

# Peter's Final Exhortation

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn together now to 2 Peter chapter 3. We're going to focus especially on the final few verses of this chapter. And this is really to round off our studies relating to Peter's life and ministry.

As he comes to write this second letter, one of the final letters of the New Testament, we find him summing up here what he has written in these verses.

In verse 17, to counter what he says at the beginning of the chapter there, in regard to the scoffing of those who scoff at the idea of the coming of the Lord.

Seeing here, as you can see, as we've read, I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandments, knowing this, that scoffers will come in the last day with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

They will say, where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were, for they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and so on.

[ 1 : 39 ] And he refers there, of course, back to the time of the flood and the days of Noah, and builds his argument from that on the return of the Lord again in judgment, the Lord Jesus Christ and his return.

And he deals with how we are to anticipate this, something just of a brief scan over the whole of this short letter will help us come to see why he arrives at this conclusion from verse 17 at the end of chapter 3.

This idea of scoffing and of false teaching is by no means confined to our day. It was there in the days of Peter as well. This letter was written primarily to counteract those who were setting out with false teaching and leading some people in the church itself as three.

So Peter begins encountering that with facts. He tells in chapter 1 of how he himself was a witness of the transfiguration of Jesus, a witness of that voice that they heard coming from heaven about this being the beloved Son of God.

We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And it's really just deliberate overlooking of these as facts that you find in people who dismiss this as accurate presentation of facts, that this was just an idea that people came up with long ago, or those people who had been disciples of Jesus, that this is just something they put together in order to try and remember his teachings.

[ 3 : 11 ] Peter was an eyewitness of that glory that was displayed in the person of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. And he passed on the knowledge of that to those who came after him.

We're not dealing with fables. We're not dealing with things that are just hard to establish or not really true to the facts. If you believe, as we do, the Bible to be what it is, what it claims to be, the inspired word of God, that God has breathed out this word to give testimony to himself and to what you can regard as factually accurate and reliable, this is how it is.

And that's where Peter begins, and that's where you and I have to begin. You have to remember that our salvation is based on facts, things that actually happened, events that happened in the course of this world, and particularly in the events of the Lord's own ministry in terms of his incarnation and his death and his resurrection from the dead.

And unless you actually hold to these as facts, you don't have a solid foundation to anything of the idea of salvation. You're just left with something that's really just a shadow or a theory.

And Peter is not in any way embarrassed to remind these people and ask them to remember those issues. Verse 12 in chapter 1, I intend, therefore, always to remind you of these qualities, the qualities that are mentioned in the previous verses there.

[ 4 : 37 ] Though you know them and are established in the truth that you have, I think it right, as long as I'm in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my

body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to you.

I will make every effort so that after my departure, and interestingly, he uses the word exodus there, the same word used by Luke in his account of the transfiguration, the exodus of Jesus, his departure out of this world.

After this, you may be able at any time to recall these things. In other words, when we preach the gospel and come back again and again to the really solid, serious, basic issues, the foundational truths and facts of the gospel and of our salvation, that's not an accident.

That's just following the pattern of the Bible itself. And that's just following the way in which the Lord himself is saying here to the likes of those people that received this letter of Peter, this is what I'm doing.

I'm stirring you up by way of reminding you so that when he's gone, that they will have this left and they will keep going back to these very basic important matters. You know, if the great doctrines of the faith are boring to people who say they are Christians, well, that itself shows there's something seriously wrong with that person.

[ 6 : 02 ] Whether it's the doctrine of Scripture that people may be tired of, that doctrine of Scripture that we hold so much to in our Reformed confessions and in our testimony as a church, that's maybe something that people think is no longer relevant, that it's no longer adequate for this generation.

Well, Peter is saying, no, I'm going to remind you that these things are essential for every generation and to bring your minds back to them, to stir you up. So he moves on then in chapter 2 to speak, well, he makes it move in the end of chapter 3 there to the reliability of Scripture itself.

And then chapter 2 is largely taken up in a very solemn way with the dangers and the effects of false teaching. False teachers had actually been set up even in the days of the apostles.

This is not something new. This is not something that waited for many generations or even for centuries to appear in the church. You see, when he's saying, beginning of chapter 2, but he says, false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

That's what he's saying to those he's writing to. Among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

[ 7 : 25 ] And the reason that he is so severe in that chapter against false teaching is because false teaching leads people astray and leads people away from a proper foundation on which to build for eternity.

It's really a serious issue. And to Peter is so serious that he's bringing them back to these correct factual matters, these doctrines of the faith.

