

So, here we are, in our last sermon in Peter's second letter.

I hope that you can remember what the main thrust was of Peter's letter to the churches that he was writing to. Because that is the main thrust of this section of God's word to us.

Of course, it is the terrible danger of false teaching and false teachers, wherever it is we come across it or them – though the most severe warning is of the danger of false teaching coming from within the church.

And here at the end of this letter – we will see that danger emphasised again.

But we will also be reminded that the opposite of false teaching – true, biblical teaching – has effects too – good effects.

You see, whether we like it or not, the teaching that we receive in our hearts will affect our lives day-by-day.

If it is false teaching, even in the smallest way, it will damage our walk with the Lord.

And of course it can do much more damage than that.

It can damage the church – causing splits and divisions.

It can damage the witness of the church - when those who are known as Christians do not live as Christ calls us.

But, of course, if we take the teaching of the bible to heart – truly apply it - it will have a wonderfully positive effect.

We will walk more closely with the Lord.

We will know the unity that comes from walking together with the Lord.

We will have a powerful witness of our lord and saviour as our lives are proof of our words.

So as we come to the end of this letter about false teaching I want us to make sure that we aren't being complacent.

False teaching is devastating to the church. Jesus described those who falsely claim to speak the word of God as 'wolves' and warned they would come.

Something Paul echoed in his farewell to the Ephesian elders. (Acts 20)

You do not want to be amongst a pack of wolves – especially if you are a sheep. The wolf is coming to feed on the sheep, make itself fat at their expense – not care for them.

And we will find these wolves, these false teachers in many places.

I heard such false teaching on the radio just this week by somebody who claimed to be a church leader.

Again, just this week I read of a church leader expounding something dangerously close to the horrible false teaching of health and wealth.

We need to take this terrible disease – this poison - seriously. And you remember last week we were told the antidote.

Look again at 2 Peter 3v2

We need to recall God's word given to us by the prophets and apostles – the command given by our lord and saviour.

And that's exactly what Peter is doing in our passage here in v10.

He is recalling what the Lord Jesus taught us that the day that he returns will come upon us unexpectedly – like a thief in the night. The Lord's word recalled to us in here in Matthew's gospel (Ch 24), recalled to us here by the apostle Peter.

This is exactly what provides an antidote to false teaching – the clear teaching of the bible.

It's an example of true teaching and what it means to us.

In this case it is teaching us perfectly clearly that there will be a destruction of the created order as we know it. It will come with fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

That phrase, laying bare – is one that we might use of bringing everything into the open. And that is exactly what it means here.

The earth and everything in it – all people included. It will all be brought into the open for everyone to see.

And most importantly it will be laid bare before God.

It is what we have been reading before in this letter; God's judgement.

But that is not the end of everything – there will be a new heaven and a new earth – and that new earth will be a home of righteousness – not the home of sin that we find throughout this world.

And in v11 Peter does what we should do with true biblical teaching – we should say to ourselves – since this is true – then what kind of people should we be?

Here Peter is using this specific bible teaching about Jesus' second coming and the judgement that goes with it.

But we can apply the same question to all bible teaching – since this is true, then what kind of people should we be.

I am sure I have mentioned before from the pulpit that there are 2 kinds of faith.

One is confessional faith – that doesn't mean something that sends us into the confessional box – it means the faith we say that we believe.

And then there is functional faith. That means the belief in something that leads to action, it affects how we function

There is a famous story told to illustrate this difference. The story is based on the exploits of a famous Victorian tightrope walker who was the first to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope in 1859.

He did this repeatedly over the summer of 1859 including walking across on stilts and walking across pushing a wheelbarrow.

The story is told how he crossed with a wheel barrow then crossed back pushing the wheelbarrow with a sack of potatoes in it.

He was a great showman and then went on to say to the crowds, "You have seen me cross with a wheelbarrow, and with a wheelbarrow with a great weight in it. Do you think that I can cross pushing my wheelbarrow with a man in it?" To which the crowd all shouted that they thought he could.

“So,” he says, “who will volunteer to cross the falls in this wheelbarrow then?”

