

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	96		Gary L.W. Johnson
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HOW, THEN, SHOULD WE BE LIVING?

Most of you will immediately recognize this sermon title as a take on the late Francis Schaeffer's book, *How Should We Then Live?* He argued at length that "people function on the basis of their world-view more consistently than even they themselves may realize. The problem is not our outward things. The problem is having, and then acting upon, the right world-view – the world-view which gives men and women the truth of what is."¹ Our text is a firm exhortation to grasp the reality of what Schaeffer calls an imperative. Note the strong emphasis that Peter puts on *knowing these things beforehand*. This introductory causal participle *proginōskontes* literally means to know in advance. Barclay notes, "The Christian is a man who is forewarned. That is to say, he cannot plead ignorance. He knows the right way and its rewards; he knows the wrong way and its disasters. He has no right to expect an easy way, for he has been told that Christianity means a cross, and he has been warned that there will always be those who are ready to attack and to pervert the faith. To be forewarned is to be forearmed; but to be forewarned is also a grave responsibility, for he who knows the right and does the wrong is under a double condemnation."²

- I. **EXHORTATION CONCERNING SPIRITUAL MATURITY.** The word "therefore," *oun*, looks back to what Peter has already said. The adverb *therefore* forcefully contrasts the distorters of Scripture with the readers of Peter's epistle. The believers Peter addresses are different from the false teachers and their followers. These believers need encouragement and guidance.³
 - A. **Beware of Falling.** To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The word "beware," *phulassesthe*, is a present middle imperative that stresses the importance of being alert to danger. Why did Peter feel compelled to warn his readers? Martin Lloyd-Jones gives three reasons.
 1. "The first is the delay in the Lord's coming. I say the delay, perhaps I ought to say the apparent delay. I mean by that, that these people, these early Christians, having listened to the preaching of the Apostle, had somehow got hold of the idea that our Lord was coming back immediately. And because He did not come at once they began to question and to query. That has been the great theme of this Epistle – why does He not come? And we have already seen Peter's answer – God's calendar is a moral one, and to Him *a thousand years are as one day and one day as a thousand years*."
 2. A second factor which tended to produce this falling away, and this failure, was the work and the teaching of the false teachers. We need not refer to them again; it is the whole theme of the second chapter, as we have already seen. But Peter refers to it once more in this seventeenth verse – *being led away with the error of the wicked*. The wicked are the false prophets, and they are still with us. It is not an easy thing to be a Christian today. There are so many ideas and thoughts and suggestions and insinuations which would discourage us, and would indeed positively encourage us to slackness and indolence, to a falling away, to a

failure to stand. We are set in a very difficult position. Never, therefore, is this exhortation to steadfastness more needed.

3. Then, perhaps, the third factor, and the one which Peter wishes to emphasize particularly in this section, is what I might call our natural instability, our natural waywardness, the natural tendency to indolence. Is it not a very remarkable manifestation of sin that the natural man who, when concerned with material things is characterized by energy and enterprise, should, when it becomes a question of standing loyal to Christian principles, be affected by instability and indolence. I sometimes feel that there is nothing at the present time which should make those of us who are Christian feel so much shame as the way in which we can so easily be put off from our Christian views. When we observe the contrast between the world and ourselves, is it not rather sad and pathetic? It takes a good deal to stand between the man of the world and his plans and the thing in which he believes. He will endure almost anything to obtain that thing which he likes and in which he believes. But far too often we give the impression that it takes very little indeed to stand between some of us and our loyalty to the Gospel – this Gospel which tells us that we are sons of God, that we are going on to a glory which transcends our highest imagination, that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. We say we believe that, and yet how easily can we be deflected from it. Now those are the reasons that led the Apostle to make this appeal; and these factors are still powerful in their influence.”⁴

- B. **The Source of Danger.** Peter says that they are susceptible to “being carried away,” *sunapachthentes*, aorist passive participle, which underscores the danger of going astray. The same word is used by Paul in Galatians 2:13 to describe how Barnabas was misled by the Judaizers. “Once again in this verse Peter stresses the relationship between knowledge and behavior. He does not fight shy of *knowledge* on the ground that the false teachers are making such play with it. The fact is that faith without knowledge degenerates into pietism; purely emotional religion leads, often enough, to immorality, which militates against stability as almost nothing else does. The word for *steadfastness*, *stērigmos*, occurs only here in the New Testament, but is from the same root as the verb Jesus had used in Luke xxii. 32, *When you are converted, strengthen (stērixon) your brethren*. This is a command which, throughout this Epistle, Peter has been seeking to obey. It is not surprising that he who had been so mercurial and had been changed by the grace of God into a man of rock should be so concerned about stability.”⁵

