

Gospel Amnesia
 2 Peter 1:10-15
 Michael Felkins
 Grand Avenue Baptist Church
 Ames, Iowa
 Oct. 18, 2020

Amnesia is a very distressing experience. Those who have amnesia forget what they have done, or things said to them, or things they have even said themselves. Often people with amnesia struggle to retain the new information they have learned. While everyone has mild lapses of memory, clinically diagnosed amnesia is very distressing for a person and their family.

If you have a family member who has had Alzheimer's, you have been around someone who has a form of amnesia. People who have Alzheimer's will forget who they are and even forget their closest loved ones. It is difficult to watch a loved one with Alzheimer's lose their most cherished memories. We should pray for people we know who suffer from Alzheimer's and dementia. We should pray for their family members too.

The Apostle Peter wrote to Christians with bad memories. They were beginning to forget the truth of the gospel, and they were not striving to remember the gospel. These people were in danger of the condition called gospel-amnesia.

The Apostle Peter knew that we are all prone to gospel-amnesia. So, in vv. 10-15, he stresses the importance of remembering the gospel.

I am going to break our text down into two sections. Verses 10-12: remembering establishes our minds in the truth of the gospel and vv. 13-15: remembering stirs our passions for the truth of the gospel.

I. Remembering establishes our minds in the truth of the gospel (vv. 9-12)

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities¹ you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.

I want you to notice three truths in vv. 10-12 that establish and strengthen us when we put a priority on remembering the gospel.

The first truth is in v. 10: The diligence of remembering strengthens our assurance of salvation. I am going to pick up v. 9 to help us get the flow of Peter's thought:

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

When Peter says, "brothers," he is using a term of endearment. Also, brothers, in the Greek, is a generic term for "brothers and sisters," or it can be translated "friends."

Next, Peter says, "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election." Peter gives a command in this phrase. He is stressing how important it is for us to make sure we are saved.

To "confirm your calling and election" flows from his train of thought in v. 9, where he tells us not to forget that we have been cleansed by Jesus from our past sins. He says to forget is the same thing as being blind.

So, in v. 10, he uses the Greek language of command to stress his point. To confirm means to make certain. Peter commands us to be diligent to make certain we are saved. He is not calling us to doubt our salvation. He is calling us to do the exact opposite. He wants us to have assurance of our salvation, and the way to do that is to understand the work that Jesus did in order to pay for our sins and purchase our forgiveness of sin.

One of the dangers described in vv. 8-9 is not that you make it to heaven and not have any rewards but that you might not make it to heaven at all. You see, failure to be diligent in making certain of our calling and election may mean we are not saved at all.² Making certain of our calling and election means we are living in the universe of the gospel.

¹ "These Qualities" refer to grace-driven efforts described in vv. 5-7. Peter refers to "these qualities" four times in chapter one.

² John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/confirm-your-election>.

So, Peter commands us to engage our minds with the facts of the gospel. He does not command us to base our salvation on our emotions. Our assurance of salvation is not strengthened when we “feel” like we are saved. It is not strengthened when we say, “I feel like a Christian” or “I feel like I am saved.”

Emotions are not sources of truth. Our emotions are highly unreliable because they are influenced by all sorts of things like diet, illness, external circumstances like relationships with friends, family, work, and medication. Furthermore, successes and failures in life will cause our emotions to rise and fall, and with these experiences, we may feel like God loves us or hates us. Bottom line: emotions are not a source of truth, nor do they strengthen the assurance of your salvation.

So, to strengthen our assurance, Peter points us to facts, not feelings. He points us to the work of the gospel. He commands us not to forget how our sins are forgiven.

The forgiveness of our sin is only possible because Jesus came and lived the perfect life we should have lived and was crucified on the cross as our substitute in our place in order to pay the penalty for our sin. Then He was buried in a tomb and rose from the dead three days later. By this, Jesus paid for our sins on the cross.

Our response to what Jesus has done for us is to place our faith in Him as our Lord and Savior. We do this when we turn from our sin of living for our own purposes and turn to Christ. The Bible calls our turning from sin to Jesus: repentance and faith. By remembering the facts of the gospel, we remember that we have been cleansed from our former sins.

Then in v. 10, he commands us to confirm our calling and our election. We confirm our calling and election NOT by asking the question: “Am I called and elected to salvation?”

We confirm our calling and election by examining the work of the gospel in our lives. Verses 8-9 tells us to examine our lives to see if these qualities listed in vv. 5-7 in our lives. The qualities listed vv. 5-7 are the work of the fruit of the gospel in our lives.

The person who confirms his or her calling and election does so not by examining his or her feelings but by examining the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Only those who love Jesus care about their calling and election. It is a mark of salvation to confirm your calling and election.

