

“15 Years from Now”

2 Peter 3:17-18

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I want you imagine with me for a minute that it is the year 2022.

That is 15 years from now.

How old will you be? (Test your mental math skills.)

Think about it, if you are in high school now you will be about 30 years old then.

- Will you be married?
- Married to someone who loves the Lord?
- Will you be active in a church where not only you, but maybe also your children are learning about Christ?
- Will you be using your money, your abilities and your energy to expand the kingdom of the Lord Jesus?
- Will you then care about such things?

If you are 35 today, just think; you'll be 50 then.

Your children will probably be out of high school or nearly so.

You'll probably be settled into your occupation or career.

- Will you still be married to the same person?
- Will your commitment to the work of the church be as great?
- Will you personally be walking with the Lord?

What about you who are around 55? You'll be about 70 then.

- Will people know you as a godly man or woman?
- Will you be an example others will look to and say, "That's what I want to be like when I'm that age?"
- Will there be about you a gentleness and wisdom of character that comes from having spent years with the Lord?

What's happened in the last 15 years?

Some of you who were high-schoolers 15 years **ago** are today married, have children of their own, are active in this church or another.

- You are teaching Sunday school, working as youth leaders, serving in inner city ministries, leading as pastors or missionaries.
- You are paying attention to your relationship to Jesus, desiring to know him better and serve him.

Others who graduated from high school 15 years ago are today about as far from Christ and his church as anyone could be.

They may be nice people but they are unconcerned about Christ and his kingdom.

In some cases they are even hostile to the claims of Christ on their lives.

What has made the difference?

15 years ago they were all in our high school student groups and claiming to be Christians.

15 years ago there were scores of 30 and 40 year olds who were active in the small groups of this church (paying attention to their relationships to Christ and his people).

Today some of you now in your late 40s and 50s are leaders in the church, happy in their marriages, successful in their ministry to others.

While others are bitter, defeated, and even bailing out on Christ and his church.

What has made the difference?

And now as I look at you and I think of the year 2022, I wonder what the next 15 years will bring?

You in high school today, you are enthused about the gospel and Christ's kingdom.

In 15 years will you be steering your life by God's Word and His desires?

You, in your 30s, will you still be faithful to your Lord, his mission, to your wife or husband?

Will you be a model for your children and an example for the men and women around you?

In the year 2022 many of you will be living your lives for the Lord, but if the past 15 years are any indicator, some of you will not.

What will make the difference?

Oh, how I wish it were possible to guarantee that every one of you who is a Christian would continue on in your relationship to Christ!

How I wish there were some automatic way, that none of us could mess up, whereby we would be certain to walk with the Lord not only for the next 15 years but until He comes again.

The Apostle Peter wrote his second letter with this concern in mind.

Look again at how he finishes the letter in 2 Peter 3:14-18:

“So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this (Christ’s return and the new heavens and earth), make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!

Peter writes I want you to stick with the Lord.

I don't want you to get bushwhacked.

I want your relationship to Jesus to get better and better.

I don't want anything to sidetrack you, to lead you away from Him.

In fact that seems to be one of the major reasons for much of the New Testament being written - to help us remain on course.

Jesus often spoke of remaining faithful.

He said there are going to be times of difficulty and therefore you should pray and not give up or back out.

The heart of the book of Hebrews was written to help people remain steadfast in their love for Christ.

In chapter 12 the author writes, "Since we are surrounded with such a great cloud of witnesses (as he described in chapter 11) let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...so that we will not grow weary and lose heart."

Now specifically in this letter, Peter is writing to help the Christian remain faithful.

Look with me at 1:10-11 "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

1:12-15 "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live...¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

3:1 "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

Then, I think, he summarizes the whole letter with these closing words in verses 17-18

"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Looking closely at those two verses you too can see the two primary things Peter says are the way to remain faithful.

Verse 17 "Be on your guard" and

Verse 18 "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ".

Here we have a negative and a positive.

We have **defensive** action to take and **offensive** action to take.

In the 17th verse we see the defensive action we are to take: We are to be "on guard".

This idea of being "on your guard" is exactly what you think it is.

It means to watch out, to be aware, to be careful.

There are things that are dangerous to your faith.

Notice what he says to "watch out" for: "the error of lawless men."

There are people out there who do not care anything about the Lord Jesus.

They don't believe whom He is and that He is coming back again.

It is their ideas that you are to guard against.

It is not that such people are always malicious, determined to ruin the faith of others.

It is as likely that they just don't believe and they offer a very different way of looking at life and living it.

I don't think a man I know well set out to destroy the faith of his wife.

But he did. The error of lawless men!

Before looking more closely at the ideas we are to guard against, I want you to see why Peter says it is so important to watch out for them:

He doesn't want us to be "carried away" and to "fall from our secure position."

