

PETER'S PARTING PRECEPTS

2 Peter 3:17, 18

Intro: The Apostle Peter wrote two Epistles which we have in the New Testament. Today, on this last day of 1989, I want to consider with you the last two verses of his second Epistle.

It is customary even for the people of the world, as they come to the end of one year, and to the beginning of a new year, to look back at the past, and to try to anticipate what the new year might hold. At the end of a decade, we look back over the past ten years, and look ahead to the next ten years--which will bring us to the end of this twentieth century! There has already been a lot of twisting of heads, backwards and forwards.

As Peter wrote his last Epistle, he was doing this--looking backwards, and looking forwards. We have an example of this in chapter 2, verse 1 where he wrote,

But there were false prophets also among the people,
even as there shall be false teachers among you....
"There were...even as there shall be...." And as you read down through chapter 2 you can see that one of the dreadful by-products of false teaching is terrible sin and immorality which always accompanies a departure from the truth of God.

Chapter 3 tells us that there will be a growing scorn for the Christian's hope that Christ will come again.

We live today almost 2,000 years since these words were written, yet they could have been written for us. There is a certain timelessness to the Scriptures. Many of you have mentioned during our study of Jeremiah in our Sunday School how so much of what Jeremiah wrote 600 years before Christ came has its application today. The world today has been corrupted by all kinds of false teaching, and sin is out of control. There are many sins from which we used to be protected by law, but that protection has been removed in many instances. If anything, the situation today is far worse than it was even in Peter's day, and it is getting worse every day that we live.

Such circumstances present some real problems for the Christian. Several years before Peter wrote this Epistle, he had heard his Lord and our Lord say about the last days,

And because iniquity shall abound,
the love of many shall wax cold (Matt. 24:12).

When we read a statement like that we need to ask a couple of questions:

1) Their love for what, or for whom, will cool off?

2) Whose love will cool off?

Our Lord was obviously speaking of the love that people had for Himself, and for the truth that He taught. And the only people who even professed to love Him were those who claimed to be His disciples, His followers.

This had happened in Ephesus by the end of the first century. The Lord told the Ephesian church, "...I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4). Their love had cooled off. They did not love the Lord as much as they had loved Him in days past. And this threatened the very existence of the Ephesian church. Even living where we can see sin presents some real dangers for the child of God.

This is where we are today as the people of God. Sin abounds. The truth is being watered down, or ignored, or being replaced by a lot of human wisdom which is not the truth. Our problems in the Church, instead of decreasing, are on the increase. And one reason is that we are not dealing with them in a Biblical manner. In a day when the Church needs to be stronger than she has ever been, the Church herself is in great need! And that involves all of us who profess to belong to the Lord because we claim to be a part of the Church, the Body of Christ!

What should we do? How can we regain our former strength? How can the Church again become a powerful influence in an ungodly world? Peter has the answer for us.

Look with me at 2 Peter 3:17, 18.

I am going to suggest that, from these two verses, there are three things for us to be concerned about. The first is negative; the last two are positive. The first is a warning; the second two are signposts, indicating the way we need to go.

The first is:

I. THE WARNING (2 Pet. 3:17).

One advantage we have over people who do not read and do not believe the Bible is that we know basically what things are going to be like in the 1990's. There may be ups and downs like the stock market, but as far as life in general is concerned, things are not going to get any better.

Some of us here this morning have been around quite a few years, and any of us can tell you that, while life may be

easier today from the standpoint of the conveniences that we have now, yet morally the world is far worse than it used to be. Crime is worse. Immorality is worse. There are more divorces today than ever. There is more abuse of all kinds. Things are not improving; they are degenerating.

Now, as you look back over 1989, can you honestly say before God that you have been seeking to be steadfast? That is the word that Peter used here. Let me answer that for most of you. From what I know of you, I would say that you have been seeking to be steadfast! None of us has a perfect record, but we have been seeking to remain faithful to the Lord, steady, firm, persevering in the faith even though we have been tried and often discouraged in our walk with the Lord. We love Him, and we want to please Him. We love His Word, and we have been seeking to add to our knowledge of the Word. That is why you have been here week after week. And that is why you have been reading the Word in your homes.

Now you know your heart better than I do, and the Lord knows all of us better than we know ourselves. If you happen to be one who has fallen from your own steadfastness, then you need to regain the ground you have lost. You need to go to the Lord, repent of your sin, and get back into fellowship with Him.

A MILITARY
EXPRESSION

BUT WE ALL NEED TO "BEWARE"! WE CAN BE LED ASTRAY BY THE ERROR AND SIN THAT IS ALL AROUND US. THE LORD WANTS US TO BE STEADFAST, TO PERSEVERE, TO WALK WITH HIM AND TO LIVE FOR HIM AS HE HAS DIRECTED US TO DO IN HIS WORD. WHENEVER YOU AND I BEGIN TO SEE OUR HEARTS GROWING COLD TOWARD THE LORD, WHENEVER SIN IN ANY FORM BEGINS TO ATTRACT US, WE NEED TO TAKE STEPS IMMEDIATELY TO GET BACK TO THE LORD, AND TO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM.