So, when you examine your calling and election to salvation, and you find these qualities of grace-driven effort in your life, your assurance will be strengthened, and you will be established in the work of the gospel in your life.

The second truth is in the last part of v. 10: The diligence of remembering guards you from false doctrine

For if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Then notice what Peter says at the end of v. 10, “if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.” We know what “these qualities” are. They are the grace-driven efforts from vv. 5-7.

However, what does he mean by “you will never fall.” He does not mean practice makes perfect. He does not mean you will never sin. What he does mean is that you will not fall into the ditch of false teaching. In other words, when you are grounded in the truth of the gospel, and you hear false teaching, you will not be fooled by it. You are able to identify bad doctrine, and so you are not tempted to believe it.

We have a problem in evangelical churches today. Many so-called “Evangelical Christians” do not hold fast to the truth of God’s word. Consider this national survey conducted by Dr. Stephen Nichols. Dr. Nichols is the president of Reformation Bible College in Orlando, Florida, and Chief Academic Officer at Ligonier Ministries. These results are disturbing.

- (1) 32% of evangelical Christians said that people are good by nature. This doctrine is not taught in Scripture.
- (2) 36% of evangelical Christians said the Holy Spirit is a force. This doctrine is not taught in Scripture.
- (3) 14% of evangelical Christians said there were not sure if Jesus was God. The truth is this doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture.
- (4) One last stat: 46% of evangelical Christians believe that God accepts the worship of all religions. In other words, God accepts Judaism and Islam, just like He accepts Christianity.³ Jesus said that He is the Way and Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except by Him. He is the only way and the only one we may worship. God does not accept worship from other religions as valid.

Friends, Christians are learning false doctrine somewhere. Either from false teachers or from being too lazy to read God’s word or both. Bottom line: Many “evangelical Christians” have drunk the Kool-Aid of cults and false teachers. Peter warned us that false teachers and their false teaching would eventually invade the church, and that day is already here.

Brothers and sisters, the diligence of remembering the truth will guard us from false teachers and their false doctrine.

³ <https://worldandeverything.org/2020/09/taking-the-churchs-theological-temperature/>.

Capital One has the catchy commercial that ends with, “What’s in your wallet? The fact is, who cares what’s in your wallet. Your wallet will not get you to heaven. The most important question is, what is in your heart and mind? Are you investing in truth or lies? What are you putting in your mind?”

The third truth is found in v. 11: The diligence of remembering provides us with a triumphant reward

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I think many of us live our Christian lives believing that Jesus simply puts up with us. We believe He rolls His eyes when He sees how we live and the sins we commit. Many of us believe that Jesus simply shakes His heads and thinks, “If he makes it to heaven, it will be by the skin of his teeth.”

Verse 11 teaches us that Jesus does not simply put up with us. Jesus does not want us to barely make it to heaven. Instead, His aim is for us to make a triumphal entry into Heaven.

You may ask: How can this happen? Well, His plan and aim for us are not hidden. There is no guesswork for us to make a triumphal entrance into Heaven. Peter tells us in v. 11, “For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

When he says “in this way,” he means in this manner or by means of these qualities and by confirming your calling and election. In other words, when you keep remembering the truth of the gospel and are strengthened by it, you will make it to the end and not just barely make it, but there will be a triumphal entry into God’s kingdom for you.

Peter drives home our point in v. 12:

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.

Oh, brother and sister, don’t allow gospel-amnesia allow you to forget these truths. Don’t allow gospel-amnesia to allow you to forget how you were cleansed of your sin. Don’t allow gospel-amnesia to cause you to forget the truth of God’s word and fall prey to false teachers. Don’t allow gospel-amnesia to allow you to believe Jesus simply puts up with you. Don’t allow gospel-amnesia to keep you from living out the means of grace that Jesus purchased for you on the cross. Our greatest need is to remember, remember, remember so that our minds will be established in the truth of the gospel.

II. Remembering stirs our passion for the gospel (vv. 13-15)

¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Remember what Peter said in v. 12: He intended to remind us so that we will know the truth of these qualities and be established in them. In other words, he has deposited the truth in our minds, and now he needs to stir that truth up in our hearts.

Think about it this way. Do any of you like chocolate milk? My son Mac loves chocolate milk. I used to make him a large glass every morning before he went to school. He liked to drink the Hershey® chocolate syrup brand, where you squeeze the chocolate into the milk.

If you have ever drunk that kind of chocolate milk, you know how it works. You squeeze it into a glass of milk, and when you look at the glass, it is just sitting there at the bottom of the glass. It is not chocolate milk until it is stirred up. You must take the spoon and stir it up really good. You stir it up until the milk becomes dark, chocolatey, and delicious.