Peter knows the power of lies.

Even when those who tell them don't know they are lies.

Last week I said, "Conduct follows conviction"?

What you believe determines what choices you make.

IF a kid believes the pleasure of disobedience is greater than the punishment - he'll very likely disobey.

If a married man believes that his rights and desires are more important than his marriage vows and the command of God he will probably be unfaithful sooner or later.

There are ideas that come along, masked as "truth," that will "carry you away.

Those ideas, lies that they are, take root in your mind and then in your heart until they finally convince you of action to take - they carry you away.

- Think of the issue of abortion: "It's not really a baby." "My life will be ruined."
- Think of homosexuality: "God made me this way."
- Gambling: "It's just for fun; it's entertainment."
- Giving to missions: "I can't afford it." "Missionaries live better than I do." "We ought to take care of Americans first."
- God's sovereignty – How could God allow what happened in that Baghdad orphanage this week?

The result of those lies, over time, is that you "fall from your secure position."

Does Peter mean that you lose your salvation and go to Hell?

One month ago, May 27, I preached an entire sermon attempting to answer this question – I refer you to it.

But I can summarize the point this way:

The promises of God are certain and I can stake my life and eternity on them.

But the warnings of God are also very real and I must be very careful.

If you are **not** truly a Christian, I believe this passage, and many like it, warn you clearly – you have too much knowledge of God and his grace to claim ignorance.

If you **are** a Christian, I believe this passage also warns you clearly – don't mess around with sin.

I think Peter is serious when he writes: "be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. (2 Peter 3:17)

But his deep desire is that they would continue in the faith – firmly established.

So he writes, "Be on your guard against error".

What "error" does Peter have in mind?

If we look back over this letter we will see some of the errors that he finds so dangerous to our souls.

We have looked at chapter 1, verses 12-21.

The subject was the Bible.

Peter took great pains to point out that the Scriptures are from God and are an infallible guide for life.

I don't plan to teach that portion of the letter again but it was important in Peter's day and it is still critically important to us to know and accept this Book as God's word to us.

If someone begins to believe the lie that this book is less than authoritative, his or her whole Christian faith begins to crumble.

If God has not spoken and spoken clearly to us about life and death, about forgiveness, about where we came from and where we are going, and about faith and living then we don't have any reliable truth.

There will come times in your life when you will be sorely tempted to challenge the authority of the Bible because the pain of obeying it will seem greater than you can bear.

Peter says, don't buy the lie - it is God's word, trust Him, obedience will be worth it.

Later we looked together at Chapter 2, a long section of the letter where Peter warns his readers about the lies that false teachers will introduce.

These people introduced the idea that godly living, living in compliance with God's law, is impractical and unnecessary.

It's impractical, they said, because we all sin, no big deal.

And it's unnecessary, they said, because God's grace covers all sin and it doesn't truly matter whether you obey God or not.

After all you're a Christian.

Peter says not true; obedience matters!
Citing several examples he proves that
judgment will fall on the disobedient.

Holiness is not an option for the Christian.

We will not achieve anything close to perfection this side
of heaven but we are called on by God to be moving in
the right direction.

Holiness matters.

In the same chapter Peter mentions several other "lies" that tend to "carry
people away".

In 2:14-15, he writes of "greed".

Like Balaam of the Old Testament we are tempted to barter
away a relationship with God for a few shekels.

Our jobs, our hobbies, our financial and material goals
become more important to us than Jesus and His
kingdom.

Peter in essence says, "You bought the lie" - The lie
that position and possessions in this life are worth
more than the life to come.

In verse 18 as in the first part of verse 14, Peter writes of "lust".

The lie that personal satisfaction is a right begins to take root in our
thinking.

Rationalization takes place such as thinking that "since God
made me this way, surely he means for me to be happy."

But happiness is a by-product of holiness.

And in 2:19 Peter writes of the lie of "freedom".

There is probably no lie more common in our culture than this one.

The American definition of freedom is the unrestricted right to
do whatever I choose.

That is not freedom, that is simply slavery to your own
desires and your desires will never be satisfied.

God's definition of freedom is freedom from the tyranny of yourself and the freedom to be under God's loving leadership.

Human freedom is to be what God created us to be.

The lie is that there should be no law to govern us.

But Peter says 'no law' is the worst kind of slavery.

In chapter three, which we have looked at for the past couple of weeks, Peter points out another lie that can carry us away:

It is the lie that Jesus isn't really coming back or if he is, it is so distant, it doesn't make any difference today.

How many Christians have fallen for that one.

They say they believe in the 2nd Coming of Jesus but live as if it makes no practical difference.

They've bought the lie.

The Bible says, "Be on your guard."

Watch out, be careful, be alert, and understand that there are ideas that attack your faith.

