

## ***"Forewarned Is To Be Forearmed"***

### **Holiness**

2 Peter 3:17

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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**Bruce:** Don, let's go into the presence of the Lord and know that He is God. *(Music.)*

Lord, it is well with our soul because of Your grace. Not that we consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy comes from You. Lord Jesus, we pray that once again You'd be pleased to open our eyes, that we might see You more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen and Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

Continuing our study of the book of 2 Peter, which is the theme of holiness, coming to the conclusion of this book—we'll probably have one or two more sessions on this. And then talking with Bishop Rodgers last week, I think he made a great suggestion. We'll start studying the book of Galatians. Martin Luther said it was the most important epistle in all the Scripture because it dealt with license versus liberty versus legalism. And so we'll begin the study of the wonderful book of Galatians after we finish 2 Peter.

Let's turn in our Bibles, please, to 2 Peter chapter 3, looking at one verse as sort of a summary of what we've learned so far in 2 Peter 1, 2 and 3.

Peter writes this near the conclusion of his letter in verse 17. *"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless men, and lose your own stability."* May God be pleased to teach us what that means today for His glory.

Have any of you ever been out in the woods on a hiking trip and come across a rattlesnake? What's the first thing you see or hear? *(One of the men makes a hissing sound.)* It's a rattle. Now what's the purpose of the rattle?

**Men:** A warning.

**Bruce:** To give you a warning. Now the snake doesn't know that. But he's diminishing his own ability to harm somebody because he's giving you a forewarning.

Now that's what Peter is doing now in this verse. He's basically giving us a rattle, saying, "Look! To be forewarned is to be forearmed." And when you and I are out in the woods and we hear a rattlesnake, that rattle forewarns us so that we are forearmed. And now we know how to respond, and we respond by doing what?

**Participant:** Running.

**Bruce:** Running—getting away from the situation. Now essentially that's what Peter does in this verse. He says, "Beware, so that you're not taken in by these lawless men and lose your stability." He's basically saying that they've given us certain rattles to get our attention. And that's what we want to talk about today as a matter of review about what we've learned in 2 Peter chapters 1, 2 and 3. These are going to be the rattles that Peter warned us about so that we will not lose our stability. So in essence we will be forewarned so that we will be forearmed. And once you're warned, you'll know how to respond.

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So take a look at your notes if you have your handouts, please. And the principle is this. The thesis of this proposition that Peter is going to teach us in verse 17 of chapter 3 of 2 Peter is that to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Now I've set before you a whole summary of verses in 1 Peter. And 2 Peter chapters 1, 2 and 3 are the rattles where Peter is saying, "Look! Be cautious when you hear these rattles." Be forewarned because you will be forearmed and know how to respond. So let's take a look at these forewarnings so that we can know our forearming.

Now these are some of the symptoms that I've written for you that are a summary of what we've been learning over the past several months. These are symptoms of these lawless men who will lead us astray unless we're cautious and not aware of the rattles that we hear.

First of all, #1 would be this in chapter 2, verse 1. You've got to watch out for destructive heresies. *Watch out for destructive heresies.* Peter warns us about these obvious teachings that contradict the Bible. Essentially, a false teacher would say, "I don't believe the Bible." And when they begin to say that, they are saying that Jesus is not God. And so we have to be very, very discerning, friends. When you hear a lot of things down the Christian pike, there is a lot of stuff that may be damaging heresies—destructive heresies, because they are designed to lead you astray, and you've got to be discerning. And the basic premise is this. They do not believe the Scripture, that the Scripture is sufficient. And the battleground is the sufficiency of the Scripture. Be careful about destructive heresies. They're very popular. They teach what people want to hear, but not what they need to hear. #1: destructive heresies.

Secondly, #2 would be *greedy exploitations* in 2 Peter chapter 2. These are masters of manipulation to get you to support their work. They'll do all sorts of things to play upon your emotions, your feelings, to get you to feel sorry for them, or whatever it may be. They are masters of exploitation to get you to support their work. That's a symptom of one of the rattles that you've got to be careful of.

#3 would be *irreverent speech*. Now I put this in because Peter talks about it in chapter 2, verse 10.

