

Reminders

2 Peter 3:1-9

How many of you need reminders? Reminders about birthdays and anniversaries. Reminders about appointments. About meetings. About jobs and chores you have agreed to do.

Husbands, do you ever need reminders about something you promised to do? Children, do you ever need reminders about something that you were asked to do? Wives, do you ever need reminders about something you agreed to do?

I suspect everyone of you would answer yes. We all need them, don't we? Sometimes because of our own sinful laziness, we forget. Sometimes, it's just because of the weakness of our human frailty, due to the infirmities of older age or the struggles of too little sleep. But whatever the reason, forgetfulness is part of our human condition.

But reminders are hard to give. After all, if those reminders take the form of nagging, they usually have the opposite effect of what was intended. We get defensive. We get angry. And we continue in our forgetfulness.

But reminders can be a very good thing. We can program our computers to print up daily reminders, or utilize some sort of written calendar. We can write notes to ourselves, or to others. And the dentist and doctor's office surely do well to give us a phone call to remind us of an upcoming appointment, which had been scheduled six months earlier.

In one sense, God gives us a weekly reminder of his place in our lives, a weekly reminder of the truths of the gospel and of the call to godly living. It's called the sabbath day, and what a helpful

reminder it is, freeing us from the normal affairs of the other six days so that we might fix our hearts more completely upon Him.

And God also calls us to a daily reminder, for a day is the most basic unit of our lives. A day is the most fundamental distinction in our lives. And we are called to have a daily reminder of his grace. A daily fellowship, centered on prayer and reading the Bible.

Peter is well aware of that need, and tells us in those very words that,

I. THE BIBLE IS A BOOK OF REMINDERS.

v.1-2

Peter identifies this book as his second letter to them, which seems quite obviously to refer to First Peter as the first book to them. Amazingly, commentators actually debate the identity of that first book, filling the pages of many books with useless speculation.

Peter knows that he is writing Scripture, and he knows that he is writing for the spiritual edification of the people, to remind them about the ways of God. And he does so with great love and compassion, addressing them as "beloved." There is no nagging here. No belittling. No pride or arrogance. Just a loving reminder. First of all,

A. A reminder to stimulate wholesome thinking.

v.1

Wholesome means pure, unmixed, sincere. The reference is to ethical purity and moral excellence. The Bible should stimulate such good thinking!

And we need that stimulation, for the world in which we live is filled with unwholesome thoughts, to say the very least. We need the frequent and even constant reminder of Paul in,

Phil. 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things.”

Let your mind dwell on these things! Wholesome thinking. Thinking built upon common sense. Thinking prompted by the mental alertness to discern truth from error, good from evil, righteous from wicked.

In the world in which we live, with all its pollution which filters into our minds, this exhortation is essential. And necessary to be repeated. Often! As Calvin says, with such pointed humility, “the laziness of the flesh smothers doctrine once it is accepted and makes it ineffective unless the urge of admonitions comes to its aid...It is due to our laziness that our minds sometimes get rusty or are clouded by darkness.”

I have like several books by Os Guinness, especially a book entitled “Fit Bodies, Fat Minds.” The basic subject of that book is to demonstrate how lazy and unfit our minds really are. Our society devotes itself to physical training and bodily discipline, but we leave our minds to linger in laziness.

We need the Bible to stimulate wholesome thinking, to transform our minds. To change the way that we think, and therefore, the way that we act.

Paul describes the war that is necessary in order to change

the way that we think, writing in,

2Cor. 10:4 “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”

Our calling as Christians is to “take captive every thought.” To transform every aspect of the way we think, how we think, and what we think about. And to accomplish that, we need to be stirred up out of our mental laziness.

The Bible should make you think. And every time you read it, it should make you think. And when you hear something from me that goes against your way of thinking, search the Bible. Study more deeply. Let the Scripture be a stimulation to wholesome thinking. Let yourselves, and your own mind, be changed!

In that exhortation to wholesome thinking, in that reminder, Paul reinforces to us that the Bible is the word of God. And so we have,

B. A reminder of God’s own authority.

In my preaching, I can’t give you that reminder often enough. This is the word of God, and my job is to expound it, explain it, and apply it. But to expound, explain and apply it alone. Not to insert my own ideas and thoughts. So everything I preach must be grounded in the pages of Scripture.

For the Bible comes to us with God’s authority, as a reminder of that authority. Notice how Peter describes it.

v.2

Peter is making a direct reference to two things. One, the words spoken in the past by the prophets. The holy prophets, an obvious identification of true prophets. Those who belong to God. Those who speak for God. Specifically, his reference is to the prophets of the Old Testament, those also referred to in,

Heb.1:1 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.”

