

GUARDING, GROWING, GLORIFYING

2 Peter 3:17-18

INTRODUCTION

- Here are recorded Peter's last words in Scripture before his martyrdom
- As he concludes his final letter, he summarises all that he has written and leaves his readers with the essential truths and instructions they need in order that they would continue steadfast in the faith after his departure
- Now if Peter was a modern mega-church pastor he might have finished his letter with something like:
 - ✓ Your best life is here and now!
 - ✓ Think positively, because there is great power in positive thinking!
 - ✓ Name it and claim it!
 - ✓ God wants you to be wealthy and healthy!
 - ✓ Don't be judgmental!
 - ✓ Always obey the government, even if it means disobeying the Bible!
 - ✓ Strive to be inclusive to all, especially our LGBT brethren!
- But Peter was not a wolf in sheep's clothing as these contemporary pastors – no, he was an apostle of Jesus Christ and proclaimed the word of God to his generation
- There are two major themes in this epistle
 - ✓ Chapter 1 dealt with spiritual growth, adding to our faith the seven graces
 - ✓ Chapters 2 and 3 dealt with the error, the effects and the end of the apostates
- In the closing verses, Peter takes these two themes and makes a final application to the saints

- ✓ Verse 17 is a warning not to fall into error, to not be led astray by false teachers
- ✓ While verse 18 is an encouragement to grow spiritually
- There are two imperative verbs (or commands) given in these two verses, one negative and one positive
 - ✓ *Beware* of being led into error and falling from steadfastness
 - ✓ *Grow* in grace and in knowledge of Christ
- Here we will consider Peter's final exhortation to the saints before his departure from this world

I. GUARD AGAINST ERROR (17)

A. "Ye therefore, beloved"

1. This is the last of four "beloved" (*agapetos*) appeals in this chapter:

- a. "Beloved...be mindful" (1-2)
- b. "Beloved, be not ignorant" (8)
- c. "Beloved...be diligent" (14)
- d. "Beloved...beware" (17)

2. "Therefore" marks the summary and conclusion of the letter

B. Forewarning

1. "Seeing ye know these things before" is one word in the Greek (*proginoskontes*) which is to "foreknow"

2. Peter saw it as his solemn duty to impart knowledge to the brethren regarding the enemies of the truth who would pervert the Scriptures in order to deceive others into their errors

3. This was part of Peter's ministry, given to him by Christ, to "strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32), and "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17)
 4. The Christian who is forewarned is forearmed and should be therefore prepared to face the enemy he has knowledge of
 5. We who have been blessed with a knowledge of spiritual truth are responsible and accountable to God for what we do with this truth – "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48)
- C. The ministry of *warning* has always been essential part of God's preachers' calling
1. Whether it be God's prophets, Christ, or the apostles, men of God throughout history warned both believers and unbelievers concerning spiritual realities, and they were usually hated for it (Matthew 3:7; Mark 13:5, 33; Acts 20:31; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Colossians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 3:12)
 2. The Scripture itself serves to warn God's servants (Psalm 19:11)
 3. One of the great failings of our generation is the negligence of ministers, through fear of offending people, to faithfully warn their flocks of the spiritual dangers assaulting them
 4. God is not pleased with such hirelings who care more for their salary than their sheep, and will hold them accountable (Ezekiel 3:17-20)
 5. "Beware" (*phulassesthe*) means to be on guard
- D. Believers can be led away with the error of the wicked
1. The word for "led away" is *sunapechthe*, and is found also in Galatians 2:13 to describe Barnabas being "carried away" with the hypocrisy of Peter concerning his refraining from eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2:13)

2. They are “the wicked” (*athesmon*) which is lawless, unruly, unprincipled
 - a. Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked (2 Peter 2:7)
3. A mark of a true Christian is that he hears and recognises his Shepherd’s voice and follows him (John 10:27)
4. Yet a true child of God, particularly one who is young in the faith, can be led astray by listening to false teaching
5. All of us should be careful what teaching we read or listen to, as none of us are immune from falling into the error of the wicked (1 Corinthians 10:12)
6. “Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.” (Proverbs 19:27)

E. Believers can fall from their steadfastness

1. Peter was confident his readers were “established in the present truth” (1:12)
2. Yet he was concerned that that stability might be shaken through the influence of false teachers
3. While a believer cannot utterly and irretrievably fall, seeing he is kept by God’s grace (2 Thessalonians 3:3; Jude 24), he can yet be led into false doctrine and sinful conduct, even as the apostle Peter experienced (Galatians 2:11-16)

