

2 PETER

REMEMBERING THE PROMISES

Guarded By Growth

2 Peter 3:14-18

This morning we are going to wrap up our sermon series through 2 Peter. So, let me invite you to 2 Peter 3 where we are going to be looking at the final words of Peter in this letter, actually the final words of Peter we have in Scripture.

So, just to remind you in his first letter which we went through not long ago, Peter is giving instructions to Christians who are living in a world that is hostile to their faith and he wanted to give them instruction and encouragement in how they might live as exiles, both spiritually and, for them, literally, in this world.

In this letter, his second, Peter is giving more instruction and encouragement to Christians in how they ought to live out their faith in this age giving special attention to growth in our faith as well as guarding ourselves from false teachers.

And so in this final section are Peter's last words of encouragement to them and us, and he is going to sum up all of his letter here...

2 Peter 3:14-18

14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. **15** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. **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. **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.

Now, I don't know if you have studied much philosophy or if you're even interested in philosophy, but reading this passage made me think of a quote from a famous philosopher, Mike Tyson—you may be more familiar with him because of his boxing career—Tyson once said, "Everyone has a plan, until they get punched in the face."

Needless to say, Tyson had some experience with that truth, literally being punched in the face and punching others in the face for a living. But even if we've never stepped foot into a boxing ring, we have some experience with that truth as well.

Every one of us has had the experience of expecting certain things for our life, only for us to be seemingly punched in the face by life. Whether that is a broken relationship that you expected to go a different way, or an unexpected health diagnosis, or the sudden loss of a job, or any number of other things, we experience circumstances in life that if we aren't somewhat prepared for, punch us in what feels like our soul and has the potential to make us lose our stability and knock us off our feet.

In the boxing world, everyone who steps into the ring needs poise. They need stability, knowing that two feet on the ground is always more stable than one foot, knowing that they should keep their guard up because punches will be thrown their way, knowing that they need to stay alert because not everyone in the ring has their best intentions at heart.

And in this final passage of 2 Peter, Peter really is summing up his entire letter, I think, calling for believers to develop *poise*. Why? Because life in this age, the age between Jesus' first coming and Jesus' Second Coming, is one of incredible blessings and one of recurring threats. On one hand we live on this side of the resurrection of Christ, which means we have a better grasp of redemptive history, we have the full Scriptures, we have the Holy Spirit who indwells us, we are closer and closer to the day when Jesus will return and make all things new. However, until he does, we are still subject to the threat of our own sinful hearts and we are still subject to the threat of false teachers and false ideologies that threaten our faith.

And so, to walk as faithful exiles in this world we need poise, ready for those false ideas and doctrines that threaten to knock us flat on our back. So, Peter ends his letter by saying, you need poise and, even more importantly, here's how you can develop it.

So, let's look the text again and we will walk through it together...

1. The Need for Purity - v. 14-16a

2 Peter 3:14-16a

14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. **15** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

Again, Peter is calling the believers to walk in purity and at peace. And this is really a summary of the passage before this which we looked at last week (“therefore”).

But again, don’t forget, this call to holiness is in response to false teaching. Remember what they were being told. They were being told that Jesus isn’t going to come back, which means God doesn’t care about how we live, so you should live in whatever way your heart desires.

But Peter says, no, Jesus is coming back, he is going to bring judgment and salvation, so we ought to live a certain way. Here he says that we should “be diligent” to walk in purity. We are to be “without spot or blemish.” And we are to live “at peace.” He further says we are to be thankful for the patience of God because it means our salvation, rather than ridicule or doubt God like that false teachers and scoffers. We looked at that more in depth last week.

And he says not only have I given you instruction in these matters, but so has Paul. Paul has also written to you. BUT, BE CAREFUL. Not everyone who comes to you and desires to teach you is someone you should trust. There will be others who come and they will take the Scriptures, will take Paul’s writings and they will not treat them in a way that is honest...

2. The Need for Poise - v. 16b-17 - Source of False Teaching

2 Peter 3:16b

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Notice how Peter describes these teachers, they are “ignorant and unstable” who “twist” the Scriptures. That word “twist” there is active. They actively distort the Bible in order to teach doctrines that are actually contrary to what the Bible teaches.

And Peter here is pointing out something incredibly important that we need to recognize today if we are going to live with poise - Oftentimes false teachers are able to gain a hearing and following, not because they present plain error, but because they present error wrapped with a veneer of truth.

Isn’t this a description of the very first false teacher, Satan, in the garden of Eden? When Adam and Eve have had clear instruction from God about the boundaries to living in Eden, Satan comes along and attempts to deceive them...

Gen. 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

And that is very tricky because God didn’t say that. He didn’t say they couldn’t eat of any tree, he said, they could eat of any tree except one. Satan took the words of God and twisted them to mean something completely false.

He did the same thing in Matthew 4 when he tempted Jesus, he questions God’s pronouncement that Jesus is the beloved Son of God, by saying, “*If you are the Son of God...*” and then going so far as quoting verses from the Psalms to tempt Jesus.