And no-one volunteered. They had confessional faith – but not functional faith

I am not entirely sure that story is true – but what is true is that he did cross the falls on a tightrope carrying his business manager, not in a wheel barrow but on his back.

His manager had seen Charles Blondin’s skill. I am sure that he talked to other people about that skill when he was trying to get bookings for him.

But his belief in Charles Blondin’s ability as a tightrope walker went beyond words. It went to a functional faith. He put that belief into practice.

False teachers it seems had been teaching that things would always go on just as they were. Jesus would not return, they said. There was no judgement coming, they said. They were probably saying that Christians could live free of the commands of God.

But that was a lie.

God’s word – the words of Jesus give the lie to such teaching.

And as God’s word shows up people’s lies – it also tells us the truth. We are told that we need to remind ourselves of the truth of God’s word. To recall it.

And then we are asked – will we live by that truth?

1<sup>st</sup> thing for us to learn – in the face of false teaching - Know the truth of God’s word & Live by the Truth

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The specific truth talked here is the return of Jesus and the coming judgement demands.

And the way to live by that truth – is that we *live holy and godly lives* (v11), it is *to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with God.* (v14)

In thinking about the return of Christ there are those – like those false teachers who Peter is talking about – who deny it entirely.

But there are also those who spend vast amounts of thought on the second coming of Christ, thinking carefully about timings and details.

When we do that we can miss the importance of the second coming for us today. It is important because the truth of that future certainty changes how we live today.

It means that today we should live holy lives.

Now the requirement for Christians to live holy lives is something that we are often nervous about speaking about from the pulpit because of a number of dangers – false teachings, even, that can result.

But it is the consistent teaching of the New Testament that Christians are called to live holy lives.

It is the consistent teaching of the whole bible that God’s people are called to be holy just as God is holy.

Let’s first think of some things that does not mean.

That does not mean that the moment you become a Christian, God recreates you in such a way that you are perfect and that you live without sin from that point onwards.

We are recreated, we are reborn – but we are reborn into a sinful world. We do still struggle with sin.

Read Romans 7 to think about that some more.

That means that if we do sin – and we do – it doesn't mean that we are not Christians.

In fact it's the opposite. The fact that we are aware of our sin shows that we have been given a new heart – a heart that is sensitive to sin just like God's heart is.

It doesn't mean that we aren't a Christian – it means that we can and do keep coming to God in repentance and with confidence of forgiveness through faith in Jesus

We will shortly come to the communion table – to remember the Lord's death. We may be here this morning sure we are saved Christians but also very aware of sin in our lives.

That can make us not want to take communion. We feel we are so unworthy. 1 Cor 11v27 tells us that we should examine our hearts. We cannot come to the table hanging on to sin in our hearts. That would be wrong. But we are told we should examine our hearts before we do come to the table together.

Our awareness of sin does not bar us from the table – it brings us to true repentance before we do come to the table. Sharing in the bread and wine is the demonstration of the forgiveness that we have for sin – not because we are worthy – but because the only worthy one – Jesus Christ shed his blood for us.

The second thing that holy living does not mean is it doesn't mean we make no effort not to sin and just expect God to do it all in us.

Here in v14 we are told to *make every effort* to be found spotless. Effort – considerable effort is required of us by God.

But on the other hand it doesn't mean that we expect to make ourselves holy by our own effort. No we are made holy by the righteousness of Christ. As we read in 1 Peter 2 – Christians are a holy nation.

We achieve holiness by faith – God calls us to live that holiness out. That needs effort on our part but it also needs what we read of in 1 Peter 1v2 – the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Sanctify is a word which just means 'make holy'. The Spirit's work is to make us holy and it is our work to live holy and the 2 go hand in hand.

The third thing that holy living does not mean is that we will attain perfect holiness in this world.

There are certain movements in the church, and have been through the past, that suggest we will become perfect in this world. Paul was correcting that thought in his letter to the Philippians.

And in John's first letter it is made plain that no-one can say that they are without sin (1 John 1v8).