And that's so appropriate for our day as well, isn't it? For, you know, that there are many false ideas around of what the gospel is, what the Bible is, who Jesus is.

And I'm not talking just now of people who are outside of the wider church, if you like to call it that way. There are many instances of the Bible being changed or manipulated or the doctrines of the faith, some of them at least being turned so as to soothe the prevailing mood of the age.

And Peter is warning us against that because false teaching or heresy is hugely destructive and can be catastrophic for eternity. And so he moves on to chapter 3 where he's countering this false teaching.

[ 8 : 35 ] And how does he counter it? Well, he counters it here by saying that you, beloved, he says, you know these things already. And therefore, he's now in anticipation of the day of Christ.

He says from verse 11, since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people you ought to be in lives of holiness and godliness.

And we'll see that that's important when we come to our first point this evening. And so we're looking at verses 17 and 18 as he rounds off this argument and this treatment in this short epistle.

You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and use your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, it's important to notice before we ever go into the thing in any more detail, that the way you actually avoid, according to Peter here, the way you avoid being carried away with the error of lawless people, with false teaching, with heresy, the way you avoid being carried away with that is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 51 ] There is no in-between neutrality. There's nothing as a kind of innocent in-between being carried away and growing in grace.

What he's really saying is if you want to avoid, as you must, being carried away with error, then the way to do it is to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's the counteraction to apostasy, to falling away, to decline, to relapse. And that's our first point, guarding against relapse.

And he begins by saying that we have a significant advantage. You, beloved, therefore, knowing this beforehand, and that's your advantage and my advantage tonight, that we have this gospel, that we have this information from God himself as his word, telling us about the things that presently are, the things that happen, the things that he has done, but also the things that must yet come to be and come to pass.

How the world is going to end. What's going to happen at the end of the world. What's associated with the coming of Jesus. What lies then beyond that. Beyond resurrection.

[ 11 : 05 ] Beyond our judgment. And all of these things are not hidden in the Bible. They're there very clearly. So that we will know these things beforehand. And that knowing them beforehand, we are in a really advantageous position.

how thankful you and I should be tonight that we're here in this church or in a worship service as we have it. How thankful we should be tonight that in our worship services we have the preaching of the gospel.

We have something which we do not want to diminish. We have something that God himself has provided in order to frequent us with his will and with a knowledge of his government and of all the things that he himself has done and will yet do.

And tonight, surely you and I are thankful that we know this beforehand. That God has filled our minds with his truth. That we know these things of the gospel.

That we're not like others tonight who sadly have no time for these things. and don't want to have any relationship at all with this Bible and with its teaching.

[ 12 : 16 ] You, beloved, knowing this beforehand. And that word, that word you is actually very emphatic in the text. He's really saying you, therefore beloved.

You, plural, is emphatic. He's really writing to them and saying you of all people because you know this. You're in the best possible position to avoid being led away.

To avoid actually being carried away with false teaching and the error of lawless people. That's how it is for you tonight. Be thankful. Be thankful to God. Express your thankfulness to God.

I'm sure you do. But it's something we're liable to forget that because we're so familiar with the gospel and so familiar with church services and with coming to this place to worship God, perhaps it doesn't really hit us as much as it should.

What a huge advantage God has given us to be placed in such a favorable position. That's something that we really ought always to bear in mind and to think about and to think through thankfully to God.

[ 13 : 21 ] Well he says you because you're in this position he says take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

Now the first thing there is take care. Be on your guard because our prevention of slipping away or being carried away is not something accidental.

You don't look at this and say well God will look after me and it will happen anyway whatever whether I come to church regularly or not whether I read my Bible or pray regularly or not if I'm a Christian then God's going to look after me.

That's fatalistic. That's the kind of argument that Peter is in a sense really counted in here. You therefore knowing this take care apply your mind to it. Be serious about it.

Think about it as something that is really of the utmost seriousness because we're dealing with not just things of this life and our witness to Jesus in this life and our faithfulness to God in this life but our destiny our eternity where we're going to spend eternity what our eternity will be like.

[ 14 : 28 ] So he's saying give your mind to this take care apply yourself to it have a concentrated activeness in guarding against falling away slipping by relapsing and he is talking here about take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people.

Take care that you are not carried away because what lies behind that is the fact that error actually in itself to our own sinful hearts to our own propensity to our own natural bias towards the things

that are other than of God and of holiness of life and so on error can be hugely attractive. Error draws your mind in such a way that the more you dwell upon it the more you're drawn towards it and the more place you give to error and to that which is counter to the gospel and to Christ's pure teaching the more you actually give that a place in your mind the more persuaded you are that that's the truth the more attached you become to it.

