

Dear Friends,

Old and New Testament, Scripture occasionally reminds us. The bedrock anchor to a stable, healthy, and fruitful faith rests on the solid rock of the Lord's promised return and final judgment. Neglect or forget that truth and we become vulnerable to every form of error and distraction away from the Lord Jesus Christ and His grace toward us.

With this week's study, I temporarily pause my long habit of weekly writing these "Gospel Gleanings" articles. Personal necessities require my attention and energy. I will miss our weekly studies. And I will continue to occasionally post my reflections and studies as time and circumstance allows. In the meantime, I ask and sincerely appreciate your prayers for me and for my family.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

## 2 Peter: Final Instruction

**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 steadfastness. 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. (2 Peter 3:17-18 KJV 1900)**

As I grow older, I find that my mind thinks more about my own faults and responsibilities than about other people's faults. Peter's closing thoughts to this letter nudge me to work still harder at that emphasis. If we know the Lord is truly "**Lord of lords and king of kings**," (1 Timothy 6:15 KJV) we can relax our personal efforts to make everything right. Yes, whatever we can do to correct errors, we are ethically obligated to do it. However, it is foolhardy to confront wrongs which we know we cannot possibly correct, and yet we try. If we know the Lord is currently Lord of this world, and Lord of His people, we can rest in His righteous judgment. What we can't make right, He can, or He shall bring it to His final day of Judgment for punishment. When David confronted wrongs and unfairness, he wrestled with it intensely. He confessed that it almost got the best of him. But he also tells us where and how he found a resolution to his dilemma.

**Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. (Psalm 73:17 KJV)**

When we take our troubles and distresses, even our frustrations at life, to the "**sanctuary of God**," to His house where His people meet, we are more likely to find the answers we seek there than anywhere on earth.

**...seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.** Our knowledge of the Lord's Second Coming and judgment leaves us without excuse or claim of ignorance. Further, Peter also warns us that we can be deceived or discouraged by scoffers in our world. The most faithful of believers needs to "beware" no less than the weakest of believers. To warn his readers means that Peter understood their vulnerability, and even his own. They could indeed "fall" from their own steadfastness. This passage rejects the idea of divinely determined and orchestrated perseverance "If you are really saved." We have no Scriptural reason to question the spiritual state of those first recipients of this letter. In the first verse of the letter, Peter describes them as possessing "**... like precious faith**" with him and other godly believers.

To fall in this lesson means "...to change for the worse," (Louw-Nida) with an emphasis on both suddenness and degree of change. Simply stated, Peter chose language to warn us that we are liable to shipwreck our faith suddenly and severely. When we compromise our faith and lose our sharp and steady focus on "**these things**," referring to the Lord's faithful promise to return and claim His people for a glorious eternity with Him, we become liable to this failure. A pastoral observation. Most often I have observed once sincere and devoted believers compromise their faith by diluting it with what they decided was important and worthwhile stuff. In today's season, if Facebook and chatter I hear from people is an indication, many believers have decided that their political ideas are almost as important as their faith, so they rationalize investing much—at times most—of their emotions and energy in their personal political ideas. I've witnessed godly believers become too invested in a career that eventually took them away from their faith. The paths away from steadfastness are many. However, the strategy to avoid that failure is one. Keep your spiritual vision of the Lord's return fresh and foremost in your mind. Anything that tends to push that truth into the background of your mind may well become your "**besetting sin**" which causes you to fall from your steadfastness.

Often New Testament writers "Bookend" their letters. They teach the same or similar truth at the beginning and the ending of a letter. We see this pattern in most of Paul's letters. Peter opened this letter with a detailed admonition to grow a fruitful faith, warning that our failure results in our becoming unfruitful and even forgetting that we were purged from our sins by Jesus. And now at the end of the letter we see this similar warning. What do we choose, steadfastness in our faith, or becoming ensnared by "**the error of the wicked**"?

**But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.** Before we can grow in grace and knowledge, we must anchor our faith in the Lord and His promised return. If we allow "**the error of the wicked**," cynical scoffing or any other error, to derail our faith, we cease our spiritual growth. In fact, we fall backward into less spiritual maturity.

A student in school can't learn or grow by never opening a textbook and studying. Likewise, a believer in Jesus can't "**grow in grace**" or "**in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**" if he/she never spends regular time with their Bible. I've known a few preachers who, as they grew older, spent less and less time with their Bible. In every case, their failure to keep the message of truth fresh in their mind showed up in their sermons. What was fresh and edifying at one time slowly grew stagnant. They often repeated the same ideas over and over, not bad ideas, but also not fresh and edifying truth. Folks, whether in the pulpit or the pew, Peter's lesson instructs, warns, and encourages us. If you do not like a "Stale" sermon, you shouldn't like a stale life either. The Lord likely regards both with equal disapproval.

