

Do Not Fall, but Grow in Grace

II Peter 3:14-18, Transfiguration Sunday

January 24, 2010

Beloved of the Lord.....I've said it before, but the strength of our Christian faith is much like a rollercoaster with its many ups and downs. When God calls us by the Gospel, so that we as Peter believe "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God", we are like that car on the track which is steadily heading upward with every click click click of the track. But soon enough we reach the high point, and our faith takes a blow due to an outward event or lapse into sin, and we are filled with worry and fear. Contrary to the rollercoaster experience, it is no fun heading down and sometimes terrifying. While the new man and the old man within us are always constants, one is totally evil, the other totally righteous through Christ, the battle between the two is the "up and down" of our sanctified life. When faith is weak we tend to give in to sin more, have more fear, and are less fruitful, and when faith is strong we resist sin more, are fearless, and more fruitful. But beloved of the Lord, chosen before the foundation of the world and called in time by His grace, what matters most is that though you realize that though you are dead in trespasses and sin, you are very much alive through Christ for Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Let us then rejoice that though we are weak, He is yet strong, and we have His promise that a smoking flax He will not quench. Therefore be steadfast in your battle against sin and "grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

I. God wants us to live in peace, without spot, blameless. Where there is faith in Christ, there is not only the knowledge that He will come and return the second time, but there is also anticipation of this day of deliverance. God has given us the promise of a new heaven and earth and these days of sorrow have their end. Knowing these things then, the question is, just how will we spend our remaining days here on earth? Will we live our life to God's glory and be fruitful in good works, or will we squander our days of grace and give a bad example to the world around us. Thus Peter writes, "Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Peter here appeals to our faith. We know well and rejoice that Jesus has come and saved us from our sins, but due to our flesh we often behave and act as in a manner contrary to faith. To our shame we do not live in perfect peace with our fellow man and there are many spots, stains of sin in our life, and we are to be blamed. Peter therefore writes "Be diligent", be steady, earnest, and energetic in the Lord's work. Guard yourself

against sin lest God return and find you have fallen from grace. Do not give in to sin of any kind, not even an inch lest the devil drag you down the road for a mile. Most importantly you must always strive, work hard to live in peace with all men. Romans 12 says, "as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath." Angry Christians are sinful Christians. The devil makes great gains for his kingdom when we are angry and the Bible says, "anger rests in the bosom of fools" also "let not the sun go down upon your wrath" – don't go to bed angry. Instead we should "give place unto wrath", let it go, put it away. Do not constantly dwell on the sins of another against you lest God's wrath befall you. Repent then of your angry thoughts and let your thoughts return to peace. Think of Jesus who suffered the greatest injustice when He was crucified, yet from His heart there flowed words of peace, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Live in peace then with your fellow man, as God through Christ lives in peace with you. I Thessalonians 5 says, "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

II. Don't abuse God's Word to your own destruction.

Thus we're not to be comfortable in this world, nor comfortable in sin, but diligent in the blameless life, so much the more as we see the Day approaching. We "account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." What does this mean? It means the only reason this world has not yet perished in flames of fire, is because God is extremely patient and longsuffering. He is still working through the preaching of His Gospel Word and Sacraments to save the last few souls from that damnation which is to come. We then live in what is called a "Time of Grace". Though our sins and the sins of all men merit full and immediate damnation NOW, God holds back the damn of His anger for that brief moment between now and Judgment Day. Though all are sinners, all have a pre-ordained time of grace where God allows them to live as they please in the hopes that by the Word they will repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as their Savior. But this window of grace is quickly closing and tomorrow or today could be the Last Day this earth exists. The doors to heaven may soon be closed forever. Hence "knowing the time, now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed." The rich treasure of God's grace and forgiveness which gives everlasting life through the merits of God's Son, they are there for all to receive and believe by faith – but they are there for a limited time. Like we hear in the commercials, "This offer won't last", and there is a

Last Day. Jesus said, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Today’s lesson also contains God’s sincere warning that Christians should be careful not to fall away from the truth. Peter speaks of those passages which are “hard to be understood” and how “they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” What does this mean? It means both Peter and Paul knew Christians who took hard and difficult passages and perverted them, namely they forced their own private interpretation on a passage. Typically they make this false doctrine the chief doctrine of their faith, often to their own damnation. There is then a pattern with sectarians. They use the harder and less clear passages of Scripture to establish doctrine, even if it means ignoring or contradicting the more simple passages that are perfectly clear.

But Peter’s lesson is God’s lesson for us: namely we should not abuse God’s Word to our own destruction. Our principle is *Let Scripture interpret Scripture*, let the Word speak for Himself. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for CORRECTION”, and sometimes we are the ones who need correcting. Because our will and deceitful flesh are by nature contrary to God’s Word and will, we must always be willing to be corrected by God’s Word for the sake of our own salvation. We cannot put words in God’s mouth by making the Bible say something God does not – that is what it means to “wrest the Scriptures”. Hence in Revelation 22 God warns, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.” When there are hard passages we don’t understand we should pray, but more importantly we should let the simple and clear passage help us to understand that which is harder. We do not guess or make it say something we want it to say, nor can we devise a new doctrine or go off on a tangent to our own destruction. Our comfort is when we reach heaven all will be made clear. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

III. Grow in grace in the knowledge of your Lord Jesus Christ. God’s final warning now is perfectly clear, “beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.” Here is God’s earnest command to be 100% faithful to God’s Word, God’s doctrine which will guide you and keep you on the path to heaven. Don’t let other people

lead you away by the errors of false doctrine, but hold steady, fast, and true as your Lord commands. “Hold that fast which thou hast, let no man take thy crown.”

Finally, what then should we do between now and the day of our Lord’s return? Besides living a holy and blameless life we should “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” This means we should study God’s Word to increase in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Our knowledge of Him needs to grow, not to shrink. Therefore dear Christian, don’t ever, EVER be content with your knowledge of doctrine. If you are glad those catechism days are over, glad you no longer have to study God’s Word, if you think you can coast into heaven, you have a big problem and the devil is putting you in a chokehold. Neither you nor I can coast into heaven. We must fight all the way and it is an uphill battle. Nevertheless as David said to Goliath, “the battle is the Lord’s.”

Your battle dear Christian, was fought and completely won by Jesus Christ on the cross. His victory is your victory. When Satan then attacks and assaults you with the fears of death and hell, ask yourself the question. Why did Jesus come? Why did He live? Why did He die? Why did He rise again? By faith you know the answer. He did all this for you, that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Does God love you? Study His Word. Increase your knowledge and He will give you the answer. “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

God’s redemption for you then dear Christian is not an uncertain thing of the future, it is an accomplished fact of the past. Faith alone in Him is necessary for salvation. When you are troubled by your sin, discouraged in your battle against sin, or filled with worry about the future, again and again return your thoughts to Jesus and all will be well. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.” Truly His salvation for us never wavers and the thoughts of His heart are perfectly clear. “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” Our end on earth is only our beginning in heaven. Therefore do not fall but grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Savior. “Too Him be glory both now and forever” Amen.