You know people who have gone away from the gospel and from the church don't really all of a sudden most of the time at least it's not people who have just all of a sudden decided well that's it. In most cases they will have given some mind to an alternative way of looking at life or looking at eternity or looking at salvation or looking at this bible or of Jesus or the work of Christ and gradually as that has grown and be given more and more of a place in their mind they've been drawn more and more toward it and against the teaching of scripture itself.

I remember reading an account by a naturalist who was at one time watching an eagle standing on a big block of ice on a river that had been frozen and had huge blocks of ice floating down on the river and was going towards a precipice towards a waterfall and this eagle was standing on a large block of ice and it was eating away at a carcass the carcass of a lamb it was probably a lamb that it had actually killed or taken from somewhere and it landed on this huge block of ice and as it was busy eating away at it and being carried down the river it had obviously been there for some time as it had been carried down past where this man was watching proceedings and he saw it was horror that the eagle was heading for the waterfall and then when it came to the waterfall the eagle flapped its mighty wings nothing happened because it was stuck to the block of ice and it just disappeared over the edge its feet and claws had become frozen you can actually in some parts of the world get frozen to what you're in contact with within seconds let alone minutes or longer and its feet had become frozen to that block of ice so concentrated on its feeding that it didn't realize that it couldn't actually flap its wings and go away as it used to and it disappeared over the waterfall that's something like what false teaching is the more attached you become to it the more persuaded you are that this is a very valid alternative to what you understand of the gospel and our reformed and traditional views of what's foundational to the gospel and especially the bible itself and the nature of the bible and scripture you don't realize that actually you're becoming so attached to the false doctrine that maybe one day when it becomes pretty critical you think you're going to be moved away from it but actually you're so attached to it that's where you stay and you don't come back to the gospel and you don't come back to what you once professed it's happened many times it happened in the days of the apostles

[18:37] Paul speaks about Demas a companion of his in the gospel work Demas he says has forsaken me having loved this present world he had become so attached to this present world that it had taken him away from the gospel away from the work that he had previously been doing as a companion of the apostle who would imagine that somebody who had been with the apostle Paul and heard his preaching and been counseled by him and actually seen him at work and discussed the things of the gospel you would not imagine that somebody like that would actually leave and turn his back upon the whole thing but he did and that's what Paul says he became so attached to this world he has forsaken me but he's saying here knowing this before take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability now that doesn't mean that a person can be saved one day and then not saved ultimately if we are saved in

Christ if we are by the grace of God justified saved in Christ we are safe we are given the guarantee from God that once saved is always saved there is no possibility of not being saved if once we have been saved but being saved is not the same as professing to be it is not the same as being active in the church though all of these things are hugely important and are themselves very often an indication that we are saved what he is saying here is watch that you don't lose your own stability watch that we don't lose that fixed and steady stability of life which is so important even to an individual Christian now cast your mind back just to what James says in his epistle as he begins an epistle that's really very punchy as you know and doesn't leave us in any doubt over many issues well he's saying at the beginning near the beginning there if any of you lacks wisdom chapter 1 verse 5 let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and be given but lest him ask in faith with no doubting for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind for that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord he is a double minded man unstable in all his ways it's really literally saying the man is really in a kind of spiritual schizophrenia is two minds he's got one mind one time and then another mind

another time he can't really settle on something that is true that is of the truth he's got to go and think about other things at other times he's unsteady in all his ways he's not stable that's what Peter is warning against because that instability comes from in one way it comes from giving place to error and not really being concerned to check it out and to keep the truth alive in your soul you see tonight you have got to take away all that you're hearing from this pulpit you're not just relying on the fact that I'm a free church minister I've been preaching the gospel for 30 years you have to take this away and you've got to measure it by the yardstick of God's word and you've got to do that because your soul depends upon it and you have to make sure that it's the truth that you're receiving into your souls and that you're getting from this pulpit

