

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part nineteen

Studies in 2 Peter - Sunday, July 7th, 2019 - Teaching #2144

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DO NOT LOSE YOUR OWN STABILITY

2 Peter 3:17-18 - “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. [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.”

“**Do not lose your own stability**”(17). Peter would have a particular passion in his heart as he penned those words. He, more than most people, knew what it was like to lose his stability. As Jesus faced the cross, He had labored to brace his disciples against panic and fear. He had warned them of His coming death and promised them future glory and life in His resurrection from the dead.

Peter knew the promise of the Lord of resurrection and future glory. He repeatedly professed his loyalty and commitment to Jesus. Yet, under the pressure of the moment, he cursed Jesus and denied even knowing Him. Peter fell from steadfastness with a crash that has sounded throughout history. So Peter closes his letter with a plea that is close to his heart. He wants to give words that will **hold people up - brace them against false religion and trial - keep them steadfast until the Day of the Lord**. Peter’s goal is clear here. He doesn’t want me to carelessly imagine my present level of faithfulness and devotion is automatically sustainable.

Think of certain faces right now. Picture people you have known who were once far more devoted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ than they are now. No one dreamed they would ever drift so far from Christ. And then the really important question - **Might that be you one day?** And if you say, “**No!**” - how do you know? That’s the issue of our final text today.

It’s interesting to note how the remarks in these two closing verses of Peter’s letter. **Verse 17** restates the **warning about false teaching and corrupt examples** that was the subject of chapter two. **Verse 18** picks up the theme of chapter one - an **exhortation to keep growing in the faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ**. Let’s look at each of these themes in turn:

1) **FAILURE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMES, MORE COMMONLY, FROM A LACK OF CAREFULNESS THAN A LACK OF ABILITY**

Jesus will give strength to the weak and forgiveness to the guilty. What He won’t give is **diligence** to the **careless**. We have ways of fooling ourselves here. We usually cite **weakness** as the cause of our sins. We cleverly shift the blame away from ourselves to the lack of help from above. Peter will allow no such scheming in his closing words. He forces us to use the right terms in dealing with our own souls.

2 Peter 3:17 - “You therefore, beloved, **knowing this beforehand, take care** that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”

“....Knowing this beforehand....” Knowing **what?** He tells us that in **verse 16** - “....There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and **unstable** [same word he uses in verse 17] **twist to their own destruction**, as they do the other Scriptures.

The claim here is these people “**twist**” the Scriptures to “**their own destruction**.” They minimize the cutting voice of the Word that would call them to repentance. They turn grace into a passport for future resistance to the Word of God.

So Peter is trying to **install** something that our world is constantly trying to **delete**. He’s trying to keep people alert to some **contaminants to strong and stable faith**. The culture you inhabit daily is obsessed with an effort to **make all ideas seem to have equal weight and value**. Our world is orchestrated, more than it knows, to lower your spiritual immune system.

That is the primary area where Christ and culture collide. And Peter says, having been warned about the nature of the battle, we will only face increased guilt and punishment for our carelessness in this matter. **Being forewarned should make us all forearmed** - “**Knowing this beforehand**,” **take care that you’re not carried away with the thinking of lawless people!** (3:17a).

There is another point that follows logically from this first one:

2) **RATHER THAN BEING WEAKENED AND DISCOURAGED BY THE WICKEDNESS OF OTHERS, I SHOULD**

CONSIDER MY OWN POTENTIAL TO THE VERY SAME SINS AND DISCIPLINE MY LIFE IN MORE CAREFULNESS.

2 Peter 3:17 - "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are **not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.**"

There is a ***social aspect to holiness***. Other people - and this is even more true in our image and data drenched age - can make the same sins that sound gross on paper look liberating and life-giving in an attractive person or glamorous life situation. Whatever sin or temptation or failure I see in others, ***there is a friend to those same sins in my own heart if I don't rule it and keep it in check.***

Galatians 6:1 - "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, **lest you too be tempted.**"

But ***why*** am I more vulnerable to those same sins just at the point of contact with the person I'm trying to help? Because now any number of emotions can weaken my own spiritual resolve. ***Sympathy, false confidence in my own spiritual maturity***, and even ***false compassion and friendship with the sinner*** can all soften my convictions.