There are those who think – a bit like the Pharisees in Jesus' time - that aiming to live perfect lives will speed Jesus return.

v12 does seem to say that doesn't it. But the sense in the Greek words is a sense of diligence and keen-ness. It is not that we make Jesus hurry back, but that we are diligent, eager- we are like someone hurrying towards something that we desire.

The return of Jesus will be at a time of the Lord's choosing – not ours. That is the day that we can look forward to when the work of sanctification in us will be completed.

But we are eager for it to come – we live in the light of it today – living the holy life to which we have been called – making every effort and trusting in the Lord at the same time.

2nd - Live by the truth – means Live holy

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And as the letter closes in v17– Peter says to the churches – the Lord says to us, that we already know all this.

I hope that's true – but as we have already seen we need to be reminded – we need to remind each other. What a blessing it is to be amongst believers where we can do that.

What a blessing that we can listen to the Holy Spirit reminding us through the pen of the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul and others as we read the bible

But as it says here in v17 we do need to be on our guard.

There are those people who will distort the scripture.

They will do so (v16) out of ignorance and because they are unstable.

Both of those make it sound like its no-one's fault. Being a bit unstable is not our fault is it? And we can't be blamed if we don't know something, can we?

Well, the instability talked of here means not standing firm. Not having a firm footing. It is the instability that comes from placing your feet on something that is not solid.

In spiritual terms it is the instability that comes from trusting in lies rather than the truth.

God's word is the truth and that's where we find our stability in our spiritual lives.

When we start to rely on other things, when we are seeking any kind of spiritual foundation based on anything other than God's word - then we are unstable, things will come tumbling down.

And the word that is translated 'ignorant' it doesn't just mean someone who could not be expected to know something – it has a deliberateness in its meaning – more like 'someone who refuses to learn'.

We are so blessed in having the bible in a good, straightforward English translation – many good translations.

We are blessed by having study bibles with lots of extra helps in them so we are not ignorant.

And we have the piles and piles of bible commentaries and similar books to help us understand.

Being ignorant about God's word is only because we choose to be ignorant.

So it's straightforward how to be on our guard – we make sure the foundation of our faith is nothing other than the firm foundation of God's word.

We do all we can not to be ignorant of it, so that we are not deceived by these lawless men, who distort the scriptures.

This is our last look at Peter's second letter. In my morning sermons when Richard is back I will be looking at some key Christian doctrines. So it won't be working through a book but looking at certain things that we believe as Christians and looking at God's word to see why we believe them.

We will be doing just what we have been told to do here.

But as we finish this letter we have seen that false teaching is disastrous for the church. And it is a very real danger.

As well as the lies that are told about the Lord from those who don't claim to be Christians we are warned that there are those who appear to be part of the church of Christ but are, in fact, teaching lies.

We have been told to be on our guard – to recall the study the scriptures. That is how we do not become unstable.

But also we need to live according to the truth of scripture - live godly, holy lives – making every effort but trusting in the sanctifying work of the holy Spirit.

But as we do finish off in this letter I want us to end on a positive tone.

Firstly – and just quickly - v17 might make us concerned that we can lose our secure position – our salvation. That is not what it says.

It is the same word as that '*unstable*' word in v16. The sense is not that we stop being a Christian, but that we lose our sure footing – we get all wobbly in our faith.

That is the danger when we go away from scripture – our faith is still there but we get all wobbly, leaning this way and that rather than on God's word.

So the positive thing is that if we have received a faith as precious as that of the apostles – if we are Christians - then this danger cannot be fatal for us. We are safe. The very first verse of the letter reminds us that our faith is not something that we have worked up in ourselves – but it is a gift of God.

Which is also exactly what the last verse reminds us – reminds us that it is God's grace – God's free, undeserved gift to us.

And that grace is to be found in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

If Jesus is not your Lord and saviour, then you do not have that firm foundation – you are in grave danger – fatal danger. Come and put your faith in Jesus today.

But for those of us whose faith is in the Lord Jesus, then v18 reminds us that we do not need to be fearful of the danger of false teaching,

As we hold firmly to God's word, rather than being fearful we can be confident that we will *grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.

And as we live by that truth we will bring glory to him, both now and forever.