Peter wants to help us recognize that, just like Satan in the garden and in the desert, just because someone quotes a Bible verse it doesn’t mean they are speaking truth. It is possible to “twist” the Scriptures, to say something that God does not say.

And so, we might hear false teachers, maybe even with Bibles in their hands or verses memorized by heart say, “Does God really say that about sexuality? Does God really say that about the sanctity of life? Does God really say that about racism? Does God really say that about the person and work of Jesus? No, he doesn’t say that, the Church as gotten this all wrong, let me tell you what he actually says...”

I’ve heard teachers, use Scripture in all of those examples to question what has long been regarded as orthodox teaching of the Bible. Understand, error isn’t presented as error; it’s presented as truth. And that is true whether you hear it on a podcast, read it on a blog, or hear it from someone with the title of “pastor.”

So, if that is an ever present reality, what are we to do?

Look at the next verse...

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.

Peter says, since you know this to be true, since you shouldn’t be taken by surprise when you encounter false teaching, “take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”

The Greek word that makes up the English phrase “take care” is translated in other places “be on guard.”

Paul uses this phrase in 1 Timothy 2 to warn Timothy about a specific person who was hostile to him and the Christian faith...

2 Timothy 2:14-15

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. **15** Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

Paul says to Timothy, this man, Alexander the coppersmith, is dangerous, so beware of him. Watch out for him. Stay alert to him. And so, Peter says to us beware of false teachers and false teaching, because they are dangerous. Watch out for them. Stay alert to them.

Now, in Timothy's case, I think it is important to recognize that it's a lot easier to be on guard when we have a specific name, but it takes much more diligence when we don't.

It's easy to say, beware of a particular teacher or teaching, because it is a twisted version of Scriptural teaching. We can be far more ready to spot and guard against that. It has a name and a face. However, it's a little harder to just say, be on guard because false teaching is out there somewhere.

Like, it's one thing to say, beware of Bill Johnson from Bethel Church Redding because he teaches a heretical view of the person of Jesus. Or, beware of Rob Bell because he teaches a heretical view of, among other things, sin and salvation. But it is another thing to spot false teaching when we are listening to the radio, or reading new books, or watching youtube videos. But that means we should all the more "take care" or "be on guard."

In other words, have your defenses up. Don't get careless. Or apathetic. Because...

Peter goes on to describe what could happen if we aren't on guard...

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.

Two descriptions of the dangers of false teaching, 1) we will be "carried away," and 2) we will "lose our own stability."

I am from Oklahoma originally, my wife is from Kansas, so we are from the part of the country named "Tornado Alley." And if you grow up in that part of the country, or if you live there long enough, you somewhat become accustomed to seeing tornadoes. Both my wife and I have seen a number of them, had to take shelter because they were near.

Thankfully we've never actually been through one or never had one hit our homes. But there is kind of a joke down there that when a tornado touches down and the tornado sirens go off, the first place people go is outside. Because we want to see it. We want to take a picture or a video. We can become pretty cavalier in our attitudes toward them because we are just so use to them.

The danger becomes real for us though, if in our carefree attitude we don't give enough respect to the incredible power of a tornado that we don't heed the call to find shelter in time. And the potential danger is that we, like cars and other debris, could be carried away in the powerful winds.

You see, there can be a fine line between being a spectator and a victim. And I think that is true of false teaching as well. If we aren't able to spot false teaching, or underestimate the dangers of false teaching, than we can easily become a victim.

To be clear, no one sets out to be carried away, just like no one intends to be carried out to sea by the current, but it can happen. Whether from peer pressure, culture's messaging, plausible arguments you haven't yet found an answer for, fascination with "reimagining Christianity" we are in danger of being "carried away."

Peter also says we will "lose your own stability." Without the poise needed to withstand the onslaught of false ideologies and theologies, we are in danger of losing our footing and collapsing to the mat.

And I think this is a particularly good word to caution against the deconstruction craze that is currently popular within the evangelical world. Deconstruction, if you aren't familiar with that term, is "the process of systematically dissecting and often rejecting beliefs that you grew up with" (Alisa Childers, "Why We Should Not Redeem 'Deconstruction,'" *The Gospel Coalition*). It is questioning everything you have been taught about Jesus, the Bible, the gospel, in order to uncover the supposed "real" Christianity.

And there are multiple reasons why someone might deconstruct. For example, it might be due to church hurt. Some have been wounded or abused by church leaders in the past or been a part of some really unhealthy church cultures, and because of their experience it's left them questioning everything they were taught by those church leaders.

Some deconstruct because they want to justify their sin. We talked a bit about that last week, that it is more preferable sometimes to suppress the truth than to submit to it.

Others deconstruct for “street cred.” In the “exvangelical” world, doubt is actually seen as cool, and so it might be tempting to fit in by questioning orthodox Christianity.

