

Peter's Final Commands to the Churches

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Date: 28 May 2017

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[0 : 00] We come now to our Bible reading, which is in the second letter of Peter, chapter 3, and you'll find this on page 1019.

I think that's right, 1019. Is that right? Does it say it up there? Good, 1019. I'm going to be taking just the final section from verses 14 to 18 this evening, but we'll read the whole chapter so that we can see the context more clearly.

So 2 Peter, chapter 3. This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days 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 from the beginning of creation.

[1 : 15] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

But by the same word, the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

[2 : 45] But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 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're 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. Amen. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Well, let's turn again to 2 Peter chapter 3.

And my title for this evening is Peter's final commands to the churches. And as I said earlier, we're looking at verses 14 to 18 particularly.

[4 : 16] Now, these are the apostle Peter's last surviving words. And they're framed around four commands. First of all, from verse 14, be diligent.

Secondly, from verse 15, count. Thirdly, verse 17, take care. And then at the end, verse 18, grow. And it's in verses 17 and 18 at the end that Peter delivers the weight of his teaching.

Because in those two verses, he's summing up and thrusting home the heart of his message to the young Christians that he's writing to. But the whole of the paragraph lies behind verses 17 and 18.

So I want to look at each of these commands in turn. But before we do, let me say a word about the purpose of the New Testament letters in general. As you know, God did not just give us the Old Testament and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and the Acts of the Apostles.

In his wisdom, he knew that we needed something more. And so he provided us with these final letters, these 22 books of the Bible.

[5 : 25] And their main purpose is to enable their readers to persevere in the Christian life, to keep going. We had this message this morning, didn't we, if you were here. And it's not going to be quite the same this evening, but there will be something of the same.

To persevere in the Christian life. Now that purpose of perseverance shows itself here in our verse 17. Have a look with me. Verse 17. Take care that you're not carried away, carried away like flotsam down a stream, with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

Now there's the danger. These young Christians could lose their stability, which would mean that they would collapse, like a rickety old building in a gale of wind. Peter is writing this letter to give his readers stability, because he knows that endurance in the Christian life is difficult.

Now of all people, Peter knew how difficult it was to endure. He never forgot how he denied the Lord Jesus when he was suddenly put under pressure. You're one of that man's disciples, aren't you?

Said somebody. No, I'm not, he said. He didn't show much stability at that point, did he? He was sharply tested. So Peter knew the weakness of the human heart, and so, of course, did Paul and John and the other writers.

[6 : 43] Now bear in mind that most of these New Testament letters were written between 50 and 70 AD. By that stage, the churches were no longer infants, but they were still toddlers, and the apostles knew that they lacked maturity and strength.

Remember how Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians. He says, The Lord has given to us pastors and teachers to help us to grow up to manhood, to maturity, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Now it's in the nature of children to lack understanding and discernment and firm convictions. But the New Testament letters are here to teach us conviction and to help us to grow into maturity so that we can withstand the buffetings of life.

So how do the New Testament letters enable us to persevere and to develop this capacity to endure? By teaching us at two basic levels.

First, by showing us how to live, and secondly, by showing us what to believe. Or you could reverse those two in their order. Paul puts it like this to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4.

[7 : 57] Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Your life, how you conduct yourself, and your doctrine, what you believe and teach. And Paul goes straight on to Timothy.

Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. Now that's pretty simple to understand, even if it's hard to practice.

Perseverance in the Christian life, which leads us finally to salvation by the grace of God, comes through careful attention to our lifestyle and to what we believe.

And belief and behavior are always intimately connected. If our belief and understanding of God and the gospel are strong and well-founded, we will want to behave in a godly fashion.

But if our belief is shallow and not properly anchored, we shall easily be led astray and fall into sin and disorder. Now every one of these New Testament letters was called for by a situation where there were sharp difficulties that had to be addressed.

[9 : 01] As they write these letters, the apostles are troubleshooters. Now Peter, as we've seen over the last few weeks, was painfully aware that the young churches that he's writing to are in danger from false teachers.

These teachers were denying Jesus. As it's put in chapter 2, verse 1, denying the master who bought them. And specifically, they were denying that he was going to return.