In the past, in the previous covenant, God spoke through the holy prophets, who produced what Peter has called the prophetic word, or the word of the words. And we studied what he said about that word in,

2Pet. 1:19 “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

The prophets were men who spoke from God, men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit, whose words were God-breathed. Those words of the prophets were the words of God.

Peter also refers here to the word of the apostles, those entrusted by Jesus Christ to bear witness and testify to his life. And so we read in,

v.2

Peter does something astounding there. He equates the writings of the NT apostles with the writings of the OT prophets. They are on equal footing, with equal authority. He even know of his own authority, obviously identifying himself among the group he calls “the apostles.”

He writes to remind the people of the command given by our Lord and Savior. The whole of the gospel can be summarized by that phrase, and we studied a good cross reference last week,

2 Peter 2:21 “For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.”

The holy commandment is the fullness of the gospel, the whole counsel of God. And that commandment was given by our Lord and Savior through the apostles, the men who became the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ.

The point is that both the Old and New Testaments have been written by God’s own authority. Both the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, in only infallible rule of faith and practice, as every OPC Pastor and Ruling Elder is required to vow.

The Bible is a reminder that God speaks to us with authority. And so, Peter says, I want you to recall the words of Scripture. I want you to recall and remember what is written down.

We need that reminder, for not one of us can recall all of what is in the Bible. Some of us could probably recall very little, if anything. Why is it that so many Christians today remain biblically illiterate? Why do so many Christians really have no idea of what’s in the Bible?

Because they ignored the reminders! They didn’t read what the prophets and apostles have said.

v.1-2

There is a good reason why we need to heed that reminder,

and that is the reason for much of what Peter actually writes. The simple reality is that,

II. MANY WILL ATTACK THE TRUTHFULNESS OF WHAT GOD HAS SAID IN THE BIBLE.

Many will attack the words of God himself. Peter calls them scoffers, and for emphasis in the pattern of Hebrew grammar, he uses that word twice. Scoffers will come scoffing.

v.3

A scoffer is one who mocks God, making fun of him and his word through mockery. Not just frivolous irreverence, as bad as that would be. But mockery. Scornful and deliberate rejection of all that God says. Willful contempt for God and his Word.

There will be such scoffers. Peter promises. And he says that understanding that is of first importance. He stresses the primary importance of what he is about to teach. And the opposition of those scoffers is a sure mark of the last days.

v.3

Don't be confused by that reference to the last days, for the Bible uses that identification to define the time period between Jesus' first coming and his second. The last days began with Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, and they will, of course, end with his coming again in glory.

The clearest cross reference is,

Heb.1:1 "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."

The past is the OT past. These last days is a description of

the era inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

v.3 "...scoffers will come in the last days."

And what are their motives? Their methods?

v.3b "...scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts."

Scoffers will come, scoffing! They will be following their own evil desires, their own lusts.

A. Their motives are sensual.

We studied a detailed description of them last week.

2Pet. 2:17 "These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error."

Those who attack the truthfulness of what God has said in the Bible live according to their own pleasures, and that's really why they are attacking the truthfulness of what God has said in the Bible.

They don't want to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions. They don't want to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. They want to indulge their flesh in whatever they choose to do. With no one in authority over them to tell them not to.

Many attack the truthfulness of what God has said in the Bible because they love their sins! They love their wickedness. They do not intend to give up their disobedience.

And in that stubbornness,

B. Their accusations are willfully ignorant.

That is, they deliberately forget things they want to ignore.

Selective memory, we call it when our people play this game. How frustrating it is to hear testimony in court or in congressional hearings, “I don’t recall.” “I don’t remember.” There is every sense of willful forgetfulness. Willful ignorance, often even later confessed.

Notice how Peter describes that willful ignorance. He uses the example of the promise of the second coming, a promise the false teachers are attacking.

v.4

In other words, they say in their obstinacy, that everything continues to go on just like it has since the beginning of the world. The coming of Christ has not made any difference, particularly in respect to death and dying. The gospel is therefore irrelevant. “Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” Nothing has changed. Therefore, they arrogantly deny that the judgment day will come.

And they attack the truthfulness of God’s promise.

How does Peter evaluate those scoffers? He condemns their intentional ignorance.

v.5-6

They deliberately forgot one thing. The flood. The universal judgment of God upon the sinfulness of man. Things haven’t been the same since creation. The waters of creation became the waters of judgment. The world of that day was deluged and destroyed.