I challenge you to record a children's cartoon show, a soap opera, a teen-targeted afternoon sit-com or a prime-time drama and then sit together with friends or family members and talk about the values behind the conversation and the actions that you hear and see.

Discuss the truth that is presented.

Discuss the lies presented as truth.

I only pick on television because it is so easy to evaluate.

Peter would warn us to be on our guards everywhere: in school, in work related seminars, in what we read, in the talk shows we listen to, in everything.

You will be surprised how often the lie is appealing to some sinful desire such as greed, vengeance, pride, or lust.

Is that why Peter in his first letter said, "Abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul"?

This isn't a call for paranoia but for wisdom.

Peter not only says to take defensive action but also to take offensive action.

If you are going to remain faithful over the next 15 years and not fall from your secure position then you must also (verse 18) "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ."

Before we talk about what it is we are to grow and how we are to do it I want you to understand two assumptions Peter makes by using the word "grow".

1. Peter assumes that his readers are truly Christians and not just Christian in name.

He assumes there is spiritual "life".

And that life comes as a result of God's favor through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The second assumption Peter makes is that this life will grow.

An oak does not go from acorn to full-grown tree in a flash.

Spiritual growth does not happen overnight through some secret experience that a person discovers at a special meeting.

Spiritual growth is a process over a lifetime.

Do we want to remain faithful 15 years from now?

Then we are talking about this year, next year, and each of the 15 years.

What is it we are to grow in?

We are to grow in "The grace and knowledge of our Lord"

What does it mean to "grow in grace"?

In the first verse of the first chapter Peter writes that the relationship we have with God is by God's grace.

We "received" his grace, as a gift.

We didn't earn it. We didn't deserve it.

God brought us to himself and then in v 3 Peter writes that God "gave" us everything we need for life and godliness.

The apostle Paul speaks to the same issue in Romans 5:1-2

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have

peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace **in which we now stand**.

When we trust in Jesus as Saving-Lord we are placed within God's grace. And in that new place we are privileged to grow - to experience that grace more and more - to have a growing understanding of all his love and promises toward us who are his.

Peter says I want you to grow in that awareness of God's favor.

I want you to be more and more convinced of his love.

I want you to revel in it and respond to it.

What does it mean to "grow in the knowledge of our Lord"?

I believe that in this context it means that we are to increase in our understanding and acceptance of the truth about Jesus.

I believe it is truth-knowledge he has in mind here because it is in contrast with the error he mentions in verse 17.

Peter wants them to be so knowledgeable about and convinced of the truths about Jesus and our relationship to him that it governs every aspect of our lives.

What knowledge did Peter emphasize in this letter?

In chapter one, as we have already seen, he emphasizes that we belong to God by God's grace.

He also emphasizes that God has provided us with everything we need to grow in life. He has provided the food for us to grow, it is for us to respond.

Also in chapter one he emphasizes that we have been given the sure word of God in the Bible. We can trust it.

In chapter two he makes it very clear that disregard for God will be punished forever but that God will rescue those who are trusting in Him.

In chapter three he emphasizes the truth that Jesus is definitely coming again.

This present earth will be dissolved and a new earth will be formed.

Those who are trusting in Christ will spend eternity with Him on the new earth.

Trusting in Christ does make a difference.

And how do we grow in this relationship with Christ and in this knowledge of Him?

Through his Word - the Bible.

These are not simply religious words on paper - they are the very words of God - his promises for us and his gracious will for us - written for us to study and obey.

All the way through the letter Peter mentions the Bible:

- Early in his letter 1:7 Peter mentions the "precious promises" that God has given us. These promises recorded in the Bible.
- Late in the first chapter he mentions the words of the prophets and the apostles as the very word of God to us.
- And then in the text we are studying today, he speaks of Paul's letters as the authoritative Word of God (vs. 15-16).

We grow in the knowledge of our Lord through His Word.

I know this is something you have heard time and time again but here it is again.

If we want to be men and women who do not fall from our secure position, if we want to be faithful to Jesus 15 years from now and a lifetime from now there is no substitute for the Bible.

Read it, study it, meditate on it, talk about it, and practice it.

3500 years ago Joshua said:

Joshua 1:8 "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

3000 years ago King David said:

Psalm 119:11 "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

2000 years ago the Apostle Paul:

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...

I don't mean to embarrass them but I want to tell you about three men I know quite well - Bob Wilbraham, Jim Means and Tom Bayless.

One thing I know from listening to them and watching them is how much the Word of God shapes their thinking, their speech and their actions.

Have nearly any discussion with those men and you will hear Scripture verses and ideas.

The Bible has shaped their values, it informs their thinking, and it guides their actions.

What kind of man or woman do you want to be in 15 years?

2 Peter 3:17-18 "Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!