

1 Peter - How Christ-Like Is Your Life?

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of preparing for the second coming by living a life of righteousness, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and being on guard against the error of lawless men.

Duration: 40:09

Scripture: Amos 4:12, Micah 6:8, Colossians 4:16, 2 Peter 3:14-18

Topics: "Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the second letter of Peter, which he describes as a marvelous summary of basic Christianity. The Apostle challenges the listeners to examine themselves in terms of their love, faith, and hope. The sermon concludes with the question of how Christ-like their lives are. The preacher emphasizes the importance of growth in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, using the analogy of a tree that grows and towers over time. The sermon also mentions the story of John Bunyan, who initially had a superficial reformation but later experienced a true internal regeneration after hearing about the new birth and reading the Bible with new eyes. The preacher encourages the listeners to have hope in the new heaven and earth and to live accordingly. The sermon references 2 Peter 3:14 and emphasizes the need to be a certain kind of people in light of this hope.

Transcript

On these Sunday evenings, we've been focusing on the second letter of the Apostle Peter. This portion of scripture has been chosen because it is such a marvelous summary of basic Christianity. For in the short compass of this letter, the Apostle, by his writing, challenges us to examine ourselves concerning the reality of our love, the firmness and solidity of our faith, concerning the clarity of our hope.

And in the concluding section this evening, he puts the question to us, how Christ-like is your life? Reading from 2 Peter chapter 3 and beginning at verse 14. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard

so that you may not be carried away with the error of lawless men.

And fall from your secure position, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To him be glory, both now and forever. Amen.

This is a section of scripture that begins with a word of preparation. The note of preparation is not rare in scripture. It occurs repeatedly.

Think, for example, of the tremendous statement given in the book of the prophet Micah, where he does not speak to the heathen, who in their blindness bow down to wood and stone, he speaks to the people of Israel, because to whom much has been given from him much more shall be required. And so he speaks to the people of Israel and he says, prepare to meet your God, O house of Israel. And the apostle Peter, in this letter, as he winds up his writing, echoes the note that is found in scripture, epitomized in that statement by Amos.

A word of preparation. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to something wonderful that is going to happen, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. We must prepare for what is to come.

And what is it that is to come? The apostle Peter states it in the preceding context. He looks for the dissolution of the world that now is. And he looks for a new heaven and a new earth by the creative and renewing power of an omnipotent God.

He looks for a new world order which shall not be infected with the decadence of contemporary society. He looks for a new world order in which corruption will not run rampant, but where righteousness will dwell as an honored guest. He looks for a new heaven and a new earth.

And that which is the hope of the apostle Peter is also the glorious vision of the apostle John. For imprisoned on the island of Patmos under the tyranny of the Caesars, he is yet caught up in the spirit of God. And in the midst of enslavement, his spirit is free.

And he looks forward to the time when God will make all things new. And there will be a universe in which there will be no more sin, no more sorrow, no more pain, and no more death. Now, says the apostle Peter, since you have this hope in your hearts, since you look for a new heaven and a new earth, since you look for corruption to be swept away and righteousness to become entrenched, what sort of people ought you to be? What sort of life ought you to live? If you expect a new heaven and a new earth, you ought to prepare by being new people.

If you look for a reign of righteousness, begin now to live a life of righteousness. And so he does not encourage ease, but effort. And so he does not tolerate laziness, but energetic resolve.

We are, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews puts it, to pursue holiness without which no one shall see the Lord. And we must make every effort in view of the great expectations that are ours to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. James, the brother of Jesus, said something similar.

He said, Pure religion and undefiled in the sight of God and our Father is this, to be compassionately concerned for orphans and widows and their affliction, and to keep yourself unspotted from the world. And the turn of phrase that is used there and is used here is reminiscent of what we find in 1 Peter, where the character of Jesus is described as being like a lamb without blemish and without spot. That is the way that

you and I prepare for the return of him who is absolute holiness, by being unspotted, without blemish, and to be blameless, to have no skeletons rattling in our closets which at the very least opening of the door will tumble out to great shame and embarrassment and dread.

To be the kind of men and women who can be sure that in that great day when the judge of the living and the dead shall appear, there will be no charges hanging over our heads, that every indictment that could legitimately have been brought against us has equal legitimately been canceled by the decision of the judge of the universe. To know that our sins have been forgiven and that there is now therefore no condemnation that we expect because we've been absolved and acquitted by the sentence of God, that is the way to prepare for the second coming. To be without spot and without blame, and to be without fear, but rather at peace with him who is to return.