That's why the person Paul describes as "***spiritual***" is the person who is fully aware of his own potential to the same sin he sees in others. This spiritual person is going to ***stay*** spiritual by his own alertness to the dangers around him and the dangers within him. Without such carefulness, no one will stand - not even the best of us - for long.

"Pastor Don, we already know all this stuff. Why spend all this time on it?"

Listen, most of us live in homes where we have taken more pains to insure the smoke detector goes off in the event of fire than we do setting up alarms that will sound when things impure and immoral are entertained in our family rooms. What if an alarm sounded - actually rang out loud - every time something contrary to the commands of God or the way and life of the Holy Spirit entered your house through T.V. or movie or internet or book? That lack of carefulness is the problem with the mind-set of many contemporary Christians. And that's what Peter is warning about in his last words to the church.

And he's not alone - **Proverbs 4:23** - "**Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.**"

Your heart needs more protecting than your BMW or your Mercedes. There is more than just ***temporal loss*** at stake. I can lose my soul through carelessness. And Jesus said when you lose your soul, it's incredibly difficult to get it back - **Matthew 16:26** - "**For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?**"

You can't take everything indiscriminately into your mind and keep your spiritual stability. Put one of those carbon monoxide monitors over your heart. Stay alert to the danger of quietly and gradually drifting from Jesus.

3) **THE ONLY SURE WAY TO ENTER THE KINGDOM IS TO PURSUE CONSTANT GROWTH IN GRACE UNTIL JESUS COMES AGAIN**

2 Peter 3:18 - "**....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.**"

Peter is saying something profound in these words. This is the ***reason*** such carefulness and diligence is urged and required. A ***lazy*** Christian is a ***doomed*** Christian. Here's why: You and I, as followers of Jesus, can never successfully just ***maintain*** spiritual life. Our only option is to ***grow*** in spiritual life if we want to enter the kingdom. You ***grow*** into God's kingdom, or you don't ***enter*** it at all.

We are so accustomed to looking at the receiving of grace as a ***one time event***. We received God's grace when we were saved. Now we just have it. Peter sees the reception of grace as the ***ongoing, deepening quest*** of the believer.

It's just like sowing and reaping. The planting of a seed isn't the completion of the growth process (how much food would our farmers produce if the seeds they planted never advanced beyond what was put into the ground?). The reception of God's grace in Jesus Christ must ***continue to multiply and flourish*** in my experience and

understanding if I'm to reap a harvest of righteousness and spiritual life.

That's what Peter is saying in these closing verses. Don't fall away from steadfastness in Jesus. I must **grow!** Don't be caught trying to preserve or maintain. You will die a slow spiritual death that way.

So, how do I **not** fall away? Constantly look for new life. Keep exercising fresh sacrifice and increasingly muscular commitment. Seek out new areas of service. Keep reading and studying Scriptural truth. Grow in your apprehension of the things of God. Make the next book you read a little deeper than the last one.

Something else. Look for fresh areas of self to **prune** and **cut back** in the desires of self to devote more of your life's energy to your soul. Jesus relentlessly highlighted this - **John 15:1-2** - "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

Jesus labors to remind self-loving people like me **consumption** doesn't produce spiritual life. **Pruning** does.

Here's the same principle in **Mark 4:23-25** - "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." [24] And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. [25] For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Notice the difference between "has" and "more" in verse 25. "Has" is the present amount. "More" is the potential future amount. "Has" is **present**. "More" is **direction**. Jesus constantly **prunes** the amount of time, energy, and money I put into my own self so there will be **more** life flow into the nourishment of my soul.

You can see the very same emphasis from Paul in **Philippians 3:13-16** - "Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Notice again the difference between "**holding true to what we have attained**" (16), and "**pressing on toward the goal....**"(14). The goal is always beyond what you have presently attained.

There are no question and answer tests in the pursuit of holiness. It's never just intellectual. Over time, you will lose what you have unless you deepen and multiply it. If you fail to multiply what the Master graces into your life, you will find it running out of power and influence in your heart and mind. That's what Jesus said. That's what Paul said.