As the scoffers put it in chapter 3, verse 4. But their denials of gospel truth were accompanied by immoral living. And that so often happens.

The doctrine and the lifestyle always go together. That's why Peter quotes this disgusting proverb at the end of chapter 2, 2.22. The dog returns to its own vomit. And the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.

Now it's good for us that Peter should use such a shocking picture. Because this picture jolts us into realizing just how dangerous the influence of false teaching is. It doesn't restrict its damage to the way people think.

[10 : 05] It always issues in immorality. It corrupts the way people believe. So this is what the New Testament letters are doing in the Bible. They're teaching the Lord's people a right understanding of the gospel so that the Lord's people should live in a way that pleases the Lord.

And it's when the gospel is properly understood and the ethics of the gospel are properly lived out that Christian people learn how to persevere with joy.

If you're a young adult here this evening, as many are, just think of a Christian person who is about 50 years older than yourself. You'll generally recognize them by the color of their hair.

And if you then ask, how and why is this senior Christian going on in the Christian life? A large part of the answer will be because of the New Testament letters.

They teach our minds, and that teaching molds our behavior and the consequences that we can persevere. Well, with that in mind, let's turn now to Peter's final four commands to the churches.

[11 : 11] Commands which, if we keep them, will help us to persevere in the Christian life right through to its final conclusion. First of all, then, from verse 14, Be diligent.

Now, let's see how that phrase fits within the whole verse. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

Since you are, beloved, waiting for these. Now, these must be the new heavens and the new earth that Peter has written about in verse 13. So he's saying, Since you're waiting for the new heavens and the new earth, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

Now, this verse is telling us, of course, that we're not only waiting for the new heavens and the new earth. We're also waiting for Jesus. In Peter's words here, we are going to be found by him.

Isn't that a striking thought? But when he returns, he is coming to find us. And he'll be very interested in the state that we're in when he does find us. Do you remember Jesus' own words about this in Matthew chapter 24?

[12 : 23] Who then, he says, Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

Jesus, when he returns, wants to find his servants actively engaged in serving him. It makes me think of one of those delightful historical dramas that we sometimes get on the television these days.

Downton Abbey, perhaps, or one of those Jane Austen novels. And you know how in those presentations, you sometimes get a scene when the master of the house is away from home for quite a long time.

But he then sends a message to the household to say when he's coming back. And he gives them the precise date. And as that date approaches, the servants get very active. The silver is polished.

The rooms are cleaned from top to bottom. Fresh flowers are brought in from the gardens. And delicious dishes are prepared in the kitchens. And when his lordship finally comes, he's delighted to see the good order and the evidence of hard work.

[13 : 32] And this is what Peter is commanding us to be like. Be diligent, he says, to be found by him without spot or blemish. Now this, of course, applies to the congregation as well as to the individual Christian.

If we ever become conscious of a blemish or a spot of grime in the life of the church, maybe a troubled relationship that we need to attend to and put right, maybe a duty neglected through laziness or selfishness, well, let's set about it diligently.

We don't know when the Lord Jesus will return, of course. But if it were to be in the very near future, would we be glad to welcome him and to have him inspect our work? Look, it's very challenging, isn't it?

But it's a lovely challenge because our aim as Christians is to please him. But this also, of course, applies to our individual lives as well. Is there a spot or blemish?

Now, of course, we're all sinners. There's plenty of the seeds of ungodliness swirling around in the swamps of our hearts all the time. But Peter surely is thinking about a particular spot or blemish which we're well aware of but have perhaps never grasped.

[14 : 44] Let me tell you of a temptation that I sometimes experience. I'm washing the pots and the pans after the evening meal is over and I have in my hand a particularly greasy pan which has burnt-on bits of food on it.

You know that sort of pan? And I know that the only way in which that pan is going to be fit for purpose tomorrow is if I spend five minutes or even ten minutes of quality time rubbing the wretched pan with a wire sponge and plenty of fairy liquid.

Ten minutes on one filthy pan. Do I want to do that? No, I certainly do not. But I know that the spot or blemish is so deeply attached to the pan that it requires diligent, focused attention.

