

One of the things that has gotten lost with the advent of computers, emails and text messaging is the ability to compose a letter – with a beginning, the middle content, and then a conclusion. Everything today is in short bursts, with some text messages limited to a small number of characters – so there is never time to flesh out thoughts.

However, that is what we do not see in the letters in the Scriptures – specifically in the letters either written to the various churches, such as Corinth, Galatia or Ephesus – or those written to individuals like Timothy, Titus, and the letter that we are concluding today – 2 Peter.

Again, remember, that Peter is writing this letter to the pilgrims of the dispersion – that is, those who had to flee their homelands because of their faith in Jesus Christ. This second letter is written to remind them, among other things, to beware of the false teachers that had arisen in the church – those that looked good on the outside, but were in reality those that believed and lived a lie.

As he began to conclude this letter, which we looked at two weeks ago – he told us that these people are unstable and twist the truth of the Scriptures to their own destruction and for their own purposes.

So Peter wraps up his letter these pilgrims with the following words – 2 Peter 3:17-18 (READ).

Again, we see the word therefore – and as always, we ask, what is therefore, there for? Peter is reminding them that they know the truth of the Gospel as this had been revealed to them – and that they also know that the false teachers, with their destructive teachings had arisen — because this is why Peter is writing to them.

He warns them because he does not want them to fall from the Gospel truth and to be led away in the errors of the wicked false teachers. Remember, that because of the false teachers many were being led astray – and part of this involved immoral behavior – something that we see so clearly today where all types of behavior are not only tolerated, but accepted as normal. And it even goes beyond that when those of us who are critical of this abnormal behavior are consider the intolerant ones.

Peter has told them that they know the truth. They had followed the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ as told to them by Peter and the other early church leaders. In fact, it was their belief in this truth that caused them to flee from their homes in the first place.

This fact had an important side effect – in that it facilitated the spread of the Gospel to the places that these people had to flee to. Remember, that by the end of that 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the Gospel had been spread to most of the known world.

But also remember again, that this false teaching sounded good on the outside. It essentially was a twisting and a distortion of what God really said. And as with most false teaching today it was incomplete statements, taking things out of context or failing to compare Scripture with Scripture. As I have said on other occasions – false teaching either involves failing to compare Scripture with Scripture, or adding to the Scriptures, as is the case in Islam, Mormonism and other false religions.

For example – the mantra today in certain churches is “God is Love”. God loves you — period. It doesn’t matter what else you believe, or how you live, because God loves you wherever you are on your “spiritual

journey” – as someone said the other day. However it does matter – God has standards – and those standards have not changed – regardless of what the false teachers say.

Peter wants them to be steadfast in their faith – and that is why he is writing to them. He does not want them to stray into the errors of those he calls the wicked – those who are living lives contrary to God’s Word. Again, remember that he has told us their end – and that is the destruction of their souls. And he does not want the same thing to happen to those pilgrims that he is writing to.

This is precisely what he tells them in his final exhortation to them – *“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* (REPEAT).

Consider what he tells them – to continue to grow in their faith. While acknowledging that salvation is by grace through faith, there is the exhortation to continue to grow in that faith.

Throughout the Scriptures the Christian faith is compared to that of a baby, who is born and then grows and grows to maturity. As Christians we are to grow in our faith and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we were first born – all we had was milk. Then we “graduated” to soft foods and finally solid foods. In the process we grew until we became adults. Some of us grew too much, but that is another story.

When we first became Christians, we acknowledged the truth of the Gospel, but we didn’t know everything about what God had revealed in His Word. As an aside, we will never know everything – but, as I said, in the Scriptures, here, and in other places we are exhorted to grow.

Consider what Peter says in his first letter to the pilgrims of the dispersion – 1 Peter 2:2: *“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby...”*

Here we see the foundation or the means of our growing in the faith – the Word of God. As I have said on many occasions – we need to read it, study it, memorize it – and live by it.

We do not know how blessed we are in the United States. 92% of households in the U.S. have a Bible – and the average number is 3 Bibles in each house. Without exaggeration we have at least 50 Bibles that we have collected through the years from Lilah’s family and mine.

And yet, does the average American read and study the Bible – and follow what it says? Looking at our country and the things that many believe, I would say that most don’t. Even though we have access to the truth – God’s truth – most do not follow it.

This is not the case everywhere. People in other countries get arrested for even having a Bible. Recently, I read of someone in China who was arrested for printing Bibles without the government’s permission.

Were you aware that there are mission agencies whose main purpose is to read the Bible over the radio waves SLOWLY so that people can copy it down because it is illegal to own a Bible. And then they copy it and pass it around to their Christian friends.

But, as I said, we don't have that problem. The problem is that even though we have access, we don't spend enough time reading and studying God's Word – and as a result we don't grow in our Christian lives. If we don't read and study the Word of God, then we won't know what God says and what He requires.

I had the privilege of growing up in Christian home and attending a Bible-believing church. One of the songs I remember as child went like this: “read your Bible, pray every day and you'll grow, grow, grow”.

It may sound simple, and it really is. Again, as I have said on a number of occasions – God has given us His Word – and it contains, as Peter said earlier, all that we need for life and godliness – how to live in the world that God has placed us in – and how to get to the world to come.

**BUT** we have to take advantage of the blessing that God has given us – His Word – if we want to grow. As we read and study and God's Word – we will grow. We will know what is pleasing to Him and we will know what is not pleasing to Him.

The false teachers at the time of Peter and in our day deny what God has revealed in His Word – and they are leading people astray. Peter did not want that to happen to those he is writing to and I do not want it to happen to those over who God has placed me.

So, I encourage you to read your Bible and pray every day – so that you will grow in your faith and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because as Peter concludes – *“To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”* In these concluding words we two very important things. First, there is a presupposition to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ – that he indeed is God – the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity. Only God is to have the Glory – and if Peter tells us that Jesus is to have glory also, then he must be God.

Secondly, we see that this glory belongs to him now and until he comes again. One of things that we confess is that Jesus is coming again – in glory and judgment.

The point of all this is that we know the truth – the whole truth and nothing but the truth – because it is all in there – in God's Word – the Holy Scriptures. So I will continue to encourage you to read it and study it – so that you will know it. And so that you will be able to discern and recognize false doctrine when someone tries to teach you things that are contrary to the Scriptures.