

## II PETER

Guarded and Growing

March 09, 2014

- I. Be holy in all your behavior just as God is holy
  - A. II Peter 3:17-18 . . . You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, [18] 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.
  - B. Pray
- II. Final Exhortations – Guarded
  - A. II Peter 3:17 . . . You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness . . .
  - B. be on your guard – Peter prepares us for his exhortation to be on guard by reminding us that we already know several truths that give us sufficient reason to be on guard. For example, we know Christ is returning; we know a final judgment follows His return; we know why both have been delayed; and we know that false teachers will mislead some Christians regarding these things.
    - 1. Therefore, we are to be on our guard against the false teachers circulating within the Christian community so that we do not neglect, abandon, alter or get led away from the truths we need to follow in order to be properly prepared for Christ's return.
    - 2. And when I say that false teachers are circulating within the Christian community, I mean they can be found preaching in churches, leading Bible studies, teaching on television and radio, publishing books, and speaking at Prophecy conferences – which means their influence is everywhere, so we need to be on guard!
    - 3. Now Peter's warning did not originate with him. He heard Jesus give a similar warning when talking about the end times.
      - a. While sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew were questioning Jesus privately, saying: "Tell us, when will these [end times] things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" And Jesus began His answer by saying to them, "See to it that no one misleads you" (Mark 13:3-5).

- b. And a little later, in that same conversation, Jesus warns these four disciples to be on their guard, because the trials, the tribulation, and the persecution associated with the end times might compel them to deny the faith (Mark 13:9).
  - c. And once more, in this same conversation, Jesus tells them to "Take heed, [and] keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come" (Mark 13:33).
- C. So why do both the Old and New Testament scriptures warn us about being prepared, vigilant, on guard, and alert in relation to the return of Christ? There are several ways to answer this question, but John Bunyan, in the second chapter of *Pilgrim's Progress*, gives an answer that, when applied to the end times, cuts to the heart of the matter. So listen and ponder while I read an abridged version of this section from *Pilgrim's Progress*.
  1. After passing through the narrow gate of life, Christian came to the house of the Interpreter who showed Christian many things he would need for his journey. One of them was a room where two little children sat, each one in his chair. The name of the eldest was Passion, and the name of the other Patience. Passion seemed to be much discontented, but Patience was very quiet. Then Christian asked, "What is the reason of the discontent of Passion?" The Interpreter answered, "The governess of them would have him wait for his best things till the beginning of the next year, but he wants to have all now; but Patience is willing to wait."
  2. Then someone came to Passion, and brought him a bag of treasure, and poured it down at his feet: which Passion took up, and rejoiced over what he had, and laughed at Patience with scorn. But in a short time, Passion had lavished all away, and had nothing left but rags.
  3. Then Christian asked the Interpreter to expound this matter more fully. So Interpreter said, "These two lads are figures; Passion is a figure of the people of this world, and Patience of the people of that which is to come; for, as you see, passion wants to have all now, this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the people of this world: They must have all their good things now; they cannot wait for their portion of good till the next year, that is, until the next world. The proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," holds more sway over them than all the scriptures about the good of the world to come. But as you saw, Passion had quickly lavished all away, and

was left with nothing but rags – so will it be with all such people at the end of this world.”