And the point? Just as the waters of the flood came in judgment, so, too, the promised judgment at the end of the age will come as well, a judgment Peter defines in,
v.7

Such willful ignorance! So common with those who attack the truthfulness of what God has said in the Bible. So what must we believe about the future judgment? What must we about the second coming of Jesus?

Well, as a matter of principle, to silence the scoffers’ foolishness,

III. WE MUST BELIEVE WHAT GOD HAS SAID ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THIS PRESENT AGE.

And God has spoken. This present age, which began with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, will come to an end. Peter speaks of the present heavens and earth in verse 7, and tells us what is in store.

A. The present age is being held for the day of judgment.
v.7

By God’s word, this world was created. God made all things out of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good. God spoke, and the world came into being.

And by that same word, God will speak again, and judgment will come. By that same word, “the heavens and the earth which are now preserved... are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

Those words correspond to how we’ve seen Peter describe the judgment of the fallen angels,

2Pet. 2:4 “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”

That idea is the main thrust of this book of reminders, as he defines it in,

2 Peter 2:9 “...then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”

The unrighteous are being held for the day of judgment. They are in jail, arrested and indicted. Awaiting only the sure certainty of their sentencing before the judge.

That sentencing will come, Peter says, it will come on the day of judgment. And that day will be a day of “perdition of ungodly men.”

The present heavens and earth will be destroyed. Peter will explain that further,

2Pet. 3:10 “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

That destruction will be the final act of God’s judgment, for we know that that day will also usher in the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal state in which God will dwell with his people for ever and ever, such as we read in,

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem,

coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

People of God, know “that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,” but don’t be persuaded by their foolishness. The present age is being held for the day of judgment, and,

B. That day of judgment has been delayed only because God is longsuffering.

v.8-9

It’s amazing, how people blaspheme God for his attributes of goodness and mercy. They say, “Where is this coming he promised?” They attack and deny the truthfulness of that promise. They call into question God’s own justice and authority. And they do it because they haven’t seen God’s judgment yet.

But the reason that they haven’t seen God’s judgment yet is because God is gracious and longsuffering.

These are astounding words, even very troubling words for people whose theology about God’s election and predestination has gone a little extreme. Some people so emphasize God’s sovereignty in election that they can’t accept these words which describe the very inclination of God’s mind,

God is not “willing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Those words cannot refer to the sure and certain purpose of God’s own eternal decree, by which he brings all things to pass according to the counsel of his will. Certainly I believe that God has predestined and elected those who will be saved unto eternal life. That is a core doctrine which governs so much of my thinking and preaching. But that cannot stop you from understanding the nature of God from this verse.

These words describe the compassion of God. The eagerness and joyfulness of God in bringing salvation. Indeed, the pleasure of God in bringing the wicked unto repentance. Peter’s obvious point is that God is longsuffering. God is patient.

Why hasn’t the day of judgment come yet? Because God, in his forbearance, in his longsuffering compassion, is still bringing his people unto salvation. He is still saving people from their sins. And in that patience, we can understand that “this is his wondrous love towards the human race, that he desires all men to be saved, and is prepared to bring even the perishing to safety. We must notice the order, that God is prepared to receive all men into repentance, so that none may perish.” Those are the words of no less an authority on reformed theology than John Calvin.

“This is his wondrous love towards the human race, that he desires all men to be saved.”

Calvin goes on to say that, “It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? My reply is that no mention is made here of the secret decree of God

by which the wicked are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his loving-kindness as it is made known to us in the gospel.”

And actually, the God of the NT gospel is also the God of the OT, for we read of the same lovingkindness in the OT. Especially,

Ezek. 18:21 “But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 "None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. 23 "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"

Why has the day of judgment been delayed? Not because God has been slow in keeping his promise. Not because he is powerless to bring about the judgment he threatened. But because of his lovingkindness. The work of salvation is not yet done. God is longsuffering. For he is not wanting anyone to perish.

He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and so in his longsuffering, he proclaims the gospel to them, “Repent and live.” And so we read of this compassionate appeal from God in,

Ezek. 18:30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31 "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

The message for us today is clear. It is the same. The judgment will come. Therefore repent. Turn away from all your offenses. That's the message of evangelism we must proclaim, a message which has at its root the very nature of God's goodness, expressed in his own words, "For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" It is the message I declare to you this morning.

And people of God, you who believe, come to know this God whom you love, the God who has loved you. Come to know the nature of his patient longsuffering, his forbearance, and the kindness that leads to repentance. And love him all the more for it, even as you proclaim the gospel to the lost.