II. GROW IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE (18)

A. But grow in grace

1. Here is the antidote to the dangerous errors that threaten to displace us
2. It is not enough to shield ourselves from error – there must be the active pursuit of spiritual growth

3. The Christian who is planted and rooted firmly in God's grace will stand against the raging winds of error, while the shallow rooted Christian will be toppled
 4. Physically, as we grow older, our bodies stop growing – our cells cease replicating, our bodies decline and eventually die
 5. But spiritually we need never stop growing – “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16)
 6. Even the aged Christian, who is established in grace, “shall still bring forth fruit in old age” (Psalm 92:12-14)
 7. Spiritual growth is not passive, but requires my active diligence
 8. By definition grace is given by God, not earned by the Christian
 9. My responsibility to access that grace (Romans 5:2; Hebrews 4:16)
 10. Just as I cannot make a plant grow, but I can provide the best environment to enable it to grow (removing weeds, fertilizing, watering), so too I cannot make myself grow spiritually, but I can provide the best environment for my soul to grow – removing sin and temptations, making use of the word and prayer
 11. In the first chapter, Peter shows what growing in grace looks like, as we add to our faith the seven virtues (1:5-8)
- B. Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
1. Salvation and eternal life come only by a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ (John 17:3)
 2. Subsequent to this, we are to increase in our knowledge of Christ as a critical part of our sanctification (Philippians 3:10)

3. We are to grow in our knowledge and experience of his being our *Lord*
 - a. This includes his double-right to our obedience as both Creator and Redeemer, our duty as his bond-slaves to follow his commandments
4. We are to grow in our knowledge and experience of his being our *Saviour*
 - a. This includes all his atoning work on our behalf – his incarnation, his active and passive obedience, his suffering and death, his resurrection, his ascension, his session and his return
5. Every day, we should be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10)
6. The highest attainment that a person can possibly make is to deeply and personally the Lord Jesus Christ
7. “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

III. GLORIFY JESUS CHRIST (18)

A. A doxology to Jesus Christ

1. The Person being rendered eternal glory here is Christ
2. This ascription of divine glory shows that Jesus Christ is God
3. If Christ is God, therefore, “all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23)

4. “For ever” (*eis hemeran aionos*) is literally “unto the day of eternity”

B. What does it mean to glorify Christ?

1. Christ as God is glorious – he is the possessor of all greatness, splendour, dignity, honour and praise
2. To glorify him means to live so that he may be seen to be most glorious
 - a. Christ glorified the Father by performing the work he was given to do (John 17:4)
 - b. We glorify him when we “shew forth the praises” of God (1 Peter 2:9)
 - c. Our entire beings with our abilities are to be employed in the service of God, to glorify him (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Corinthians 10:31)
3. There are many ways whereby we may glorify Christ
 - a. By believing in him
 - b. By confessing him before men
 - c. By praising him (Psalm 50:23)
 - d. By defending his truth
 - e. By showing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives
 - f. By worshipping him
 - g. By suffering and dying for him (John 21:19)
 - h. By being faithful to his church (Ephesians 3:21)

C. Amen – “truly”, “verily”, “so be it”

1. Amen declares this to be true

2. Amen delights in this with joy
3. Amen draws this into the heart
4. Amen desires this to be done

CONCLUSION

1. Tradition says that Peter was martyred by being crucified upside down, and while we do not have the details of his final words, it is said that he spoke words of encouragement to his wife who was likewise put to death at the same time, saying to her as she was led to her execution, "Oh thou, remember the Lord!"
2. We have been so abundantly blessed in having in our possession the word of God which instructs us of the truth and warns us of error
3. Are you taking heed to these warnings by being on guard against false doctrine by taking God's whole armour to yourself, knowing how prone you are to being led astray?
4. Will you set as your chief goal, as your first priority in life, to *grow* spiritually in grace and in knowledge of Jesus Christ
5. Heaven will be an eternity of giving glory to the Lamb
6. If we wish to prepare ourselves for heaven we should make it our endeavour to live our lives wholly to the glory of God
7. Pray: "Enable me, by thy grace, in whatsoever I do, to do all to the glory of God!"