Notice how this is all tied together by Peter under the general theme of staying steadfast and holy until Jesus comes. Just as the fact that you were once on a diet will not keep you slim, the fact that you once said the sinner's prayer will not keep your heart "**spotless and blameless**" at the coming Day of the Lord.

As Peter has already taught in great detail, it's not nearly enough to **have faith**. Peter puts the emphasis on **adding to our faith**:

2 Peter 1:5-8 - "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. [8] For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Holy Spirit reverses the basic laws of material physics in increasing the spiritual momentum of our beings. Remember those words. It's not what you **have**. It's how much it is **increasing** that determines the shape of your soul.

4) **GRACE WON'T EXPAND IN YOUR HEART WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD GROWING IN YOUR MIND**

2 Peter 3:18 - "...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."

Sooner or later, we all have to make the discovery in the school of discipleship that the Christian life isn't Sesame

Street. God is not Big Bird. And learning isn't always fun. It takes diligence and hard work.

Jesus never came to help us relax. He came to train us as servants. After coming into your life as Lord, ***the first part of you that he wants to dominate is your mind.*** If you want to see the power of His grace ***in your heart,*** learn to love His truth ***with your mind.***

This is a recap for Peter. It is not the first time he has outlined this powerful truth: **2 Peter 1:2** - "**May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**" Grace and peace are obviously tremendously important. ***How are they multiplied in my life?*** Peter says it has much to do with ***knowledge.*** Specifically, the knowledge of "***our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ***" (3:18).

Keep your attention on Jesus and his saving work. Train and use your mind as an instrument of the Spirit. Not just with emotional worship choruses. Not just with sentiment. You need to know everything Jesus ever said. When did He say it? To whom was He speaking? How did He pray? When did He fast? When did He talk about His Second Coming? What did He say about it? What did He say about healing? What did He say about the Holy Spirit? How did He say He wanted to make His presence real and powerful in my heart?

That's the kind of knowledge of Jesus Christ Peter is talking about. His truth must be ***learned*** before His Person can be properly ***loved.*** His truth must be carved into the mind before I can obey it with my will. ***Above all else, grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!***

5) **AS LONG AS YOU HAVE BREATH, GLORIFY JESUS ABOVE ALL ELSE**

2 Peter 3:18 - "**....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.**"

There is such simple, practical wisdom here. Notice how Peter balances ***knowledge*** and the ***affections.*** He has the wisdom to put knowledge first. It is the terribly frustrating experience of many Christians that they try to make themselves ***love Jesus through worship*** when they don't ***know Him with their minds.*** That route will only make you feel empty and phoney and hypocritical. You must start from the ground up. You must ***know*** before you can properly ***love*** or ***obey.***

But knowledge must never be an end in itself. Jesus is looking for people who both ***know*** Him and ***glorify*** Him. When you truly ***know*** Jesus, never be intimidated out of passionately expressing ***praise and worship*** to Him just because someone else will think you're just empty headed and emotional.

True, there are empty headed fanatics. True, there are mindless trancers who just follow the crowd in whatever they're told to do. But while both those examples are displeasing to the Lord, they are no ***more*** displeasing to Him than those who know the truth inside out, but refuse obedient passion in praise and worship and the glorifying Jesus ***now*** as we will ***in eternity.***

"Well, glorifying Jesus - that means glorifying Him with your life, pastor Don"

That's absolutely true. But isn't praise a part of your life? If it isn't, why isn't it? It's clearly commanded in the Scriptures. There is absolutely no denying its biblical base. I'm not arguing that the rest of my life shouldn't glorify God. I'm only saying that glorifying Him with praise and worship ***doesn't exclude my glorifying Him with the rest of my life.*** ***I want all of my life to glorify Him - including my praise and worship.***

So don't allow yourself to set up false arguments on either side of the issue. ***Know Jesus and His truth with your mind.*** And ***let glory reign both now and forever more!*** Because when your mind is brimming with Christ-centered truth, and your heart overflows with a burning, unashamed love for your Lord, you will indeed be ***"steadfast, immovable, always abounding in your work for the Lord."***