If we are justified by faith, if we are acquitted of all the charges that hung over us and we are accepted of God, then we have peace with God and we do not dread that ultimate encounter with Christ, but we look forward to it for he will not come against us as a prosecuting attorney but as a friend and a redeemer welcoming us to himself. And so the apostle says, dear friends, since you look forward to all this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. A word of preparation.

I came across an ancient Scottish paraphrase of this passage, which sums it up in a few poetic lines, and it reads like this. Since all this frame of things must end, for heaven has so decreed, how wise are inmost thoughts to guard and watch o'er every deed, expecting calm the appointed hour, when nature's conflict o'er, a new and better world shall rise where sin is known no more. And we're perhaps more familiar with another rendition of the same thought.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, oh, may I then in him be found, clothed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne. Since you expect all this to happen, prepare now by making every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. The word of preparation.

Then there's a word of commendation. He says, bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters.

His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction. Now, embedded in these sentences is a word of commendation, and it's a very interesting thing that the Apostle Peter should commend the Apostle Paul and refer to him as our dear brother Paul. You recall what had happened between these two men at one critical juncture in the development of Christian doctrine? The Apostle Peter had come to certain convictions, and then, because he was afraid of what some people might think, he compromised his convictions.

And the Apostle Paul confronted him, spoke the truth in love, but spoke the truth nonetheless, and he dared to do what he would never have done if Peter had been the first in a succession of infallible popes. He withstood him to the face. And Peter must have been broken up.

Peter must have been crestfallen. Peter must have been shattered by the correction that he received, but it set him straight for the rest of his life on that particular issue. And so, with that as background, we are delighted to hear him refer to the man who had withstood him and corrected him to his face, and he calls him our dear brother Paul.

Now, mind you, he says there are some things in the writing of our dear brother Paul that are rather difficult. For example, he speaks of the mercy of God that forgives sinners. And some people have misunderstood this to mean that we have license to live as we please and we can always go to God and he'll straighten it out.

They've distorted the teaching of the Apostle. On one hand, he says that women must keep silence in public and they are not allowed officially to teach. On the other hand, he extols women like Phoebe who hold a high rank in the early church, and he tells us that in Christ there is neither male nor female, just as there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, but we all have equal acceptance before God.

Difficult to understand. How do you reconcile this whole matter of submission and equality? Is one of temporary enforcement and the other of abiding validity? And the debate goes on and on, things in the writings of the dear brother which are difficult to understand. But he says there is something in the writing of Paul which agrees with something that I myself have stressed, says Peter, and that is this, that if the second coming of Jesus Christ is delayed, it's not because God is faithless to his promise.

It's not because God is powerless to effect his promise. It is because God is patient and he gives sinners a lengthened period of opportunity in which they can come to terms with him, confess their faults, and be absolved of their guilt. For God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, 2 Peter 3 verse 9. And you find that echoed in the writing of the Apostle Paul when writing to the Romans, he says, Consider the forbearance of God.

Consider the patience of God. His hand may be uplifted, but he does not sweep down in smite. He holds back the dawning of the day of judgment, being patient with mankind, giving people yet another opportunity to repent and be reconciled to him.

It is not because he is faithless. It is not because he is powerless. It is because he is filled with patience and loving-kindness.

And the Apostle says that we ought not to despise the patience and forbearance of God, for now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation. And in commending the Apostle Peter for stressing the truth of the patience of God that gives people the chance to repent before it's too late, Peter in a very incidental manner pays Paul the consummate compliment of ranking his letters on the same level as the other scriptures. It's done in a very incidental way, and that makes it all the more significant.

Remember that Peter, like Paul, was a Jew. And being a Jew, he regarded the scriptures of the Old Testament to be the word of God written, scripture given by inspiration of God. And here, in a very offhand way, Peter says that the writings of our dear brother Paul are in the same class as the other scriptures, equally inspired, equally authoritative.

God, who spake in the past by means of prophets who were moved by the Holy Ghost, continues to speak through our dear brother Paul and the writings of the other apostles. And so he commends him to our attention. And indeed, the Apostle Paul was conscious of this awesome responsibility of being the instrument through which God made his will known to others.

He said, when I brought you God's message, you did not receive it as the word of man, but for what it is, the word of God. And when he wrote to the Colossians, he instructed them that after they had read that letter to the congregation, they should circulate it to other Christian communities like Laodicea, for this was

an apostolic writing on the same level of inspiration and authority as the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. And so after a word of preparation to those who expect the second coming, there is a word of commendation for our dear brother Paul and his inspired and authoritative writings.