This is what Peter is doing with the gospel. It is not enough to just pour the truth into our minds. We need that, but the Holy Spirit must take the truth of God and stir it up in our lives until we begin to look like Jesus. If the truth is not stirred up in our lives, we are like that glass of milk with truth just sitting at the bottom and making no change in our lives. We need the Spirit of God to take the word of God and stir it into our lives. This is best done in the context of the people of God (the local church).

When the Spirit of God stirs the powerful truth of God into our lives, it changes us in many ways. I want to point you to two of the ways truth stirred into our lives impacts us.

First, the Ministry of Remembrance in vv. 12-13.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder.

One of the important callings of a Bible teacher, a parent, an elder, or anyone else who wants to serve is the ministry of reminding. If you are a parent, a teacher, an aunt or uncle, or someone who works with children, you know that often what you are doing is repeating the same things over and over.

One of my main responsibilities as a pastor is the ministry of reminding. Sometimes I feel like I say the same things over and over. However, the ministry of repetition is no small task. Repetition is one of the means God uses to get truth deep into your heart.

I've told you this story before, but when I was in high school, we had a really good football team. My coach is in the Mississippi High School Football Coaches Hall of Fame for winning a lot of games and lots of state championships.

Do you know what one of the keys to his success was—repetition. When we came to practice, we worked on fundamentals every day. We worked on our steps in order to block the defense. We worked on lining up correctly and not jumping offsides. We worked on where to go and when to be where we were supposed to be. Over and over and over, we practiced the same plays day in day out, and it resulted in four conference titles and 88 wins and 3 losses. Now here is the kicker, I still remember the plays and how to move my feet to make the correct blocks. I still remember our defensive schemes and how to tackle. They are imprinted on my brain.

This is how we want the truth of God's word to be in our minds. We need the ministry of remembrance to help us imprint on our brains the truth of the gospel. We need it to sink deep in our hearts so that when hard times come, or false teaching comes, our minds default to truth.

The second truth we find is in vv. 14-15: Remembering the gospel prepares you to die

Since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Now Peter concludes his point and considers the conclusion of his life. The aim of Peter's life has been to get the church to look back at what Jesus has done so they will be prepared for Jesus' return.

Peter's ministerial aim is to remind us of the person and work of Jesus Christ so we will not be led astray by false teachers who water down the gospel, assume the gospel, add to the gospel, ignore the gospel, and/or forget the gospel. He wants us to finish our race well. He wants us to die well and point others to Jesus as we face our deaths.

Listen to what he said in 2 Peter 3:17-18:

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Peter desires that we finish our lives remaining firmly grounded and established in the truth of God's word. It does not matter how you start. It matters how you finish. Beginning well does not mean you will end well. Christian history is filled with men and women who started well but did not finish well.

Peter didn't necessarily begin well, but he finished well. He made plenty of mistakes as a disciple. He played the role of Satan to Jesus. Also, just before Jesus was crucified, he denied he knew Jesus three times. Peter did not start well, but he finished well.

Jesus did not give up on Peter. Jesus restored him, and he became the leader of the apostles and the early church. Now, as he looks back on his life, he knows he is about to die. He writes the letter of 2 Peter from prison. He is probably only days or weeks away from being crucified upside down on a cross. Yet, he is not fretting or overcome by fear or grief. He is established in the truth to the point that his concern is not for himself but for the church to whom he was writing and also to churches that would follow after his death.

So, beginning poorly doesn't mean you will finish poorly. Most of us have started poorly. Most of us have stumbled in our faith. Some of us have struggled with sin and rebellion, but Jesus has picked us up and put us back on the gospel-road many times. The Apostle Peter knows all too well what it is like to start poorly, deny Jesus, and humbly return to Jesus in faith and repentance and finish the race well.

Many of you know the story of John Newton, who wrote probably the most well-known and famous hymn in the history of the world—Amazing Grace.

John Newton's life did not begin well. When he was a young man, he lived a life of debauchery. His father took him to sea when he was nine years old. He worked on slave trading ships for twenty years. Then he was twenty-nine years old when a storm at sea ripped through the ship he was on and sunk it. Newton survived by clinging to a piece of driftwood. In his despair, he cried out to the Lord for salvation,, and the Lord heard his prayer. He was miraculously and gloriously saved.

Many years later, on New Year's Day, 1772, Newton was reflecting on his faith. He was examining his life. He was looking for these qualities in his life, and he saw them. As a result of seeing how God's grace had transformed his life, he wrote the hymn Faith's Review and Expectation. We know the hymn as Amazing Grace.

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That sav'd a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the vail,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call'd me here below,
Will be forever mine.⁴

⁴ <https://clatterymachinery.wordpress.com/2006/11/23/faiths-review-and-expectation-by-john-newton-amazing-grace-that-is/>.