But for others, deconstruction is the result of false teaching. And there is probably overlap with these, of course, but some walk away not from biblical Christianity, but a caricature of Christianity that they have never been able to outgrow through healthy, biblical teaching. (Joshua Ryan Butler, “4 Causes of Deconstruction,” *The Gospel Coalition*).

And so for whatever reason it might be, those who once claim to follow Jesus are led to question what has long been held as orthodox Christian belief. The problem though with deconstruction is that while it’s aim has been to uncover real Christianity, it deconstructs into something that isn’t Christianity at all. The problem with deconstruction is that it deconstructs to the point that there is no construction left for your feet to stand on. It’s hard to be poised when you’ve lost all stability.

And also, by the way, it is important to understand when it comes to questioning long held beliefs about the Bible or doctrine...questions can certainly come from a good place and if they do should be welcomed and pursued. But oftentimes, questions aren’t merely questions, they are really masked propositions. They aren’t merely seeking an answer, they are stating a belief. The belief that God is not trustworthy, so we should question his motivations. The belief that God’s Word isn’t truly authoritative, but rather should be filtered through our own beliefs and desires or through our culture or by the majority opinion.

So, Peter here again says, “take care,” “be on guard” so that you aren’t carried away and that you don’t lose your own stability.

Now, hearing those commands that we be diligent to be found pure and to take care that aren’t carried away might feel like a lot. Because even if we agree with Peter, yes, those are good and right, I want those for my life, it might feel like an overwhelming task. Ultimately, we want to know how do we guard against tornado-like false teaching that threaten to carry us away and knock us off our feet?

Well, his final instruction tells us exactly how, and it is a perfect summary to this letter...

A. The Source for Purity and Poise - v. 18

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.

How are we to guard ourselves from false teaching? By growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

“Grace” and “knowledge.” They are both necessary for living the Christian life. It is only by God’s grace that we can grow at all. It is only by his grace that we can be pure. It is only by God’s grace that we can be strengthened to live faithfully in this age.

And it is only by knowledge of Jesus that we can guard from false teaching. Knowledge is necessary for the Christian life. This is something that Peter has brought up a few times in this letter alone...

2 Peter 1:3, 5-6

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... **5** 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,

Knowledge is necessary for Christian living, which means learning is necessary for Christian living. How can we guard ourselves against false teaching if we don’t know biblical teaching? How can we point out falsehoods if we don’t know what is true? How can we regain our footing when we take hit from a false idea?

To Mike Tyson’s philosophical point, when you get punched, what you thought you knew and planned, might need to be reevaluated. You will need a moment to gather yourself. You feel disoriented. And when we encounter false teaching or false ideas in our culture, especially by voices we might trust, it can be very disorienting. It might become difficult to know who to trust and what to believe.

And this is why we need to grow in knowing Jesus as revealed to us through his word. Theology, grounded in Scripture, reorients us when we feel disoriented. When we are unsure about something we hear, we turn to the Word. When we are confused by the messages of our culture, we turn to the Word. When we are trying to determine what is true, we don’t simply ask what is the majority opinion, we ask what does Jesus have to say about it in his word.

And it might take some work at times to grasp biblical teaching in some areas, as Peter admits (thankfully), but it can be known.

This is why we offer things like Grow Groups and Institute classes, because we want you to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. So, please take advantage of those opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, how can we have the poise necessary to walk faithfully in this age? We are guarded by the threats of this age by our growth. And growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus comes solely by keeping our eyes on Jesus.

We keep our eyes on Jesus because He is the One who was truly without spot and blemish...

1 Peter 1:17-19

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, **18** knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

And because Jesus is without spot and blemish, he was the perfect sacrificial lamb that was required to take away all of our sins. And because of our repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, he is able now to present you and me without spot and blemish to the Father.

We keep our eyes on Jesus because He is the One who makes us at peace with God and with one another.

We keep our eyes on Jesus because He is the One who stood firm when tempted in the desert, not carried away or losing his stability when faced with false teaching, instead answering Satan with Scripture.

We keep our eyes on Jesus because He is, Himself, truth.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Look to him this morning with faith, ask him to help you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, that we might walk faithfully in this age until his future return.

CONFESSION

PRAYER

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

If you've trusted in Christ, the call is to be diligent to grow into maturity, but that is never without the gracious aid of our Savior.

1 Peter 5:10-11

10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let's stand and worship this morning the Lord who makes us stand firm in Christ.

VERSES

2 Peter 3:14-18

2 Peter 3:14-16a

2 Peter 3:16b

Gen. 3:1

2 Peter 3:17

2 Timothy 2:14-15

2 Peter 3:17

2 Peter 3:18

2 Peter 1:3, 5-6

1 Peter 1:17-19

John 14:6

1 Peter 5:10-11

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe "poise" in the context of our spiritual lives?
2. Why do you think false teachers gain influence?
3. Why is biblical literacy and theological proficiency so important for Christians?

4. Read Matthew 4:1-11. What do you notice about Satan's temptations? What do you notice about Jesus' response?

4. How are you personally growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus?

5. How can your group help one another grow?