Let me give you a word of warning that Paul gave to the Corinthian church. Using the history of Israel as a warning, he said,

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth
take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

And so one of Peter's precepts, one of his commands, one of his admonitions to us, as we enter 1990 and a new decade is, "Beware."

But this is a defensive measure. We are not just interested in holding the ground that we have gained so far, but we are interested in forging ahead, getting stronger, winning greater victories, becoming more like our Lord. We are far from what we need to be, and from what we want to be, and

from what we some day will be.

Let us now look at:

II. THE POSITIVE PRECEPTS (2 Pet. 3:18).

There are two. The first is:

- A. The need to grow: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

I want you to see that Peter began his Epistle in much the same way as we see here that he finished it. Look at chapter 1, verse 5, and see what he was leading up to in verse 8. (Read, emphasizing the word, "add.")

Regardless of the progress that any one of us has made in the Christian life, we cannot afford to be satisfied with things as they are. We need to keep growing. We need to keep learning. We are spiritually where the Israelites were geographically when Joshua told them, "...there is yet very much land to be possessed" (Joshua 13:1). We have a long way to go before we will be like the Lord. We need to grow, and grow, and grow.

But how do we grow?

During my university days I was continually told that we grow through service. So we were encouraged to teach a Sunday School class, or preach, or find some way that we could serve the Lord.

Now I agree that serving the Lord can be the place where we grow, but service alone does not produce growth. Just because you are busy is no sign that you are growing.

Peter himself gave the answer in his earlier Epistle when he said,

As newborn babes desire
the sincere milk of the word,
that ye may grow thereby:
If so be ye have tasted that
the Lord is gracious (1 Pet. 2:2, 3).

Do you know what "the sincere milk of the word" is? "Sincere" means pure, unadulterated, not mixed with anything else, the Word of God as it is! You will never find a strong Christian who is weak in his understanding of the Word of God. The Word is our

meat and our drink. And knowing the Word is shown by the way we live in obedience to it. We do not really know the truth until it has effected some holy change in our lives.

But let us look at our text a little more in detail.

Peter says that there are two areas in which we need to grow:

- 1) "In grace."
- 2) "In the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Actually these are not two areas, but two ways of saying the same thing. We are growing "in grace" when we are growing "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And vice versa. Cf. 2 Pet. 1:2.

Grace and the Lord Jesus Christ are inseparable. You cannot understand the one without understanding the other. The unmerited, undeserved goodness of God toward us is manifested in Christ. There is no part of Christ that we deserve, either of what He is, or of what He has done. And there is no part of Christ that we would have if it were not that Christ Himself had sought us and claimed us for Himself. When we talk about the doctrines of grace, we are talking about the doctrines of Christ. And it is the knowledge of the grace of God and of the Son of God by which we are strengthened to live godly lives in an ungodly world. And it is then that we not only are able to maintain our own steadfastness, but we can also expect to see that the Lord will use our lives to reach others with the Gospel of the grace of God.

But I have one other precept before I close.

We might think of this as a doxology, and it is. But you can also see that it is a kind of an exhortation as well. And it follows from what we have already seen in verses 17 and 18.

B. The object of our lives: "To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

One of the most dangerous things spiritually that any child of God can do is to live to please himself.

I have already quoted a verse from 1 Corinthians 10, and now I want to quote another. It is verse 31:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink,
or whatsoever ye do,
do all to the glory of God.

Peter says that all that we are, and all that we do,
are to be for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.
This shows that the Lord Jesus Christ is God.
Whatever we do we are to do to magnify Him and His
grace to us. We dare not take the glory for anything
for ourselves. We are what we are only because of
His grace.

By His grace we are not what we used to be.

By His grace we are not what we might have been.

By His grace we are what we are (even though we are
not yet what we ought to be).

By His grace we will be some day what He wants us
to be.

Concl: We do not know what 1990 will hold for us, nor what
will happen during the next decade. Perhaps the Lord
will come. I am going to be speaking about that tonight.
But there are several things I am sure of for 1990.

I am sure that nothing is going to change the Word of God.
It is forever settled in heaven. The truth never changes.
The promises are secure. Heaven and earth may be shaken and
pass away, but not the Word. It will remain.

I am sure that nothing is going to change the grace of God.
We are secure in our salvation. God's attitude toward us
will not change. His grace will be sufficient for us
whatever may come.

I am sure that nothing is going to change our Savior, the
Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and
today, and forever! We will change, hopefully for the
better, but He never changes.

I am sure that nothing is going to change the reason for our
existence here on earth: to glorify Him.

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with Thy righteousness on,
My person and off'ring to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.

The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete;

His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below or above,
Can make Him His purpose forgo,
Or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is giv'n;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heav'n.

-- Augustus M. Toplady (1740-1778)
Trinity Hymnal, #99

Make sure that you remain steadfast in the coming year, and that you are growing in grace as you grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking in all that you are and in all that you do, to live to glorify the One Who has done so much for you, with more yet that He is going to do.

These were PETER'S PARTING PRECEPTS, his final words to the believers of his day. It would be hard to find better words with which we begin the new year. May they be upon our hearts as we walk with the Lord this year, and as we serve Him in these days in which we live.