God forbid that it should be anything other than that but you see your own assessment of it is an assessment that's done in the light of scripture not in the light of tradition not in the light of the denomination you belong to or anything like that or history the word of God that's what he says there isn't it just before that verse 16 there are some of the things that Paul has written he says that are hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction you see if you don't work at this then that's leaving us very liable to this to twist the scriptures to our own destruction so what she says that you don't carry it away and lose your own stability it's not just important however to yourself as an individual and to myself stability Christian stability is really important to the church it's important to this congregation of the church it's important to the church as a whole let me just draw your mind briefly if you'll turn with me for a wee minute to Ephesians in chapter 4 where Paul talks about the ministry that God has given to the church in terms of how he

how the Lord will himself build up the body of Christ he says there in chapter 4 of Ephesians and at verse 11 he gave the apostles the prophets the evangelists the pastors and teachers why to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ now there are things in that that are not easy to understand as Peter said there are very deep things in Paul's writings and there's one reference there there's one instance of it but there's no doubt about what he says in verse 14 he says this building up of the body of Christ the spiritual edification that we have to be involved with and have to see to ourselves it's so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by craftiness human cunning and by craftiness in deceitful schemes rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way unto him into him who is the head and to

[ 24 : 56 ] Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped where each part is working properly or does its own part makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love we are responsible for our own individual growth but we are also responsible together to see to it that we're contributing by how we're living to the edification to the growth of the body of Christ of the church of Christ to the edification to the growth of itself in love so that we're no longer carried about with every wind of doctrine and carried away and lose our own stability the stability of this congregation the stability of any congregation is a stability that comes from growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and not being carried away with every wind of doctrine or the error of lawless people and lose our own stability tonight your stability is so important to you that you're a stable

Christian that you're a Christian who's not carried away and then we come secondly I need to deal with this a bit more quickly although it's worthy of a lot more than we can give it tonight we said at the beginning the way to prevent that is especially to grow in the grace of knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ what does he mean first of all growing in the grace of Christ what grace does he mean well I think we get a key to it when you go back to Romans the likes of Romans chapter 5 where Paul is writing there about how through the grace of God we've been justified since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God and he goes on from there as you know to deal with other things but he talks about we have obtained access we've been given entry by faith into this grace what is this grace it's the status of being justified the status of having before God a status that he himself approves of and meets with his approval where righteousness of Jesus is our covering having this grace we've been taken into that grace by faith in Christ that's where we're standing he says that's where we've been situated by the grace of God that has come to work in our lives and now he's saying and Peter is

saying therefore grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus grow in that grace he's been he's given you to be to be taken into that state and that status now he's saying grow in it and it's a bit like you take a seed and you plant it and you watch it growing and you have it perhaps in a greenhouse or somewhere before you plant it outside and then you give it all the conditions once you plant it once it begins to grow it needs all the conditions that that are necessary for its proper and healthy growth well he says that's what your life is like that's what the life of a Christian is like we have access already by faith into this grace into this status this acceptance with God that he himself approves of the favor of God and now we're given the proper conditions in which to grow as Christians you see that's how he begins this epistle where he in the first chapter says the same thing along these lines verse 3 his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his glory and excellence by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises and so on then he goes on to say for this very reason make every effort to supplement or add to your faith virtue and virtue knowledge to knowledge self-control and to self-control steadfastness that's gross he's already deposited us in a favorable situation we're in Christ as Christians as born again that's where we are we have access by faith into this grace as Paul puts it and that's why he goes on to speak about if these qualities are huge and increasing they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord therefore he says brothers be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure for if you practice these qualities you will never fall in other words he's saying you actually establish the assurance of your election of your calling by God by adding these things by doing your spiritual sums by engaging in that activity in which you're growing in the grace of God in the grace of Christ by which you're using all that to your advantage and everything that God has given to you a spiritual soil and spiritual fertilizer and the breath of the Holy Spirit working in you and living in you grow in the knowledge and the grace of Jesus you counteract the tendency or the temptation to be carried away with the error of the wicked how?

by growing by growing in the grace of Christ by growing in the conditions that God has given you to grow in where you have all the advantages as God himself has provided these as we have them in the gospel in other words your spiritual health and your advancement personally and for us as a congregation as well is by prayer and growing by using these things that God has given just avoid the spiritual junk food of false teaching frequent yourself with it as you need yes but don't be drawn to it don't become attached to it don't think it's a valid alternative to the grace of God and Christ because if you do you lose your own stability and so to count it it grow in the grace of Christ and in the knowledge of Christ now what does he mean by that?

well similarly by the knowledge of Christ he really means I think preeminently he means the what we call communion with Jesus with Christ the knowledge of Christ getting to know him personally and growing in that knowledge of him personally and how do you do that?

