your growing. So we've seen waiting, listening, and now thirdly, your growing.

Verses 17 through 18. We read here, 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. On these two verses, Peter essentially mentions a negative and a positive. He says, Negatively, there are going to be lawless people in the church who try to carry you away and carry you astray, and you need to stand firmly against them. But then he says positively, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The word grow here in the text is a command. You are commanded by God to be spiritually growing. But how do you grow? You must grow in grace. How do you grow? You grow by increasing in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And my knowledge here, Peter doesn't simply mean that you increase in your knowledge of facts, but you increase in your intimacy, your relational knowledge, with Him. But that is not apart from facts. You must increase in your knowledge of who He is and what He's done. And as you increase in your knowledge of who He is and what He has done, by God's grace, you'll increase in your love for Him.

You'll continue to grow in your relationship with Him. That's the call of this text. You grow in your need of Him, your dependence upon Him. You realize that you need Jesus Christ for your justification. You need his righteousness for you. That apart from his righteousness imputed to you and received by faith alone, you would have no right standing with God. You grow in your appreciation of this wonderful work of Jesus to be your justifying righteousness. But then you also grow in your knowledge of him in the realm of sanctification.

You realize more and more that You need his power in your life, that you might grow in obedience to him, that you might mature in your walk with God. You realize, in essence, that you need Jesus more than you realized you needed him. You grow in your affection for him because he becomes all the more necessary for your daily life spiritually, your assessment of his value, is ever increasing. Come to the place where you know that you need his presence continually because apart from him there's no way you will grow spiritually.

Well, a few pastoral observations I want to give on this command to grow in grace. That's what the text is calling you to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. A few very brief pastoral observations. First, growth in grace is gradual. And that's important. You will grow most frequently persistently, slowly over time. It is to be measured not so much in days or weeks, but even years and decades. You assess your growth in grace.

Second, growth in grace accompanies the means of grace. You can be assured by the Word of God that if you neglect prayer, and you neglect the Word, and you neglect the sacraments, and you neglect corporate worship, you will not grow in grace. This is the avenue, the means by which God has ordained that you grow in grace. Third, growth in grace is you should not depend upon your feelings when you're considering growth and grace.

Your feelings are going to be way up one day and way down another day. One day you're going to be down in the dumps. Another day you're going to be at some sort of spiritual high. But no matter where you are, you need to go back to the word of God and let who he says he is and what he says he does be your anchor.

Fourth, those who grow in grace often see more and more of their sin. And that's very important because as you grow in grace, real Christians are sometimes exceedingly discouraged, aren't they? Because they think to themselves, well, I'm supposed to measure this over years and decades, and I'm measuring it over years and decades, and I might actually be a greater sinner than I was years and decades ago. And if you're really a Christian,

What's most probably happening on that occasion is that it's not that you're sinning more than you did years and decades ago, it's that you're seeing your sin more clearly.

God is slowly showing you more fully the depravity of your own heart so that you might continually see how good and wonderful Jesus is and delight yourself in him and fight with all the more vigor to put to death the deeds of the body. And so that's helpful for the Christian to keep in mind as you are growing in grace and you continually see even perhaps at some level it seems more numbers of sins, it could be that God is just showing you more fully how much you need him.

And then fifth, vigorously use the means. That is the word, sacraments, and prayer. Vigorously use the means. and yet trust entirely to the grace of God for growth. Vigorously use the means and trust entirely to the grace of God for growth. You always need his grace, even as you come to the means of grace, you need the end of grace to be helping you, God himself.

And this really is much of what this whole book has been talking about. In verse 18, it's this call to grow, but how do you grow? You grow in grace. At the beginning of this letter you could think back to verse five, his divine power of chapter one, actually verse three of chapter one, his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. There was this granting, this granting, but this granting was commanding to strive and so we could say God commands us to grow and then he grants us what he commands.

He calls you to strive and then he enables you to strive. And what is the result of this reality that he grants what he commands and he commands what he grants? What's the result of that for our hearts? Well, it's one of humility, isn't it? Because even as you grow, all you can do is say it was all of God. He commanded me to grow and yes, I made an effort. But even when I made that effort, it was the grace of God at work in me to make that effort that I might strive. And so it's a call of the constant humility. Therefore, he ends the whole book with these words, doesn't he? To him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. So you see in the text today that Christ's return should influence you in the way that you wait, in the way that you listen, and in the way that you grow. But in closing, I want to say this.

How do you begin to grow in grace? you begin to grow in grace by being born again. So if there's anybody here today who thinks they can grow in grace apart from being born again from God himself you are mistaken. You can't grow if you're dead. And so the call for you then is to repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and then join with us as we with you wait and listen and grow until Christ returns.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our great and gracious Heavenly Father, we look forward to the day when Jesus comes again. More and more, we pray that as we are influenced by future things in our daily life, this future reality would be of increasing influence on our actions and our thoughts. the future reality that Jesus Christ is coming again. Would we wait for him with eagerness? Would we listen to him in the word with gratitude? And would we grow persistently and gradually as we look forward to his return? We pray this in Jesus's name, amen.