**Transcriber's Note:** 2 Peter 3:10. *"They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries."*

**Bruce:** They make fun of spiritual realities through irreverence. Now Jesus taught, *"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* You can listen to people and how they talk and you'll know just as much about them as you will anything about their actions and the way they live their lives.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Listen to their words.

**Participant:** That's right.

**Bruce:** Because the words are the overflow of their heart. When these false teachers come down the Christian pike and start saying irreverent things by making fun of Biblical truth, that's a sign that something is wrong in their heart. We've got to be very discerning about that. They will take Biblical realities and then they'll make fun of them in order to get people to have a good response. It's what I would call irreverent speech. It takes

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many, many forms. And you and I have to be very discerning about that, because in the midst of the proclamation of a supposed Biblical truth they'll be making these irreverent references to Biblical truths that hinder us in our steadfastness. Yes, Ted?

**Ted:** Could I ask you to give some examples of that?

**Bruce:** Well—

**Ted:** Just the first thing that comes to mind.

**Bruce:** I would say that we just have to be cautious. I mean, I used to do this myself. And I would refer to the Lord Jesus Christ as "the big Pirate in the sky." Now I'm not saying it's that bad. But it's a symptom of something. I'm just saying, why not call Him the Lord Jesus Christ? Why is it that they don't say that? It's because they're wanting to get a right response from the audience to make it well received.

Now that may not be the clearest example, but I was guilty of that for years. When I was with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes I used all this athletic terminology to impress people with my theological knowledge, and all I was doing was exposing my ignorance, because it was irreverent speech about Biblical realities. So I think that we have to be very discerning about that, about irreverent speech and how they take these Biblical truths and make light of them. You don't make light of the gospel of Christ! How can you make light of the cross? You don't make light of that! That's a serious thing, folks! Yes, Don?

**Don:** I remember—and this may have been ten or twenty years ago, and you've referred to this too. The National Association of Religious Broadcasters had all of these plaques or whatever, saying, "This blood's for you," and all this kind of thing just to be cute.

**Bruce:** Absolutely. Yes, Don is referring to several years ago at the Christian Booksellers Convention, when I was the chairman of the board of Sola Deo Gloria Publishing, where we were publishing all the great Reformed works, when my friend Don Kistler and I edited together, along with John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul.

One day we were walking through what I would call the money changers in the temple. They had the cross, and on the cross they had printed, "Wash your sins away." So you buy this soap, hang it on your shower head, and you'll wash your sins away. They had other things such as New Testaments—mints for your mouth. (*Laughter.*) New Testaments, Old Testaments. They had other things. They had a picture of a man, a big behemoth of a guy doing a push-up with a cross on his back. It said, "Do one more for Jesus," a tee shirt.

Now we walked through that, my friends and I, and we just began looking and we said, "This is kind of like the money changers in the temple!" They were making irreverent references to that which is Biblical and holy. We just have to be careful. I was really very shocked at how there was so much of this triviality at the Christian Booksellers Convention. Yes, Ted?

**Ted:** There is a lot of irreverence in modern worship.

**Bruce:** Absolutely.

**Ted:** People come into church with a coffee cup in their hands. They're standing before a holy God with a coffee cup in their hands.

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**Bruce:** Absolutely. I think we just have to be careful of those things! Worship is designed to be reverential, to stand in awe of the holy God, not to be something that's entertaining and just to get something done for an hour. We have to be careful of those things!

Now those can be subtle implications. Now Peter is warning us that those are subtle implications. You have to dig deeper behind it. What's the meaning of all that? You have to ask yourself why they are doing that. Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

**Bishop Rodgers:** Sometimes it's very aggressive. A recent example would be that someone referred to the cross as child abuse.

**Bruce:** My goodness!

**Bishop Rodgers:** Oh, yes. It's a theological writing.

**Bruce:** Is that right? I've not heard of that one.

**Ted:** It's the left side.

**Bruce:** Friends, that's what we have to be cautious of. It can't be much more aggressive, as Bishop Rodgers has indicated. But there's the subtlety of it and the aggressiveness of it. Be forewarned of it.