If you find yourself out of physical shape, how do you go about reversing your physique and health? You must engage in a methodical and regular habit of exercise. And that is what Peter teaches us to do in our study lesson. We can't grow in faith-knowledge by recalling what we once studied anymore than we can grow our physical strength by remembering a good meal we had five years ago. To grow either physically or spiritually, we need fresh nutritious food, and our spiritual food can only be found in the "Grocery store" of Scripture, prepared into a healthy meal in our minds, minds exercised in godliness by fresh remembrances of the Lord's glory and His Second Coming.

We often approach lists in Scripture as simply random itemizations of good things. I am persuaded that the items which appear in Bible lists appear in strategic order. Why would Peter list growth in grace before growth in spiritual knowledge? Simple. It matters little how much we know of spiritual things if we practice those truths with anger, resentment, or other spiritual cancers. We believe in eternal salvation all and only by the Lord's grace. Do we understand that this belief imposes an ethical obligation on us to live by that same kind of grace toward others, especially those in the household of faith? When weighed by the Lord, a person's knowledge means nothing if not accompanied by gracious kindness. A harsh judgmental "Expert" may be correct in doctrinal beliefs. But, if he doesn't apply that knowledge with grace, the same kind of grace the

Lord showed us in our salvation, it can become little more than a tool of cruelty. I occasionally remind myself of a quip I read many years ago as a reminder to keep my preaching framed in grace. “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care.”

Let’s test this idea against other Biblical lessons. For example.

**Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3 KJV)**

Clearly this question of meat previously offered to an idol and then sold in the meat market posed a divisive challenge to the Corinthian Church, so Paul devoted significant “Ink” in this letter to the problem. Based on 1 Timothy 4:1-5, believers are free to eat any edible food available, conditioned only by eating it with thanksgiving to the Lord for providing it. That a piece of meat passed through an idol temple before arriving at the meat market in no way rendered the meat unacceptable for believers. The idol is nothing, so it can’t alter the meat. It would appear that some of the Corinthians in the church understood this fact and ate the meat, while others in the church feared that they were committing idolatry by eating it. Both believers held their ideas sincerely, but the difference was straining gracious fellowship in the church. Paul taught both groups a lesson which they—and we—needed to know. Biblical love, “Charity,” and Biblical “Grace” go hand in hand. Those who understood that the path the meat took before arriving at the meat market had no impact on its acceptability for food were prideful. They may have felt superior to those who were offended for no good reason. And both groups had lost their fresh and strong commitment to godly love, “Charity.”

We don’t have the problem of meat offered to idols in our culture. However, this divisive mindset abounds in so many ways among believers no less than it did in the Corinthian Church. “I have learned New Testament Greek, so my insight into Scripture is more valid than yours.” Have we seen this attitude? “I understand more about the political situation than others in the church, and I can’t possibly be wrong.” “I have special knowledge about sinister conspiracies against Christian values, so my perspective is wiser than yours.” Oh, the list could go on and on. But the more we chase such prideful ideas the more we abandon true New Testament “Charity.” And the more we need Paul’s inspired teaching. Our supposed “Superior” knowledge puffs us up and gives our chief adversary grounds to sow discord which weakens our mutual fellowship in Jesus. We may define Biblical charity. We may claim exceptional insight into the word and into Scripture’s teaching, but how much authentic Biblical “Charity” governs our life, our words, and our conduct toward other believers?

We ever need to refresh our minds by pondering Jesus’ conversation with Peter. (John 21:15-23 KJV) Our privilege of teaching the Lord’s “Lambs” and “Sheep” requires Biblical knowledge. We can’t honor the Lord in spiritual ignorance. However, Jesus emphasized something deeper that He taught Peter, a divine prerequisite to our truly—Biblically—feeding and nurturing His people. How much do we love Him? And if we love Him as He taught us, how much do we show His love in us to other believers, especially when we attempt to teach them? The ultimate test of our love appears in Jesus’ words at the close of this lesson. Pride will nudge us to question the work, the “Divine assignment,” of other believers. Loving Jesus will build a fire in us to love and to nurture other believers with kind grace, not parade our self-assessed superior knowledge to them. To my friends in the pulpit and in the pew. How much do you love Jesus? How clearly do you manifest that love in your teaching and interactions with them? I’ve been at this work for over sixty-eight years, and the longer I live the more I am keenly aware of how much I need to grow in both my grace toward other believers, as well as my knowledge of Him. Lord, give me a few more years to grow in both.

Elder Joe Holder