

2 Peter 1:12-15

Introduction

- 2 Peter 1:12-15 — Therefore I am going to be always reminding you of these things, even though you know them and are [already] established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this [earthly] dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my [earthly] dwelling will be soon, as also our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able constantly to recall these things.”

Peter begins with these words, “*Therefore* I am going to be always *reminding* you of *these things...*” and he ends with, “I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able constantly to recall *these things.*” So obviously we need to start out this morning by finding out what “these things” are. We need to go back and read what Peter has just written in verses 3-11.

He starts out with the “indicative,” with what God has already accomplished and what we have already experienced in our salvation. So listen to these wonderful words:

- 2 Peter 1:3-4 — “[Christ’s] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and piety, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

That’s a wonderful indicative! It’s what God has already *accomplished*. And now rooted in this indicative and made possible by this indicative of what God has accomplished is the imperative (what we must do by faith).

- 2 Peter 1:5-7 — And so for *this very reason, bringing all your energy to bear*, supply by your faith, an abundance of moral excellence, and by [your] moral excellence, an abundance of knowledge, and by [your] knowledge, an abundance of self-control, and by [your] self-control, an abundance of steadfastness, and by [your] steadfastness, an abundance of piety, and by [your] piety, an abundance of brotherly affection, and by [your] brotherly affection, an abundance of love.

When Peter describes one virtue as being supplied by another, he’s just showing that they’re all interrelated (you can’t work on one without working on them all): They’re all enabled by faith (first on the list), and they can all be summed up in just one word – “love” (last on the list). What we see in this “catalogue” of Christian virtues is the Christian’s experience of God’s salvation—or the working out of this salvation—in the present.

But now Peter goes on to show how the imperative (what we’re called to do in the present) proves the reality of the indicative (what God has already accomplished in the past) and so *in this way* guarantees our future entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- **2 Peter 1:8-11** — For when **these things** [imperative] belong to you and are abounding more and more, *they make you* neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever does not have **these things** [imperative] is blind—being diseased in his eyes—having forgotten the cleansing of his former sins [indicative]. Therefore, brothers, be all the more zealous to *confirm* your calling and election [indicative], for as long as you do **these things** [imperative] you will most certainly never fall [into eternal destruction]. For in this way [in doing **these things** by faith] there will be [in the future] richly provided to you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In this short, opening section of Peter’s letter, he encompasses the whole of the Christian life; he encompasses the Christian’s whole experience of God’s salvation—past, present, and future—as it has come to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. 2 Peter 1:12 — Therefore [Peter says] I am going to be always reminding you of *these things*...

Why is Peter going to be always reminding us of these things? Because what’s at stake is our final salvation. What’s at stake is either being richly provided an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – or else falling from our profession of Christ into eternal destruction and ruin. This is *why* Peter says that he’s going to be always reminding us of these things. Underlying all of Scripture is the ultimate urgency of eternal matters. The Scriptures aren’t just a helpful aid to living life. They’re the revelation of eternal life in Jesus Christ (not just future, but present; Jn. 5:24; 6:54; 17:3) and also of everlasting death and judgment outside of Christ (not just future, but present; Jn. 3:18-19; 12:31). That’s why, as the writer of Hebrews says, we should always pay much closer attention to the things that we have heard, and that we hear each week in the preaching of God’s Word (cf. Heb. 2:1). That’s why Peter says that he will be always reminding us of these things.

“These things” refers “technically” to the seven virtues of “moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, piety, brotherly affection, and love (vv. 5-7; cf. 1:8a, 9a, 10b), but we know we can’t separate those Christian virtues from the context in which Peter has placed them. What Peter’s really saying is that he’ll always be reminding us of the whole Gospel: The Gospel as that which announces the completed work which God has accomplished in our lives. The Gospel as that which promises and guarantees God’s continued work in our lives. The Gospel as that which obligates and enables us to bear fruit in our lives. And the Gospel as that which is always pointing us to our future (eschatological) hope. To paraphrase one commentator, “The content of Peter’s message is [ultimately] no more than the basic Christian instruction which all Christians have [already] received.” (Bauckham) That’s why he speaks here of “reminding” and that’s why he goes on to say:

II. 2 Peter 1:12b — ...even though you know them and are [already] established in the truth that you have.

What is the “truth” that we already have and in which we’re already established? Again, it’s the Gospel teaching in all of its different facets and in all of its fullness (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-13). The truth is the Gospel truth, which has given us new life, and cleansed us, and sealed us in the past.