So Peter says to be careful of destructive heresies. Be careful of greedy exploitation. Be careful of irreverent speech. Another would be this. *Be careful of pleasure seekers.* Chapter 2, verses 13 and 14.

**Transcriber's Note:** 2 Peter 2:13-14. *"And will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children."*

**Bruce:** Be careful of pleasure seekers. They use people's loyalties to further their own pleasure, using people's loyalties to fulfill their own pleasure. Just be careful of that.

A fifth one would be this—*boastful appeals.* Chapter 2, verse 18—boastful appeals.

**Transcriber's Note:** 2 Peter 2:18. *"And 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."*

**Bruce:** They are preoccupied with their own person, not the person of Christ. It's basically this. What is it that I can do for you, rather than what God can do for you?

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** The issue is this. Let me tell you what I can do for you. One of my favorite verses is 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 4. *"Not that we consider anything as adequate as coming from ourselves."* Our adequacy comes from God.

I think that if you have to talk about your efforts, your results aren't very good.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** How many times have you heard somebody say,-- Well, let me just give you an illustration.

Years ago, when I was with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, we were at an athletic evangelistic conference. And this one gentleman was giving a presentation. And all we heard was this. "I led him to the Lord. This is how he became a Christian. I led him

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to the Lord." It was all I, I, I. It was all me, me, me. And he was basically promoting himself and saying, "This is what you need to become because this is what I can do for you to teach you how to be involved in evangelistic ministry." It was all about himself. We just have to be very, very cautious of that, because they are basically saying, "This is what I can do for you," as opposed to saying, "This is what God can do for you." They are subtleties. But Peter says that those are the things that are going to hinder our steadfastness. Boastful appeals.

I think that #6 would be *legalistic entrapments*. Chapter 2, verse 19.

**Transcriber's Note:** 2 Peter 2:19. *"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him he is also brought into bondage."*

**Bruce:** They promise freedom, but actually enslave you to a system. They promise freedom but enslave you to a system. In other words, you have to do these things and do them correctly, or it does not count. And so then, rather than promising you liberty, they lock you into a system of the dos and the don'ts, and you must do it this way and not any other way.

Those are the subtleties of legalistic entrapments. That's why we'll talk about those things in the book of Galatians, because it frees us for the liberties of Christ versus the legalistic entrapments. And we'll learn more about that.

Now these are symptoms that are rather obvious in certain cases. But in some other cases, when you're walking through the woods, when you see or hear the sound of a small rattlesnake, it's not as visible. It's not as noisy as a material which is much louder. Some of these are going to be more aggressive and some of them are going to be subtle. There's a subtle rattlesnake and there's a mature rattlesnake. The more mature the rattlesnake is, the louder the rattle is going to be. So we have to be very careful about the subtleties of these rattles as well as the loudness of these rattles, because both of them are dangerous. And Peter says this. You've got to be careful of those because you don't want to lose your steadfastness.

Now Peter is not saying that we'll lose our salvation per se. Certainly deceptive heresies may lead somebody away from the saving grace of God. So that's certainly a possibility. But I'm just saying that in the Christian community, in a church like this, we have to be careful of these rattles, because Peter is saying that they will destroy our steadfastness. Yes, Don?

**Don:** I think it's interesting that verse 17 follows on the heels of what we were talking a little bit about last week, about untaught and unstable people twisting the Scriptures to their own destruction.

**Bruce:** Right.

**Don:** And verse 17 elaborates that. There is the possibility, if we're not careful and we're not studying to show ourselves approved, rightly handling the word of truth, that we can fall prey to that, that we can fall prey to people who are twisting the Scriptures.

**Bruce:** Again, listen to verse 17. It's just a summary of what we've just gone through in these six symptoms of the rattles of false teachers.

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*"You therefore, beloved."* Notice how he addresses us. Beloved—dear friends. *"Knowing this beforehand."* Knowing what? The dangers of heresies from the verses right before it, of lawless men. *"Knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people, and lose your own steadfastness, your own stability."*

We're talking about the stability and the maturity of the Christian life. We have to remember this, brothers. Spirituality is an absolute. It's determined and defined by the Person and work of Jesus Christ. That's an absolute. We do not become more spiritual. We become more mature.

