

STAYING STABLE?

The final sentences of Peter's second letter leave readers with practical advice, and sober reflection on the realities of life. 2Peter 3:14-18 focus on salvation, Scripture, and stability, as believers take care to trust and obey what God has written down in the Scriptures, as His guide for holy living.

1- SALVATION. Peter reminds, don't be impatient with the Lord's timetable, as you await the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells. Focus not on waiting but on living. Live for Jesus every day while He gives breath and life, in "*lives of holiness and godliness.*" This takes vigilance, as he said in 1Peter 1:5 to "make every effort" and 1:10 "*be all the more diligent.*" So here he repeats, "*be diligent to be found without spot or blemish, and at peace.*" Trust and obey what God says in the Bible, in order to live Christlike, morally pure lives. In the power of the Holy Spirit.

And "*count the patience of the Lord as salvation.*" Not just individual but cosmic salvation, as Peter reminds of the consummation of God's plans for His people and creation. He is "*not slow to fulfill His promise, but patient toward you.*" This gives you opportunity to share the good news about salvation with those around you who need to repent. This is a turning around, a turning point, a quantifiable state. RC Sproul says that because election is unto faith, repentance and salvation, "God is going to keep His Word. We are called to be vigilant and diligent, to look forward. We will be grateful if He comes tomorrow, but if we die before He comes, we will be at no disadvantage to those who are still alive at His coming." God will save His people. Count on it. Meantime, trust and obey.

2- SCRIPTURE. Peter said ignorant and unstable people twist the apostle Paul's writing, "*as they do the other Scriptures.*" The early church recognized Scripture as the Old Testament and the writings with the authority of the Apostles, which we call the New Testament. Scripture interprets Scripture, according to context and author's intent. Peter said "*some things are hard to understand.*" Difficult passages require more homework. Become self-justifying, resisting the innate authority of the Bible, and you end up twisting God's words. Perhaps over-emphasizing certain words or verses and ignoring others. Perhaps taking passages out of literary and historical context, as cults and false teachers do. Perhaps being lazy or unwilling to give up some teaching heard years ago that now you learn was inadequate or improperly emphasized. Not malicious, just mistaken. Many people form deeply held opinions though they have never really studied or thought deeply about things in relation to the rest of Scripture, so they may believe foolish or outlandish or greatly mistaken things.

False teachers, in Peter's day too, believe they have special esoteric knowledge that allow them to disregard the Bible, to "*indulge in the lust of defiling passions and despise authority,*" he says. Early gnostic thinkers believed spiritual things were good and material things were bad. Evil was in things not people, so evil done in the body didn't matter because material things were already evil. Such self-justifying twisted thinking is still around today, contrary to Scripture. But if society today, like our Founding Fathers, would recognize the depravity of mankind, and evil in the human heart, then they would have to admit the relevance and authority of the 66 books of the Bible, so they refuse.

3- STABILITY. Don't be carried away with error, but take care in the truth, Peter urges. Since you know people will try to twist Scripture, you are forewarned, "*knowing this beforehand.*" How? By reading the Bible. That's why in 2Peter 1:12 and 3:1-2 he was "*stirring up your mind by way of reminder*" to "*remember the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through the apostles.*" Lawless people may not be obvious at first. Wolves in sheep's clothing, infiltrate the flock. The apostles warned about bad influences of those unwilling to submit to the Word of God.

MG Johnston notes, "to stand firm in the faith, we must first of all be on our guard against the spirit of lawlessness in ourselves and those around us - seeds of rebellion against God which take root in our own hearts." Even professing Christians can be lawless, by thinking they are a law unto themselves. Perhaps you know people who think they know better than God's Word, because somehow "God told them" to do thus and so, even when obviously contrary to the Bible. Peter warns about consequences of twisting Scripture - the fiery judgment awaiting those who rebel and reject God's Word of truth.

4- SECURITY. Johnston says, "The answer to our deepest needs in the Christian life is not to be found in new spiritual revelations or experiences, but in a clearer understanding of what we have already been taught, and the application to our daily living." Be diligent, Peter says, "*take care that you do not lose your own stability.*" Don't get knocked off balance by unstable false teachers. Peter said in chapter 1, "*be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" Not obeying to get saved, but because you are saved. "*To grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, to Whom be glory both now and to the day of eternity!*" Amen! □