And the temptation that I suffer is the temptation not to deal with it properly. Now a besetting sin can be like that. It needs focused attention.

But Peter is saying to us, do it. How do we want to be found by the Lord when he returns? Peter says, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

[15 : 52] This diligent attention to spots and blemishes will produce peace. Peace in our hearts and consciences rather than a sense of trouble and unease because something has not been attended to.

I won't name any particular spots or blemishes of that kind. But if there's one in your heart, you won't need me to name it. You know exactly what it is and you can see what Peter is saying about it here in verse 14.

So there's Peter's first command. It's about repentance and what goes on in the deep places inside our hearts. Be diligent. Now Peter's second command comes in verse 15.

Count. Count the patience of our Lord as salvation. Now we looked at this last week in some detail. So let me just offer a brief reminder about the Lord's patience, which is all about the Lord's timing of historical events.

You remember how Peter says in verse 9 of this chapter that the Lord is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. What he says here in verse 15 picks up this same idea of patience.

[17 : 04] But you'll see that Peter adds the word salvation in verse 15. The emphasis in verses 10, 11, and 12 is on destruction, the burning up of the very heavens and earth when the Lord returns, this fearsome purging and cleansing by fire.

But the purpose of the Lord's delay in returning is to extend salvation, to extend the window of opportunity still open to us in 2017 so that more people should hear and embrace the gospel.

And we looked at that last week, so I'll say no more about it. But I just want us to notice this very interesting little section here on Paul. Because what Peter goes on to say about Paul in verses 15 and 16 adds great weight to the command to count the Lord's patience as salvation.

So look with me again at verse 15. Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.

Now, why should Peter at this stage bring in Paul? Surely for this reason, to add weight to the teaching that Peter is giving about the delay in the Lord's return.

[18 : 18] This business of the delay must have been a real problem to the young churches. Here we are. Peter is writing in about 60 AD and something like 30 years have passed since the Lord ascended into heaven.

But the Lord Jesus has not returned. Why not? Because he is being patient so as to allow more time for the message of salvation to be broadcast across the world.

And says Peter, Paul has written to you on exactly the same lines according to the wisdom given to him. Now, Paul, as you know, had been a great traveler.

He had traveled in the previous decade or so to Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asia. And if you look back to 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 1, the very first verse of 1 Peter, you'll see that those places are some of the places that Peter wrote his first letter to, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asia.

And if you then look at 2 Peter, chapter 3, verse 1, 2 Peter 3, 1, you'll see that this second letter from Peter is written to the same readers as his first letter was sent to.

[19 : 27] So when Peter begins to write about Paul in verse 15, he knows that his readers are going to sit up and take notice because they know Paul. Some of them would have known Paul personally.

Some of them would have first heard the gospel from Paul's mouth because Paul was the one who founded some of those churches. And when Peter in verse 15 mentions some of the letters that Paul wrote to you, he may well have been thinking of Paul's letters to the Galatians, the Thessalonians, and perhaps the Ephesians.

So Peter is bringing Paul in to make the point that Peter's voice is not a lone voice. Paul is equally clear about the second coming in his letters.

Some of which, my readers, you have read yourselves. So Paul's letters add weight to Peter's message. But there's something else here which is very interesting.

You may remember that Peter and Paul had a bit of a row on one occasion, a confrontation. It was a public confrontation when Paul had to rebuke Peter to his face.

[20 : 31] No need to turn this up, but let me read you the passage from Galatians chapter 2. Paul says, But when Cephas, that's one of Peter's names, when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

For before certain men came from James, from Jerusalem, Peter was eating with the Gentiles. But when these men came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Now the big question that was swirling around the early church was this question. Can Jews and Gentiles come to Christ on the same terms? Or do Gentiles effectively have to become Jews before they can become Christians?

Do they need to undergo circumcision and submit to other Jewish laws? Now Peter, of course, knew the answer to that question. He knew perfectly well that Gentiles should not be required to submit to Jewish law.