Maturity is more of Christ and less of me. And that takes a long process. It's the process of progressive sanctification. Christ is our sanctification, and He transforms us through the renewing of the mind. And we just have to be careful that we're not being involved in those things that are subtle rattles that hinder us from being stable in our faith or steadfast in our worship of Christ. That's what Peter is warning us about in this one verse. It's a summary verse of all the things you've been learning in chapter 2.

So with those rattles in mind, we've been forewarned. He has given us six forewarnings. Now let's take a look at how we are forearmed. What do we do when we see these things, when we hear these things, when we come across these rattles in the Christian fight? What do we do with them? Here is what his suggestions are.

Now I would offer for your consideration, in order to prevent our falling away from our settled principles of Biblical truth, that we consider these issues. First of all, notice this. I think it's important, brothers, that we *consider Christ as our conforming model*. To whom do you want to be conformed?

Don't say, "I wish I could pray like so and so. I wish I could teach like he does. I wish I knew the Scripture like she does. I wish I could sing like he or she does." You see, we want to have our conforming model be the Person and work of Christ, not somebody else, because there are dangers in doing that.

The process by which God conforms us to Christ is different in every person. It's not going to be the same for every individual. We're transformed from one stage of glory to the next and that is an individual process where God knows what is best for our lives. All things work for God's glory for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. And He does that individually. So don't try to pattern yourself after somebody else. We need to have our conforming example be the Person and work of Christ alone.

You see, that also breeds humility. I define humility as this—seeing that which is perfect and knowing that I can't achieve it. It's seeing this. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only perfect One. I can't achieve that. And that begins to develop our sense of humility, because we're not being conformed to somebody else. We're conformed to the image of Christ. Yes, sir?

**Participant:** Where does mentoring, or someone coming alongside of you, come in? I'm not saying that's more important, but they can be a big help.

**Bruce:** No question. The Scripture says that there is wisdom in the counsel of many brothers. No question about that.

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But here is mentoring. A mentor does not try to reproduce himself in you. He tries to help you discover yourself. That's the difference. A mentor will come along and not try to reproduce himself in you. A mentor comes along and says, "Let me help you discover yourself." That's what a mentor does. He doesn't reproduce himself in you. So we have to be cautious about that. So we need to have our conforming example be Christ alone and not somebody else. Certainly mentoring can be very positive, but it's not reproducing me in you, or you in somebody else. It's helping you to be conformed to the image of Christ.

God doesn't want us to compare ourselves to others, but wants us to be conformed to Himself, conformed to the image of Christ. Build your life of faith on the perfect standard and pattern of Christ, not on the hero worship of an individual. We have to be very, very cautious of that.

The danger of that, friends, is this. If the person errs, you won't. In other words, if you're building your life on the Person and work of Christ, if the model that you're following errs, then you won't follow that error because you're conformed to the image of Christ and not that person.

We have to be very, very careful. If the person errs and you get discouraged and give up, that reveals that your foundation was on man, not on Christ. Be very, very careful of that. If your foundation is in man and not in Christ, leaders will discourage us and disappoint us. But if your life is going to be so distraught and discouraged as a result of that, it's basically saying that your life is built upon that person's reputation rather than upon conformity to the Person and work of Christ. That's something we have to be careful of.

Beware of the rattles! The rattles will come along down the road, get our attention, and draw us to people. We have to be drawn to Christ, not to individuals.

I would suggest this. One of the ways in which people are led astray is not watching out for the man who tries to reproduce himself in you rather than directing you to Christ. If somebody says, "I want to reproduce myself in you," rather than directing you to Christ, be careful of that. In other words, "I'm going to teach you what I can do for you. I'm going to build me into you," rather than directing that person to Christ.

Secondly, I would ask you to consider this. *Cultivate useful and beneficial relationships.* A person often becomes what his friends are.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** A person often becomes what his friends are. You can't associate day by day with those who hate God and despise His commandments and expect to receive benefit in the process of conforming to Christ. You just can't do that.