- II. **THE FINAL EXHORTATION: CONTINUED GROWTH.** Spiritual growth is the key to spiritual stability. Peter had warned them about the danger of being misled so that they “fall from your own steadfastness,” *hina mē ekpesēte tou idiou stērigmou*. This noun, which occurs only here in the New Testament, points to a condition of firmness or stability; their own security lies in their firm commitment to God’s revealed truth. Their security lies not in their own strength or perseverance but in their unswerving adherence to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶ “Here is Peter’s last exhortation, expressed positively and firmly. The believers are already maturing spiritually, but Peter encourages them to continue to do so because the process of growing is their work. This process is not a passive mode of existence, but one in which the individual believer has an active part. Peter specifies how the believer must grow spiritually: *in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In a sense, Peter reiterates part of the salutation at the beginning of his epistle. There he writes, *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord* (1:2). But is Peter saying that believers ought to grow in the grace and knowledge that Jesus grants them or that believers should grow in the grace and in the knowledge that they have about Jesus Christ? Because grace and knowledge originate with God and through Christ are given to the believer, commentators admit that both interpretations are possible. They generally prefer the first explanation: Peter urges the believers to appropriate the spiritual qualities of grace and knowledge that Jesus grants them. *Knowledge of Christ and knowledge*

about Christ are, if they keep pace with one another, both the safeguard against heresy and apostasy and also the means of growth in grace.”⁷

CONCLUSION: Thomas Adams, one of the noted Puritan preachers, wrote a massive commentary on this epistle (it runs 899 pages, double columns!). In commenting on what it means to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, he writes: “Let us rejoice in this honour, that we know him. Let him that rejoiceth, rejoice in this, that he knoweth me, saith the Lord, Jer. ix. 24. This is a knowledge, which whosoever seeketh, is wise; whosoever getteth, is rich; whosoever keepeth, is strong; and whosoever enjoyeth, is for ever blessed. Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, Father, I thank thee, that thou hast revealed these things unto babes, Luke x. 21. That his Father’s bounty had given us this knowledge, Christ himself rejoiced for us; and shall not we rejoice for ourselves? St. Paul was a profound scholar, and had abundance of human learning in him; yet in comparison of the knowledge of Christ, he is very homely with it all. Loss and dung, are the best terms he gives it, Phil. iii. 8; so was he enamoured and transported with the love of Christ. It was a true and just reprehension, wherewith the high priest reproveth the council, as they were set to condemn Christ; and a great deal better than he meant it: *Ye know nothing at all*, John xi. 49. He spake right, for if we know not the Lord Jesus, we know nothing at all; our knowledge is nothing, or nothing worth. This brings knowledge out of the hall into the parlour; strips it out of the old rags, and puts upon it a robe of honour and immortality. We may say of secular knowledge, as Antigonus did of his garment, O noble, rather than happy, rag! but of divine knowledge, O happy, rather than noble, garment! The world disrespects it; to the Jews it appears madness, foolishness to the Gentiles, 1 Cor. i. 23. The politician takes it to be a comely ornament, the gallant useth it for a compliment, the worldling admits it for table-talk; as if all discourse of piety were but a pretty recreation after business. But to them that are called, it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, ver. 24. This knowledge of Christ is our life and comfort: which the Lord ingraft in them that want it, and increase in them that have it; till from the contemplation of him in grace below, we be taken up to see him in his glory above.”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview V* (Crossway, 1982), p. 252.

² Wm. Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter: The Daily Study Bible* (The Saint Andrew Press, 1976), p. 350.

³ S. J. Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1987), p. 347.

⁴ M. Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter* (Banner of Truth, 1983), p. 209.

⁵ M. Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter: Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 149.

⁶ D. E. Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary* (BJW Press, 1989), p. 177.

⁷ Kistemaker, op. cit., p. 348.

⁸ Thomas Adams, *A Commentary On The Second Epistle of St. Peter* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1990).