But he gave way on this occasion out of fear. He gave way to pressure from a strong delegation of the pro-circumcision folk who came from Jerusalem to press their agenda.

[21 : 41] And Paul knew that the whole gospel was at stake over this problem. So he had to rebuke Peter to his face. And Paul didn't lock that incident away in his private papers for nobody's eyes to see.

He published it in his letter to the Galatians for everyone to see. And we read about it even to this day and it doesn't reflect well on Peter. For the sake of preserving the gospel, Peter had to be disciplined, almost slapped in the face by Paul.

But look at how Peter speaks of Paul in our verse 15. Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. Not a trace of resentment or difficulty there, only love and affection.

But notice something else. Peter is not bringing Paul in to support him on the ground of Paul's ability or seniority or anything like that.

He's not saying our beloved brother Paul that noted brain box, that heavyweight intellectual, that PhD from the University of Jerusalem. No. Look at the end of verse 15.

[22 : 47] According to the wisdom given him. Given. Given by God. Peter is saying my teaching about the second coming has exactly the same origin as Paul's.

It's given. It comes by revelation. It's not because of Paul's cleverness. Neither Peter nor Paul could possibly have devised the doctrine of Christ's second coming out of their own heads.

And you and I today, we could never come to believe in Christ's return by scientific experiment or by philosophical reasoning. We believe in the return of Christ because God has revealed it to us in the letters of Peter and Paul and of course in Jesus' own teaching about it.

The Bible's teaching, all of it, comes to us from beyond this world. It's a message to earth from heaven. The Bible's human authors are the channel of revelation and not the origin of it.

Well, let's look on now to the third command from verse 17. Take care. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you're not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

[24 : 05] So the command is to take care not to be carried off by the error of people who flout God's law, lawless people. To be carried away by their error will be to end up in chapter 2, verse 22, in the vomit and mire of unbridled immorality.

If we lose our stability as Christians, we lose everything in the end. We'll be unable to persevere right through to the gates of heaven. Now, there's an important phrase in this verse which can easily be overlooked, but actually, it's the phrase that gives the verse all its power.

It's the phrase knowing this beforehand. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand. So what are they and we to know beforehand which will help us not to be carried away with error?

Well, the phrase refers to the sentence before in verse 16. Writing of Paul's letters, Peter says there, there are some things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

Now, this is just as contemporary and relevant for us today as it was back in 60 AD. People who have a predetermined agenda of wanting to live a dissolute and immoral life, those that Paul or Peter describes as ignorant and unstable people, they were going to Paul's letters and they were twisting them.

[25 : 37] They were deliberately misreading them so as to get them to support their own agenda. Now, I wonder if you'd turn with me to Romans chapter 6 verses 1 and 2 for an example of how Paul's teaching got twisted.

Sorry, I don't have the page number there. 842. 942. 942. Thank you very much. Romans chapter 6 verses 1 and 2.

Let me read those first two verses. Just see if you can detect here the way in which what Paul is saying is being countered by other people. Romans 6.1. What shall we say then?

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Now, in the previous chapter, chapter 5, Paul has been writing about the abounding, lavish grace of God, the undeserved abundance of God's forgiveness of our trespasses.

But he knows only too well how certain people were deliberately corrupting this teaching. They were saying, God wonderfully forgives all our sins as our brother Paul teaches.

[26 : 49] So, let's sin all the more because the more we sin, the more God's abundant forgiveness will be displayed. Now, that's the kind of nonsense, wicked nonsense that Paul is countering in chapter 6 verses 1 and 2.

Continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not. By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? And he then develops his argument to show that sin no longer has any rightful place in a Christian's life to master the Christian and therefore must be resisted rather than indulged in.

And that's not the only example. Now, the pointed issue is this. Paul's letters and other parts of the Bible can be twisted. That's Peter's word.

distorted by people who are ignorant and unstable because they want to be lawless. It looks spiritual at first sight because people are giving the impression that they are submitting to the Bible's authority.

But that's exactly what they're not doing. They have predetermined the conclusion they want to reach so they reshape the obvious meaning of Bible passages so as to fit their desired conclusion.