The reason I use the word *beneficial* is because it's a word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 12, and 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 23 when he says this. *"All things are lawful for me. But not all things are beneficial."* Brothers, there is great freedom in Christ to have associations. But not all of those associations are going to be beneficial.

Now the picture in Greek of this word *beneficial* literally means this. It's the idea of throwing a stick into a stream. And the stream is moving along this way with it's base in

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the water. And you're swimming in it's direction, and you face the stream and you throw the stick in there and you move in that direction. It came to mean *cooperation*.

Paul says that all things are lawful. But not all things are beneficial. You can have all the relationships you want, but none of them may be beneficial. They may not help to cooperate with you in your cooperating with God in the direction He is moving in your life. Be careful about the associations you have. Not all of the associations we have are beneficial.

Now that doesn't mean that we're not in the world. We need to be in the world but not of the world. So yes, we're not designed to be sitting on a rock somewhere on a lake, picking lint from our belly buttons and having navel operations. (*Laughter.*) That's not what we're designed to do. We're to be in the world. But we've got to be careful. We're to cultivate useful and beneficial relationships.

Not all relationships are ones that assist in cooperating with God's direction in your life. You know the quickest way to be led astray is to follow a stray. (*Laughter.*) That's the quickest way to be led astray. Be careful.

Thirdly, I would offer this for your consideration. #3 would be this. *be actively involved in the church*. Now generally speaking, who are the happiest people in the church? Generally, it's those who are most busy and involved in ministry. One of the best pieces of advice one can give someone is to get involved. Go to work for God in the church and you'll never lose sight of God in the church. If you're not doing anything to work for God, you might lose sight of Him. Be careful of that? Get involved in the local church. It's the body of Christ.

Did you ever notice that a piece of wood on a summer day that's full of insects, when you take an axe and you hit that piece of wood, the insects just fly away? They don't do much. But what happens when you lie down on that piece of wood? What do the insects do? They just engulf your whole body. That's how they impact you. We just have to be careful of who we lie with in the sense of our relationships and our friendships. We need to be involved in the local church. Work for God and you'll never lose sight of God.

Generally speaking, people who are bitten by the insects of false teachers are people who are inactive and who are not pursuing the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. You're more likely to be impacted by the insects of false teaching if you're not involved in the local church. The local church is a wonderful protection for us, and it's the means by which God is redeeming the world and calling out the elect to Himself. We need to be involved in the local church.

#4 for your consideration would be this. *Be faithful in prayer*. You might as well start out the morning without any food and expect to be strong all day. That's what it's like to be without prayer.

**Participant:** Yes, sir.

**Bruce:** You just can't wake up in the morning and not have any food and expect to be strong. You just can't wake up and have a spiritual life, following the Person and work of Christ, and not have a prayer life. It's vitally important to do that. One might as well abstain from food all week and expect to be strong physically as to be strong without prayer. We will not be strong without prayer.



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Remember this. Prayer is preparation for a right response. Prayer is not so much taking our needs to God as it is giving ourselves to God. That's what prayer is. Prayer is giving ourselves to God, not necessarily giving our needs to Him, saying, "Lord, this is what I need. This is what I want." There is nothing wrong with giving our supplications. But the attitude of prayer is really this. "I'm giving myself to You."

Remember Jesus' response when they took Him captive the night He was betrayed? James. Peter and John were in the garden and they were sleeping. Jesus is praying.

Shortly after that there was the same event recorded in all four Gospels and you have a different perspective. Peter was asleep. We're told in the Scripture, in John 18, that when the officials came to take Jesus captive, Peter drew his sword and cut the ear off of the high priest. Jesus said, "Put your sword away, because if you live by the sword you die by the sword."

Now his response was totally different from Peter's response. The same event in life, but a different response. Peter responded out of *trepidation*, which is fear. Fear is losing control of the situation. When they took Jesus into captivity, what did Peter do? He lost control of the situation. "I'd better do something myself. I'd better defend God. I'm going to draw my sword out. I'm going to defend God."

Now that was his response. Jesus' response was this. "Put your sword away, because don't you know that I can call down twelve legions of angels?"