- Ephesians 1:13 — In him you also, when you heard *the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, *were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*.
- James 1:18 — Of his own will *he brought us forth by the word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The truth is the Gospel truth, which is sanctifying us and changing us in the present (cf. 2 Pet. 2:2).

- Titus 1:1 — Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect *and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness...*
- 3 John 4 — I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are *walking in the truth*.

The truth is the Gospel truth, which will glorify us and transform us in resurrection power in the future.

- Colossians 1:5 — ...because of *the hope laid up for you in heaven*. Of this you have heard before in *the word of the truth, the gospel*.

So as Christians, the truth is the fullness of what we already have – it's the whole Gospel truth that we already know. When Peter speaks of the truth "that you have" he's not implying that there's still more truth out there that we don't have. His point is the opposite. As Christians we already have the whole truth; we already know the whole Gospel. Think about this precious treasure that we have! But does this lead us to complacency? Does this cause us to be careless since we already "know it all"?

Peter says that *even though* we are already established in the truth that we have, he will always be reminding us of these things. Why? Because we know from verses 9-11 that to "forget" is to "fall" – to "forget" leads to eternal destruction. In reminding us, therefore, of these things that we already know, Peter is calling us to be living in the present the indicative of what God has already accomplished in the past so that we might be fully assured of our entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the future. The reminder of what we already know is a constantly renewed call to action. This explains what Peter says in the next verse:

- 2 Peter 1:13a —I think it right, as long as I am in this [earthly dwelling], to *stir you up* [to *provoke and rouse you*] by way of *reminder...*

Remembering the Gospel is ultimately about "doing." Remembering the truth is ultimately about persevering in all the Christian virtues (the virtues which flow from faith and are summed up in love). The Apostle John says:

- 1 John 2:21 — I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it...

John writes to the Christians not to impart new information to them, but to remind them of the truth they already know in full – so that they might continue standing firm in that truth, not deceived by any lie. Jude also writes:

- Jude 3 — Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for *the faith that was once for all delivered* to the saints.

The faith—the whole faith—has been once for all delivered to us, but now we must contend for that faith. And so Jude goes on to write:

- Jude 5 — Now *I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it*, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Certainly Jude’s readers hadn’t forgotten this piece of information, but they were in danger of no longer “fully knowing” it – of “forgetting” what this meant for their own lives. So what does Jude do? He doesn’t tell them something new. He reminds them of the basic Christian instruction that they already know and once fully knew. One commentator writes: “The apostolic faith, in which Jude’s readers were thoroughly instructed at the time of their conversion, is definitive and complete; it does not need supplementing” (Bauckham). Jude, and John (cf. Rev. 3:3), and Peter, and Paul (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 2:11; 2 Tim. 1:6; 2:8, 14; Titus 3:1) were all writing primarily to remind their readers of things they already knew — of the truth they had already received and in which they had already been established.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:1–2 — Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware...
- 2 Thessalonians 2:5 — Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15 — So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Are you seeing, then, what we need as Christians? What we need is to be constantly reminded of the Gospel — of the truth that we already know and in which we’ve already been established. Anyone who teaches something new, something novel, something additional—anyone who does more than simply “remind” you constantly of the Gospel that you already know (as a constantly renewed call to action)—is to be rejected. Which means that we don’t come here on Sunday morning to learn something new. We don’t come here to be able to go away saying “I didn’t know that,” or, “I never thought about it that way before,” or, “that’s a new insight.” There’s a sense in which these things might happen, but these “new insights” are not why we come. We come to be reminded, and then to respond to this reminder in worship, calling upon the name of the Lord. This is why you never need to worry about “memorizing” all the information that you hear in this sermon, or in any of the sermons on Sunday. The things you really need to go away with are the things you already know and that I should only be reminding you of. Yes, we’re all learning, but it’s not so much that we’re learning “new information.” What we’re learning is the word of truth—the Gospel. We’re learning it more deeply and being more established in it so that we might be stirred up to persevere in all the Christian virtues every day of our lives. One