The third thing that we find in our text is a word of admonition, and that's found in verse 17. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know all this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. Can you fall from your secure position? After all, don't you believe in the perseverance of the saints? What kind of Calvinist are you? What sort of dyed-in-the-wool predestinarian Presbyterian are you if you doubt that one whom God has elected from before the foundation of the world can fall from his position of security? The end is not independent of the means, and one of the ways in which God keeps his elect on course and one of the means that God uses to enable the saints to persevere right to the end is the word of admonition, the word of warning.

And we are put on guard lest we be swept away by the error of lawless men. The warning of God is intended to keep us on the straight and narrow, persevering till we see him face to face. And so the word of warning fulfills a very valuable purpose wherever you find it in scripture.

The end is perseverance. The means toward perseverance is the word of warning. And what are we warned against? The error of lawless men.

Doctrinal error, the denial of the basics of the faith, like the virgin birth of Christ, the divinity of Jesus Christ, his sinless humanity, the miraculous element in his ministry, his atoning sacrifice at the cross, his burial and resurrection on the third day, his ascension to heaven, his return to judge the living and the dead. Be on guard, says Paul, against those who teach false doctrine and deny the basics of the faith. On this score, we must be unabashed and unashamed fundamentalists, holding to the fundamentals of the faith, once for all delivered to the saints.

The error of lawless men, men who would lead you to believe that you are free to do what you like, but you are not bound by the authority of a moral code that comes from on high, the will of a transcendent and majestic God, who in 10 authoritative words that come through Moses from Mount Sinai, repeated and validated in the teaching of the New Testament, tells us what we ought to do and warns us against what we ought not to do. When it says thou shalt not commit adultery, that's exactly what it means. When it says honor your father and mother, that's exactly what it means.

When it says thou shalt not steal or bear false witness, that is precisely the intent of the will of God. Don't be carried away by the error of lawless men who deny sound doctrine and who would flout the moral majesty of God's law. After the word of preparation and commendation, that very negative word, but necessary word of admonition.

And now the final word, the most important of all, a word of exhortation. Amen. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

To him be glory, both now and forever. Amen. Ever since 1960, when I was invited to be the anniversary preacher here in Knox, the days of the revered Dr. William Fitch, I suppose that I've preached from this pulpit in one way or another as a guest or as interim minister or senior pastor pretty close to 400 times.

And if I were never again to have the privilege of so doing, as the hymn writer puts it, when this poor lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave, these are the words with which I would designedly

finish. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. A very positive statement, one that ought to be burned into our souls and practiced in our lives.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Growth is a sign of life. I planted a tree with my youngest son years and years ago, and now it towers over us.

And even if he were to stand on my shoulders, it would still stand and tower over both of us. The growth is a sign of vitality. A child is born, a premature child, cradled like a little icon in the parents' hands.

But give it 15 or 20 years. Growth, a sign of life. And so it is with the Christian church.

When we read the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we find periodically statements of progress. And the Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved. And the word of God multiplied and grew exceedingly.

Quantitative growth. Numerical growth. The geographical expansion of the gospel.

Good. But the Apostle Peter goes deeper than that. He is not satisfied with quantitative growth that is statistical.

He wants to seek qualitative growth that is spiritual. And so you and I must grow in the grace and knowledge that come with reference to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I must admit this.

Some of my best theological friends are Baptists. You can tell the Presbytery if you like. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

I regard Charles Haddon Spurgeon as a model for preachers, a prince of preachers, an immersed Presbyterian. Another man who falls in that same category is John Bunyan. Now I'm speaking to a lot of people who grew up in a time when John Bunyan was popular.

I'm speaking to the other half of the congregation who wonder who this man is. John Bunyan was a Baptist nonconformist who spent time in prison for his religious convictions and in prison wrote a classic called Pilgrim's Progress, where using figurative language, he described the Christian's journey into the city of God. The other day, I reread one of the writings of John Bunyan called Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.

And I was amazed at how that man reacted against God's approach to his soul. He was like one of these fish that gets hooked on the Florida Keys and squirms and fights and will not yield. He lived a life of disobedience and profanity.

He felt guilty, and when the guilt wore off, he continued sinning. He was spared from drowning, but it made no difference at all to the tenor of his life. He would hear voices saying, Leave your sins and go to heaven, keep your sins and go to hell, be momentarily shaken, and then go right on sinning.