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** That's a different response. You see, prayer is preparation for a proper response. It's the means by which we are giving ourselves to God so that when an event occurs we are being prepared to have the proper response that glorifies Him, because Jesus says this. The critical point of this illustration is this. "*How would the Scriptures be fulfilled?*" "If I did this any other way, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?" You see, He always had in mind the fulfilling of the Scripture. His focus was on the glory of God.

That's what prayer does. It puts us in a position to have a proper response for the glory of God. You cannot be aware of all the rattles in the Christian fight, folks, unless you have a decent prayer life. Be faithful in prayer.

Prayer is not so much submitting our needs to God as submitting ourselves to God. Prayer is recognition that I can't make a difference and that only God can make the difference. That's what prayer does.

#5 for your consideration would be this. *Study the Bible with the mindset that you might err.* In other words, a great protection to cause us to be very careful about studying the Scripture is not to be too dogmatic over what is unclear, or the mysteries of Scripture. Sometimes you have to let the mysteries be mysteries. Don't try to figure them out and be so dogmatic, because you don't know the answer any more than anybody else does. You just have to be careful that when you're studying the Scripture that you don't become so dogmatic over the secret things of God.

Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us that "*the secret things belong to God. But the things that are revealed are for us and for our children and the next generation,*" so that we might be obedient. There is a difference between the secret things of God and the revealed will of God. Yes, Don?

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**Don:** Can we be dogmatic over the revealed things?

**Bruce:** Absolutely. But we do it with gentleness and respect. Dogmatically we need to stand up for truth. But you do it with gentleness and respect. We need to be careful about how we stand up for truth. But yes, we need to do that.

My point is this. Be careful about the uncertainties and the mysteries of life. Sometimes your first answer is going to be this. "I don't know. I just don't know." Don't be afraid to say that. We need to be careful about being dogmatic about the uncertainties and mysteries of life. So study the Scripture with the possibility that I might be in error.

Now I've told you this before, men. I have errors in my theology. I just don't know where they are yet. But as I find them, I change them.

I was not reared in the Reformed tradition. But as I began to study the Scripture, I began to realize two things. The ones who led me to understand the Biblical position of Reformed theology were Jesus and Paul.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** They were the ones who began to clarify my understanding. And I had a misconception, saying all sorts of things that I thought were correct that were incorrect. I just have to be careful.

So as I continue to study, I find continued errors in my theology. I just need to refine those as I study the Scripture. *"Study to show yourself approved."* You're studying with the idea that you may be wrong. And be open to counsel from other people. Don't be dogmatic about those things that are mysteries that need to be mysteries. Let the mysteries be mysteries.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Don't try to simplify them. Don't make them too logical. Scripture is very logical. But let the mysteries be mysteries.

I'd also say this. There are a great many books out there today that are being published—Christian publications that are very good ones. Sometimes they distract us from reading the Bible. You've got to be careful about looking at too many books. Use the books to support your Scripture reading. But don't replace your Scripture reading with them. We have to be very careful of that.

And I would also say this. The tap water is never as good as the natural water. Don't put the Bible down just for the sake of reading some other book that's easier. *"Study to show yourself approved."* Yes, Ted?

**Ted:** Bruce, I think it's a perplexing problem for me that those who hold the understanding of God's sovereign grace different from the Reformed position would say that the action begins with man.

**Bruce:** Mm-hmm.

**Ted:** They feel that to talk about election and predestination is a mystery and therefore that's not one of the things we should talk about. I've had these conversations recently.

**Bruce:** Yes.

**Ted:** So to me God's predestination and election are very clear. They say that it's not and therefore we shouldn't discuss it because it's a mystery.

**Bruce:** Right.

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**Ted:** So I guess it's really that for some of us there are mysteries, and other things on that same subject are very clear.

**Bruce:** I think that with those issues that are very clear, (and you've just elucidated one which is very clear, election and the sovereignty of God), we need to teach that, expound that, and live that out with great respect and dignity.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** And do it with gentleness, because sometimes the way that we communicate that may be what is the offense to them more than the truth of the doctrine itself.

**Participant:** There you go.

**Bruce:** We just have to be very careful. Yes, Don?

**Don:** The Westminster Confession says that "this great and high mystery of predestination must be handled with special prudence and care."

