

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Scripture Memory</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>85</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>2 Peter 3:17-18</b>		
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### BE READY AND DON'T FORGET! (Part 3)

*What* does it mean to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ?” The great Puritan divine Thomas Goodwin captured the substance of the matter when he wrote: “When a man grows more rooted into Christ, that is the true growth, and that which makes the fruit to be more in God’s sight and esteem; therefore, Eph. iv. 15, we are said *to grow up in him*, -- that is, to live the life we lead more out of ourselves and in Christ. As when, for the acceptance of our persons, we are emptied of our own righteousness; so for strength to perform duties, we are emptied of our abilities, seeing *without him we can do nothing*. So when for acceptance of our performances when we have done them, our hearts have learned habitually to say more and more with the apostle, *Not I, but Christ in me*; when we interest Christ more and more in all we do, as the efficient and also the final cause. And therefore I observe, when growth of grace is mentioned, it is still expressed by *growing in the knowledge of Christ*; so, 2 Pet. iii. 18, *Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ*; as if to grow in grace without him were nothing, as indeed it is not. So in the Ephesians we are said both to grow up in him and for him. Philosophers did grow in moral virtues, but not in Christ; so do civil men and others. Temporaries do duties from him, but yet as in themselves; as the ivy that hath sap from the oak, but concocts it in its own root, and so brings forth as from itself. To do one duty, sanctifying Christ and free grace in the heart, is more than a thousand. Young Christians, it may be, do more works, but not as works of grace: and the more men think by duties to get Christ and God’s favour, the more in duties they trust, and so they become as works of the law; but the more dead a man grows to the law, and to live to Christ and Christ in him, and the more free grace is acknowledged in all, trusted in above all, the more evangelical our works are, and the more to God (for that is the end of the gospel, to honour Christ and free grace), the more we grow. *We are of the circumcision*, says the Apostle, *who rejoice in the Lord Jesus, worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh*, Phil. iii. 3. As these are the surest signs of true grace, so of true growth.”<sup>1</sup>

In how many senses can we speak of grace as it is used in Scripture?

1. As an *attribute* of God. Then in a broader sense grace is unmerited favor and in a more specific sense, that favor toward sinners. This grace has no means by which it is induced or brought about. It chooses and creates its own means. The entire plan of salvation, not excluding the Mediator, is a fruit of this grace.
2. As an *objective gift in Christ*. In Him as the exalted Mediator is found the basis of all manifestations of favor granted to the sinner. From His fullness we have all received grace for grace [John 1:16]. The means by which this grace was obtained and brought about are found in the satisfaction of the Savior.
3. As a *subjective action in us*. Everything that happens in us or to us as the outworking of the attribute of God and the gift of grace in Christ is called grace in the specific sense of the word. And this third grace is in view when we speak of the *means of*

*grace*. There are certain instruments by which God wills for us to come to know and to apply His favor residing in Christ. These are means connected with the communication of grace. Grace is hereby taken in its wildest sense, so that it is not limited to effectual, seeking, or regenerating grace, but includes everything that happens subjectively in or below our consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

How are we to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ? God does influence our minds directly, but His primary method of bringing about growth is through what are commonly called “means of grace.” This is how the Westminster Larger Catechism states it: “Question 153: What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law? Answer: That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, he requireth of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the *outward* means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation (see Shorter Catechism, Question 85, for virtually the same answer). Question 154: What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation? Answer: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his redemption are *all his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation* (see Shorter Catechism, Question 88, for virtually the same answer). In these means we are not passive but must participate actively. Even though God indeed works in us both the willing and the doing of His good pleasure, we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12-13). There are usually *five* areas in which grace and the duties of growth in the Christian life coincide. Together these constitute the means of grace: Scripture, prayer, trials and afflictions, the church, and the Sacraments. These five “tools of the Spirit” are indispensable to Christian growth.

- I. ***THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF GOD’S GRACE.*** As noted, the word *grace* is used in Scripture to highlight God’s love and mercy. In Titus 3:7 we read, “So that being justified by his *grace* we might become heirs according to the promise of eternal life.” In Acts 4:33 we are told, “And with great power the apostle gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And *great grace* was upon them all.” Here grace empowers. In 2 Corinthians 9:9 Paul declares that God is able to make *all grace abound* toward you that you always have all sufficiency in all things, having an abundance for every good work. This is provisional grace. There is also the important aspect of grace in service. Spiritual gifts according to Romans 12:6 is a manifestation of God’s grace. This is also stated in 1 Peter 4:10-11, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as *faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms*. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” In Romans 6:14 we read, “For sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under law but *under grace*. This is the key to the Christian life. By growing in grace we become *strong in grace* that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1). This is the theme Paul rehearses in Ephesians 1:15-21, “[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: . . . that *you may know . . . the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places*.” Finally, we are promised mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Old John Gill made this helpful observation: “The Mercy of God differs, in some respects, both from the love and grace of God; from the love of God in its objects; which, though the same, are regarded under different considerations. Love pitched itself originally on objects, in the pure mass of creatureship, as unfallen, though it continues with them in their fallen state, and through all the imperfections of this life, to eternal happiness; mercy supposes its objects miserable, and so fallen: in order of operation;

for though they are together in God, the one as early as the other, yet love seems to work by mercy, and mercy from it; the objects being viewed as dead in sin, and for it, love stirs up mercy to quicken them with Christ, and in themselves; *God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love*, & c. Eph. ii. 4, 5. Mercy also differs from grace; for though all mercy is grace, because it is free, unmerited, undeserved; yet all grace is not mercy: much grace and favour are shewn to the elect angels; in the choice of them in Christ; in the preservation of them from the apostasy others of their species fell into; in constituting Christ the head of them, by whose grace they are confirmed in the state in which they were created; and in their being indulged with the presence of God, and communion with him; they always beholding his face in heaven; all which is abundant grace, but not mercy; since they never were miserable, and so not objects of mercy.”<sup>3</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The late Anthony A. Hoekema, who’s writings have been so helpful to me, wrote shortly before his death, “Does growth in knowledge mean spiritual growth? The answer depends on what one means by knowledge. If it is mere abstract, intellectual knowledge, mere rote-memory knowledge, mere *Bible Trivia* knowledge, not necessarily. Paul, in fact, talks about a type of knowledge that *puffs up*, but does not build up (1 Cor. 8:1). But if growth in knowledge means growth in understanding what Christ has done for us, what the Spirit is doing in us, and what God wants us to do for him and to be for him, then growth in knowledge is bound to bring spiritual growth. This is the type of knowledge Peter has in mind when he enjoins his readers, in 2 Peter 3:18, *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”<sup>4</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Thomas Goodwin III* (rpt. Taneki Publications, 1996), p. 472.

<sup>2</sup> This is taken from G. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics V* (Lexham Press, 2016), p. 77

<sup>3</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Divinity* (rpt. Sovereign Grace, 1971), p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> A. A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Eerdmans, 1989), p. 142.