[28 : 02] Now, the most pressing modern example of this is the question of homosexual activity. I mentioned this painful subject a few weeks back but I make no apology for speaking about it again because so many churches and ministers are giving way to the pressure placed upon them by the activist gay lobby.

It's rather as Peter gave way to that pressure from the circumcision party back in Antioch. The pressure builds up and suddenly the person changes his tune. And on this homosexuality question, churches are going down like nine pins up and down the country and ministers and people are twisting Paul's teaching on this subject.

They're saying, for example, this is the typical line, Paul's condemnation of homosexual activity was perhaps appropriate in his own day and age in the cultural environment of the first century.

But the culture has changed enormously these days and what was appropriate back then is no longer appropriate today. therefore, we can disregard Paul's teaching on this subject.

This is what verse 17 means when it speaks of being carried away with the error of lawless people. Lawless people, it breaks God's law. It appears to be engaging with Paul's teaching but it is in fact disengaging from Paul's teaching.

[29 : 21] It turns Paul's teaching on its head. Now, it's you younger folk who are here today, those who are roughly speaking under the age of about 30 who are, I think, particularly in danger on this point.

When I was young, British society, Western society, by and large, still accepted the biblical view on same-sex activity. But you younger folk, you've been brought up in a very different atmosphere.

Teenagers in our schools today, as you know very well, are actively encouraged to explore their sexuality and if they feel same-sex attraction, they're encouraged to pursue it and develop it if they think that that's the right thing to do.

And people say, I experience same-sex attraction so don't deny who I am. Have you heard that phrase? Don't deny who I am.

Now, Jesus teaches us that we constantly need to deny who we are. He teaches us to deny ourselves ourselves and take up our cross and follow him.

[30 : 29] If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow him. I have to deny myself at many levels. Shall I tell you who I am for a moment?

I'm talking about myself personally here. I am by nature a thief, a liar, an idolater. I am by nature covetous, lazy, and greedy.

And although I'm very happily married, I sometimes have adulterous inclinations. And the Lord Jesus, therefore, calls upon me to deny who I am.

Do you see it? So when a person says, don't deny who I am, what they're saying is, don't you dare to tell me that I mustn't defy the teaching of the Bible. I shall defy God and I shall not listen to any Christian who tells me that homosexual activity is uniformly condemned in the Bible.

Now, you younger folk, you're going to have to stand firm against all this because there's going to be great pressure on you in this 21st century to be, in Peter's words, carried away by the error of lawless people, which will mean losing your stability, not persevering with the Lord and the truth.

[31 : 43] It won't be easy for you in these decades to come. It will demand a great deal of courage. but with the Lord's grace, you can do it. Peter's message is, know this beforehand.

Know that people will twist Paul's letters and the other scriptures to their own destruction. So be forewarned and forearmed and then you will be able to stand firm and then the Lord will be able to say to you at the end of all your battling, well done, good and faithful servant.

take care not to be carried away. It can easily happen. Now Peter's fourth and final command comes in verse 18.

Grow. Or to be more precise, but grow. And the but there is important because it implies a great contrast to what has come before. You're in danger, Peter is saying, of losing your stability.

You're in danger of not surviving as Christians because of the pressures of false doctrine which threaten to carry you away. But, by contrast with all that, I'll tell you finally what to do in order to stand firm.

[32 : 55] And it's this. Make sure that you keep on growing. The Christian life is not static. If it's to be strong against false teaching, it needs to be constantly moving forward.

It's a bit like riding a bicycle. If you're not moving forward, you fall off. So let's think about this final verse in the letter. It's a lovely verse and it sums up so much that the New Testament teaches about the Christian life.

The first thing is that growth presupposes life. You can't grow in the Christian life unless you have begun the Christian life. Peter reminds his readers back in chapter 1, verse 4, that through God's precious and great promises, they are able to become partakers of the divine nature.

They can have the very life of God in them through the new birth. But once the new birth has occurred, growth in the new life needs to follow if there is to be strength and stability to resist false teaching.

When a baby is born, you have new life. It's wonderful. But there then has to be growth. Otherwise, there will be disaster. Now, secondly, let's see how Peter teaches this growth.