**Bruce:** Absolutely.

**Don:** It doesn't say that we are not to talk about it or discuss it, but that it is to be handled with great prudence and care.

**Bruce:** Right. And Charles Spurgeon said something like this. You don't take people to the university of election and predestination till they've gone to the college of repentance and faith.

**Participant:** Right.

**Bruce:** Pretty good advice. Take them to repentance and faith in Christ. The real issue is this. Some of these things that Ted is alluding to are really smoke screens. The real issue is this. What have you done with the Person and work of Christ?

**Participant:** There you go.

**Bruce:** You start with that and keep them on that. What have you done with the Person and work of Christ? Let's deal with that, and then we'll deal with all the other things. Keep them right on that. That's the central issue. That's what Spurgeon is saying about repentance and faith. What have you done today with the Person and work of Christ? Let's start with that point, and we can cover all the other things as we go through the rest of our lives.

Another thing I would suggest for your consideration, men, would be this. *Remember the historicity of the apostolic message.* In other words, we need to compare modern movements with the Biblical message. The Biblical message is our standard.

Scripture says that there is complete revelation. Some people come and say, "I have a new revelation." We need to take that thought, that movement, take that back to what the Scripture says. The Scripture says that the Scripture is complete, that there is now no new revelation. What we need is *illumination*. We don't need *revelation*. We need illumination.

So be careful when somebody comes along and says, "God told me this," or whatever it is—that there is a new movement, that there is new revelation. We have to take that thought, take that movement, take it back to the Scripture and remember the apostolic message, the historicity of the apostolic message, and realize this. The Scripture is complete. You don't add to the Scripture. It is sufficient. It is complete. It's authoritative. So you have to judge the modern movements with the historicity of the apostolic message and the completeness of the Scripture.

## ***"Forewarned Is To Be Forearmed"***

Really, the battleground to my mind, more often than not, is the sufficiency of Scripture. Is it sufficient? Or is it lacking something that needs a new revelation? We need illumination, people; we don't need revelation. All revelation has been given to us.

And then lastly, I think this is critical for us to remember. #7. *Remember the warnings of judgment.* Peter has taught us how severely God will judge the false teachers and how accountable we will be for what we teach, how we live, and what we say and what we do. We need to remember God's statements about judgment in 2 Peter chapter 2, verses 1-12. God has already demonstrated how He responds to false teachers and to false believers. We just need to be very, very cautious of that.

A final warning is this. *Remind yourselves of God's impending judgment.*

**Participant:** Yes.

**Bruce:** You've got to do that. Look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Where am I, Lord? Where am I with the Person and work of Christ?" He's made it very clear that He is going to judge the world. We will stand in judgment one of these days ourselves, and we have to hold ourselves accountable to that.

So I would suggest this, friends. I want us to notice the key ingredient in human relationships. Now look at verse 17. Notice how he starts off. He starts off with the title "dearly beloved" in verse 17.

*"You therefore, beloved"*—dearly beloved, friends. Notice the tenderness of that word. I think that sometimes what we need to do is that we need to have compassion and affection before instruction and warning. He gives us a rather severe warning. But notice what he does first. He says, "Dear friends, let me warn you that rattles are coming down the road." But notice how he started. He started with a sense of compassion, a sense of warmth for the people to whom he is writing. He has a sense of compassion and a sense of mercy, and he addresses them as *beloved*. I think we need to show compassion and affection before we give instruction and warning. That makes our words much more digestible and palatable.

That's just the whole principle of human relationships that we see in the Scripture. All of life is based upon relationships, folks. All of life is based on relationships. And sometimes, before we pull out the guns, we need to let them see the heart.

So my final word for us today, brothers, would be this. My dear friends, be steadfast. And don't be led astray by a stray.

Let's pray. Father, you've given us some wonderful protection. You've described for us through the apostle Peter the rattles that come down in the Christian life, things that we need to be forewarned against so that we may be forearmed. Father, may we realize the truth of what Peter has given us today in summary. And may it be for Your glory, that we would become more steadfast and not led astray by a stray. And all the Brave Men said,

**Men:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Blessings and thanks.