4. Then said Christian, “Now I see that Patience has the best wisdom, and for a number of reasons: 1<sup>st</sup> – Because he waits for the best things. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Because he will obtain and enjoy the glory of treasures to come while Passion has nothing but rags.”
  5. To this Interpreter added a 3<sup>rd</sup> reason: “The glory of the next world will never wear out; but Passion’s treasures are not only worn out, but gone – and that forever. Truly, what is first must give place to what is last, but what is last gives place to nothing. Therefore, be on your guard, because the treasures of this world and our fleshly appetites are near neighbors one to another, and it requires no small effort to forgo what is desired now so as to patiently wait for what is of immeasurable value then.”
- D. The reality is, our nature is such that the longer we have to wait for what is promised, the harder it is to wait, and the easier it becomes to let down our guard and begin to compensate ourselves by seeking the pleasures, possessions, treasures, and comforts that can be obtained here and now.
1. Added to this reality is the fact that the devil, the world, and false teachers are looking to take advantage of our weakness by promoting and encouraging self-exaltation and self-gratification in this life, as if this is God’s will for us.
  2. Therefore, if we are to finish this life well, if we are to meet Christ as those who are spotless and blameless, and if we are to face the final judgment without fear, then we must be on guard to the end of our days so that we do not succumb to the false teachings that are intended to pull us away from what is eternally valuable and get us to want what is temporary, and in the end, worthless.
  3. Now I think it is wise to remind you that false teachers do not wear signs that identify them as false teachers. They sneak in, and they use all the crafty sales techniques available to gain your trust – with the hope you will buy what they are selling.
    - a. And this is important to understand, because being on guard against the big, obvious distortions of God’s word, and glaringly obvious false teachings, is easy.
    - b. The challenge is to be on guard against the more seductive, subtle, personally alluring, and widely accepted false teachings that sound spiritual and promise good things, but are lies and bring death.

- E. After exhorting us to be on guard, Peter identifies who is behind the false teaching, and he labels them “unprincipled men.”
  - 1. Interestingly, in II Peter 2:1, he likens the false teachers to the false prophets in OT days. In II Peter 3:3, he calls the false teachers “mockers” who denigrate God for making promises that He supposedly does not keep. And here in verse 17, Peter says these false teachers are unprincipled men.
  - 2. When we take all three labels together, it becomes obvious that false teachers are not naive; nor are they good people with good intentions, who happen to be misled. They are teaching a false gospel because they see that as a means to get something for themselves. In other words, false teachers are self-serving teachers who are seeking some benefit for themselves rather than seeking God’s honor and the good of God’s people.
- F. Peter concludes verse 17 by identifying what it is we are guarding against – which is falling from our own steadfastness.
  - 1. To be steadfast is to be firmly planted, anchored, immovable, and therefore faithful and loyal regardless of the circumstances. And in relation to the end times, it means remaining faithful and loyal regardless of how long we are tested by our circumstances.
  - 2. Recalling the portion I read from Pilgrim’s Progress, to fall from our steadfastness is to give way to our earthly passions, fleshly desires, ungodly fears, and self-centeredness – with the result that we seek the treasures the world has to offer now, rather than patiently persevering until the end of our days – with the result that we receive the treasures God has to offer for eternity.

### III. Final Exhortations – Growing

- A. Moving on to the first half of verse 18, we read: “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
  - 1. These first three words “but grow in” are the most important, for they give us God’s means of protection or God’s remedy to following after the false teachers and falling from our steadfastness.
  - 2. You see, these three words, “but grow in” stand between the false teachers who lead us from our steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ, /and/ that grace and knowledge which ensures our steadfast commitment to live the rest of our lives for Him who died and rose again on our behalf.
  - 3. The next important thing to notice is that Peter says to “grow in” grace and knowledge, not “grow to” grace and knowledge. And this

difference is vital, for to grow in something is to continue growing in that thing, whereas to grow to something is to grow until you reach a certain place, at which time you can stop growing.