He made an outward change, superficial temporary reformation, but no lasting internal regeneration. Then one day, he goes to the town of Bedford, and he overhears a group of women speaking about the new birth, talking about becoming new creatures in Christ, reading and discussing the word of God. He was highly impressed, and he began to read the Bible as he puts it, with new eyes.

That didn't last very long, for Satan began to insinuate doubts into his mind, and he began to wonder, Am I one of the elect? If I'm not one of the elect, what good will it do me to decide for Christ? I'm going to be damned anyway. And maybe I've committed the sin against the Holy Ghost with the profanity of my earlier years, and I will not find forgiveness either in this world or in the next. And so he tortured himself and twisted in the wind repeatedly on this score.

And then one day, he had an experience of the grace of God. And he said, From that moment onward, I resolve to see nothing before my eyes save Jesus only. And he discovered that his salvation was not the result of his accumulation of merit, for he proved to be a tragic failure at that, but that his salvation was dependent upon the sheer undeserved grace of God.

For by grace was John Bunyan saved, and that not of himself, it was the gift of God, not of his works, lest any man should boast. You and I are to grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are to draw saving grace from Jesus, grace that will pardon and cleanse within, grace that is greater than all our sin, grace that will renew us from within, grace that will enable us to endure, grace that will keep us in the way of perseverance until we see him face to face, drawing on his grace, appreciating his grace, resting and rejoicing in his grace, increasingly, day by day.

Grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And behind that word knowledge is the Greek word *gnosis*, which has been perpetuated in the English language when we use words descriptive of different kinds of knowledge. Like prognosis is knowledge in advance, some kind of forecasting possibility.

Or diagnosis, the knowledge that comes through a thoroughgoing investigation of something. Well, here the apostle doesn't speak of diagnosis or prognosis, but simply *gnosis*, knowledge. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Knowledge about him? Why, of course. I'm amazed. When I listen to some quiz shows, how people who are learned in history, skilled in political science, experts in biology, knowledgeable in literature, flub questions that have to do with Jesus Christ.

Jeopardy is one of my favorite programs. In the quietness of my own den, evening after evening, I've racked up winnings of \$5,000 to \$10,000. Now, granted, some of my answers were a grunt in assent to the answer that was given after it happened.

But there are many people today who are college educated and don't know anything about Jesus Christ, and they need to learn about him. A knowledge to be gained by reading the New Testament with unbiased eyes. But the Apostle Peter is going way beyond that.

It's not merely a matter of knowing the facts about Jesus Christ gleaned from the Gospels of the New Testament. It is a matter of knowing him, knowing him as the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Knowing him as my Lord to whom I must be subject.

Knowing him as my Savior who deals with the burden of my sin and gets it off my back. To know that he is my Jesus, God, who became man, sharing my humanity, facing my temptations, confronting my problems, shedding my tears, identifying with me at my point of need. To know him as my Christ, my Messiah, my infallible Savior, my noble prophet who reveals to me the will of God, my merciful priest who gives himself on the altar of the cross and sacrifice for my transgression, my righteous king whose right it is to rule with

his crown rights in all my life.

It's the knowledge of him that is involved in a relationship with him. And that is why the Apostle Paul said, Oh, that I might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings and to be made conformable to the likeness of his death. To know him is far more than knowing about him.

It is having a living personal relationship with him. And now we conclude where we ought always to conclude, with a word of glory, a heartfelt doxology. To him, to this Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and forever.

Glory to him because he is God's equal, the creator of the universe. Glory to him because he is God manifest in the flesh. Glory to him because he is the king and only head of the church.

Glory to him because he is the Christ, the son of the living God. Glory to him because he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Glory to him for he is the resurrection and the life and whosoever believes in him shall not really die.

Glory to him who shall come again to be our judge, judging the world in righteousness at last. Glory to him who comes to tell us, come ye blessed of my father, inherit for you the kingdom prepared from before the foundation of the world. To him be glory both now and forever.

Amen. Let us pray. Spirit of the living God, you speak to us in the scriptures and you remind us of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, on whom we depend for our salvation and to whom we must be conformed in the likeness of his life and death and resurrection.

In the silence of this hour, we examine our hearts. How Christ-like are our lives? Are we spotless, blameless, at peace with God? Have we properly used or abused the patience and long suffering of the Lord who calls us to repentance? Should Jesus come this very moment, would we be ready to receive him? Spirit of the living God, create, sustain, and perfect in us the image of the Lord Jesus. Incline our hearts to be submissive to the authority of a God who loves us and wills only the very best for us.

In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26739.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mariano-di-gangi/ii-peter-how-christ-like-is-your-life/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net