[ 31 : 57 ] well the same way you use the things that God has given you the favorable conditions that he's given you in the gospel you read your Bible you pray you meet with other Christians you discuss things you read other books that tell you about the meaning of scripture you come to worship God together with God's people you go to meetings for prayer and for Bible study you grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as you read your Bible you come before you do it and you pray and you ask the Lord to help you to listen to his voice because that's what it is that's what this word is it's God speaking to us and remember the psalm that we sang in Psalm 85 where God is praised there for the way that he has indeed dealt with the psalmist and how he says that his saints are not to return to foolishness he has blessed them he has brought them into a new situation in Christ but let them not return to foolishness all the way through the Old Testament the psalmist knew that there were people who returned to foolishness the people of Israel themselves returned to foolishness they went back to the idolatry of Egypt and their practices even in the desert and in the land of Canaan and God had forewarned them when you get in there don't be carried away with what you find there don't go to the idols of the Canaanites don't be drawn to them don't be carried away that's what he's saying to us tonight how do you counteract it you grow in the grace of Jesus and you grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ he gives him his full title our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ just to really have maximum impact on our souls tonight because what he's saying is the grace and the knowledge that I'm talking about is no less than the grace and the knowledge associated with this person we saw something of his grandeur this morning from Revelation chapter 5 and really this is packed into

that same phrase the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ what a privilege what an inestimable privilege to be in a position to grow in the grace of Christ to grow in the knowledge of Christ to be able tonight when you go home and speak to Jesus and read his word and pray to him and ask him to help you to grow and to develop in your Christian life what a privilege to know his Holy Spirit working in your soul living in you making a home in you for God to be your father for the direction that he gives grow in the grace and knowledge instead of being carried away with the error of the lawless ones this is really

Peter's last exhortation we're dealing with it just to round off our studies of Peter's ministry Peter's life as we find accounts of it in the scriptures well who better to say these things to us than Peter who better to write this letter in those terms than Peter what we've seen about him we've seen the beginnings of his discipleship his calling by Jesus we've seen he was given that new name of the rock you shall be called Peter or Petros the rock we've seen how he failed to live up to that name we've seen his moments of action that wasn't really wise at the time we saw his impetuosity we saw how it led him into trouble at times we saw how his love for Jesus especially came across so strongly so that when we came to the likes of Jesus after his resurrection standing on the shoreline when the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter it is the

Lord Peter immediately threw himself into the sea he wanted to get to this Jesus to meet him again for himself now that he was risen from the dead we saw his restoration by Christ we saw his leadership of the church in the chapters of Acts that we looked at briefly who better from his own experience from his own knowledge of Jesus to say to those readers encountering false teaching and advising them how to do that who better than this disciple who better than him to say you therefore take care that you're not carried away with the error of lawless people who better to advise us not to lose our own stability as he himself knew well from his own experience who better to say as a counter to all that but grow in the grace and knowledge of our

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity Amen Is that our burden tonight then?

[ 37 : 22 ] Is this Jesus your Jesus? Is this knowledge the knowledge you have of him? This personal knowledge this knowing of Christ and as a Christian is this what your heart is set upon tonight to counteract every tendency to relapse to be drawn away by growing in the grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Amen Let's pray Lord our God we confess and know to our shame that we so often fail to meet the standard that you set before us we give thanks that we are indeed as your people surrounded by your keeping and your love and we pray that you would grant to us constantly that mind that will be set upon that proper spiritual growth that you require of us

Lord help us we pray against every temptation to be drawn away from you and from the stability that you have given to your people in Christ help us we pray this evening to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord grant that we may take delight in doing so together and not merely as individuals maintain within us we pray and maintain amongst us as a people that unity in your truth that will honor your name that will give ourselves further to grow in this grace and knowledge hear us now and accept us we pray for Jesus sake amen our final psalm this evening is singing in psalm 119 and that's from the sing psalms version on page 159 psalm 119 section beginning at verse 33 to verse 40 the tune this time is finart teach me to follow your decrees then will I keep them to the end give insight and

I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend these four verses down through the end of that section teach me to follow your decrees decrees and I will keep them to the end give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend with me in your commandments far for then oh lord oh lord delight

I fight and find my heart towards your laws from selfish gate reset my mind mind or turn my eyes from worthless things give life according to your word to me yourself heaven in your flesh so that you may be feared oh lord you be removed from me the shame I dread your laws except in love my quest oh how I long for your decrees we serve me in your righteousness this evening

I'll go to this door at the side here at the end now may the grace of the lord Jesus Christ the love of God the father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore Amen thank you