- a. So what Peter is telling us is that we are to continue growing in grace and knowledge the rest of our lives. And why is this so important? Because continuous spiritual growth provides a powerful and consistent defense against the false teachers, and it provides a divine strength and the needed wisdom for remaining steadfast while waiting for the return of Christ.
  - b. Therefore, as Christians, we are never to assume we have arrived at a high enough or mature enough condition that we can sit back, relax, and no longer concern ourselves with further growth. Our time for growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ begins with our new birth and does not end until we pass through Heaven's door.
- B. So what kind of growth is Peter referring to when he exhorts us to continue growing in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?
1. To continue growing in the grace of Jesus Christ is to continue to grow in your awareness of and reliance on His presence, empowerment, assistance, answers to prayer, speaking, convicting, discipline, protection from evil and the evil one, providential arrangement of circumstance and the use of trials and tribulation to further transform you, working all things out for good, and the instructing and transforming power of His word in order to become all that He calls you to be in this life.
  2. In his first letter, Peter gives us a lengthy and challenging list of qualities and ways of behaving that God calls us to become in this life – qualities and ways which require God's empowerment and assistance to achieve in a way that comes close to what God wants. For example, according to Peter's first letter:
    - a. we are to continue growing toward becoming holy in all our behavior just as God is holy;
    - b. we are to grow in loving our brothers and sisters in Christ from the heart;
    - c. we are to put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander;
    - d. we are to grow in our longing for the pure truth of God's word;
    - e. we are to grow in willing and humble submission to those in authority over us;

- f. we are to continue growing toward being faithful to godly character in the face of suffering;
  - g. we are to grow toward maintaining a good testimony among unbelievers;
  - h. we are to continue growing in hospitality and in using our gifts to serve others;
  - i. the elders are to continue growing in the quality of their leadership and service to the church;
  - j. and we are to continue growing in humility and faith.
3. When we take this list seriously, it becomes clear we need an abundant and ever increasing measure of God's daily grace to make serious headway in these ten areas of spiritual growth – and they represent only a portion of the spiritual growth needed for guarding against falling from our steadfast condition in Christ Jesus.

C. Peter also says we are to continue growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

- 1. As we have said all through Peter's two letters, when Peter speaks of the knowledge of God, he is including a knowledge that is gained through information about God, and a knowledge that is gained through intimate fellowship with God.
- 2. Now as Christians who are children of our Heavenly Father, we must learn about God – His character, His commands, His Father's love and compassion, His rule over all, His Lordship over us, His judgments and justice, His word, and His ways – for it is this kind of information that helps us work out our faith in varied circumstances – especially those circumstances that test our faith.
- 3. And we can gain some of this vital information by reading the scriptures, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, listening to sermons, reading good books, and talking with other Christians.
- 4. But we are also Christians who have been reconciled to God, and reconciliation speaks of a restored relationship. Therefore, we have the privilege to come to know God personally and intimately, and it is in knowing Him in this way that our faith grows exceedingly strong, that we weep over our sin, that we long to please Him and be like Him, that we hunger for His presence, that we treasure walking and talking with Him, and that we find indescribable joy from belonging to Him.
- 5. In other words, to continue growing in the knowledge of God means continuing to take in new information, insights, and understandings

about God while at the same time continuing to pursue and nurture intimate fellowship with God so that we continue to grow in our personal and experiential knowledge of Him, too.

#### IV. Conclusion

A. Peter concludes his second letter with these words: “To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (II Peter 3:18b).

1. These final words from Peter are profound, for they summarize God’s true worth and our position before Him.
  - a. In regard to His true worth, these words state His superiority, His eternal value, and His exceeding greatness.
  - b. In regard to our position before Him, these words show that by comparison we are inferior, unworthy, and subservient.
2. As the Psalmist said: “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1) . . . to God belongs the praise, honor, awe, reverence, admiration, fame, love, and respect. And why to Him and not to us? Because we live and move and have our being because of Him and in Him. Therefore, He deserves the glory, and we don’t.
  - a. This ought not discourage us, for we are still loved and cared for by the Great and Loving, the Merciful and Worthy God of the universe.
  - b. So rather than being discouraged by the implication of these words about us, these words ought to drive us to treasure Him over anyone or anything else in this world, including treasuring Him over getting our own way or satisfying our own desires or gaining relief from our suffering . . . all which will cause us to fall from our steadfastness.
3. May we spend the rest of our days seeing God, thinking of God, speaking of God, and treating God as the One who is to be glorified.