[34 : 07] He says it needs to take place in two ways, grace and knowledge, or more precisely, the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, the grace of our Lord Jesus is a way of speaking about his kingdom, a way of speaking about the whole realm over which he presides. Grace is the whole environment of his favor freely given to us.

Paul writes, you're not under law now that you're Christians, but under grace. So when we become Christians, we're transferred from the jurisdiction of God's law, which frowns on us and condemns us as sinners, and we are brought into this new wonderful realm of freedom and forgiveness and undeserved favor.

So Peter is saying to us, grow in your experience of that realm of love and forgiveness. Explore it and rejoice in it because it's now your habitat. But then Peter shows us something else.

Knowledge. We're to grow in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus himself. You sometimes hear Christians say the important thing is not knowing about Jesus, but knowing him.

[35 : 21] Well, I understand what they're saying, but it's not really a helpful distinction to make because we need both. We need both to learn about him as well as to know him personally. In fact, the two things go together.

You can't move forward in knowing him personally unless you're also moving forward in getting to know about him. Paul famously says in Philippians chapter 3, that I may know him.

That's Paul's aim in life, to know Jesus. But Paul goes on and he helps us to understand what this knowing him means. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

So knowing Christ is going to be an overwhelming experience. It's about suffering and death and resurrection. Knowing Christ, therefore, is not for the faint-hearted. And Peter knows all that, even though he doesn't mention it here in this final verse.

Well, this final command of Peter's really sums up the Christian life. Grow in knowing Christ. This is the purpose of our life, expressed in a short sentence.

[36 : 30] Other knowledge is, of course, good. It's good to grow in knowledge of physics and chemistry and music and art and architecture and lots of other things. But all of that is low-level and secondary.

In the end, to grow in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus is the only really important thing. If we live to be 100 years old, we shall never exhaust that study. We want to know about his wonderful being.

We want to know how it is that Godhead and manhood could be combined in his person. We want to know about his purpose, his determination to intervene in our corrupted world so as to die for his people, to rescue them, to pluck us from the wreckage of unredeemed humanity.

We want to know about his resurrection, his indestructible life. We want to know about his ascension, his kingly rule, seated as he is now at the right hand of God the Father.

We want to know about his character, his teaching, his commitment to service, his joy, his love. We want to know about his sorrows, for it is we who have caused them.

[37 : 38] We want to understand his victory over Satan and over all the powers of darkness. well, how can we grow? What steps can we take to ensure that growing in his grace and knowledge is the permanent, ongoing feature of our life?

Let me suggest seven things very quickly, seven very quick things. All right? First, let's delight in the Bible and devour it as if our life depended upon it, which it does.

second, let's delight in the Lord's people and let's give the Lord's people our prime time. Christians belong to the body of Christ, which is the church.

Think for a moment, think of the hand of a newborn baby. Have you ever looked at a newborn baby's hand? Have you ever looked at the little tiny, tiny finger on the end of the hand of a newborn baby?

Perfect little finger. How does that little tiny, tiny finger grow into a big finger? Simply by staying in the body. Thirdly, let's learn obedience to Christ.

[38 : 46] It's when obedience hurts and is costly. That's when we grow as Christians. Fourth, let's talk much with our Christian friends. Let's talk about the weather and the football, certainly, but particularly about the Christian life because the encouragement of Christian friends is a powerful growth hormone.

Fifth, let's walk with the Lord Jesus as if we were on the road to Emmaus with him, talking with him often. Sixth, let's serve him as active servants.

If you're aware that you're in danger of being an idle sluggard, is that possible? Go to somebody like Richard Henry and say to him, Richard, I'm in danger of being an idle member of this church.

Help me, please, into a role of real service. Now, friends, that is not a word to those who are old and weary. It's a word to those who have energy which is currently unharnessed.

Seventh, let's think often about the cross. Then we shall be thankful people.

[39 : 54] Take care, says the apostle, that you're not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose and lose your own stability. That is the danger. That's the apostle's loving warning to all of us.

There's only one way, he says, to counter the danger. Grow and keep on growing 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. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.