thing this means is that if this sermon is truly a faithful and a biblical sermon, then the best way to remember this sermon will be to read and meditate on the Scripture that's being preached. I don't ultimately want to draw your attention to the sermon notes, but to the power of the Scriptures. This is one reason why I avoid traditional sermon "outlines," because I find that often these outlines must be artificially imposed on the text, which means that in the end it's not really the Scriptures—in their true purity and power—that are being preached. Instead, it's my original "take" on the Scriptures, or how I have transformed the Scriptures into something "contemporary" and "relevant"—it's this that we're coming to hear instead of coming to be simply reminded of the truth we already know.

"Therefore," Peter says, "I am going to be always reminding you of these things." The Greek, here, is unusual and even difficult. What does Peter mean by the future tense: "*I am going to be always reminding you of these things*"? Is he planning to write them daily or weekly letters? Is he planning to go and live with them and preach to them every week? How is it that he's going to "keep on," "constantly" reminding them of these things? We ask this question especially in light of what Peter says next:

III. 2 Peter 1:13–14 — I think it right, as long as I am in this [earthly] dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my [earthly] dwelling will be soon, as also our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

The special impetus for Peter to write this letter is the reality that he has only a short time left on this earth (the putting off of his earthly dwelling will be soon). He's now about sixty years old. He may have already been able to see the signs of his approaching martyrdom in the things that were happening in Rome. So as he considers his own advancing age, and the storm clouds gathering in Rome, he remembers Jesus' words to him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee some thirty years earlier. After inviting Peter three times to publicly confess his love for Jesus, and after commissioning him three times to "tend my lambs," "shepherd my sheep," "tend my sheep," Jesus then said to Peter:

➤ **John 21:18** — "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."

Peter knows, now, that Jesus' word is about to be fulfilled, and so instead of forgetting the sheep in light of his own approaching death, Peter is stirred to write to them one more time. In other words, this letter is Peter's final reminder. But if this is so, and if Peter doesn't anticipate living long enough to have any more communication with the Christians in Asia Minor, then how can Peter write in the previous verse, using the *future* tense, "I am going to be always [constantly] reminding you of these things"? And how can Peter go on to write in the next verse, using the future tense again:

IV. 2 Peter 1:15 — And *I will make every effort* so that after my departure you may be able constantly to recall *these things*.

The Greek future tense here is even more awkward than in verse twelve. Peter says, “I will then—in those future days—make every effort...” Has Peter forgotten already what he just said in verses 13-14 about his imminent death? Obviously not, because he goes on to say, “I will [then, in those future days] make every effort *so that after my departure* you may be able constantly to recall these things.”

Can you see what Peter must be saying? He’s envisioning this letter being read, and reread, and read and reread, again, and again, and again even after his death. One commentator explains: “The ancients understood letters [to] ‘stand in for living speech, and for the living presence of the speakers, each representing its writer to its recipient in his or her inevitable absence’” (Green; quoting Trapp). So it’s through this letter—and through the repeated reading of this letter—that Peter is going to be always reminding us of “these things” – these things that we already know and this truth in which we’ve already been established. It’s through the repeated reading of this letter that Peter envisions himself—even after his death—making every effort so that we may be able constantly to recall “these things.”

Conclusion

There’s a crisis in the “conservative evangelical” church today of a lack of confidence in the true and full sufficiency of Scripture. There’s a dangerous desire for the “relevant” and the “contemporary” – for what’s shiny and new. We’ve ceased to believe in the beauty and the power of the truth that we already know and in which we’ve already been established. What we need today is to hear the same word that God spoke to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah:

- Jeremiah 6:16 — Thus says Yahweh, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.”

Let us beware lest we should in any way forget and be moved away from that truth in which we have all been established. May we love to be to be always reminded of “these things”—though we know them already. And may we be “stirred up” by these constant reminders to persevere in “these things,” walking in every Christian virtue until there is richly provided to us an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.