

2nd PETER BIBLE STUDY

2 Peter 3:01-09

Lesson #7

Introduction

We've completed chapter 2 of Peter's second epistle, which was his main theme of this epistle, and dealt with the false teachers that would arise from within the churches, and introduce destructive heresies, that would harm some and lead many others away to perdition. We discussed at length, how to distinguish between these one's, and those who are simply of differing interpretations than ourselves on non-essential points of doctrine and practice.

Now we're moving into the final portion of this, his last epistle to the church, which he has now served with perseverance and integrity for over 30 years since the Lord's ascension. Everyone, including Peter himself, had formerly expected the Lord to return long before now, and were finally learning to deal with the understanding that there were things involved in the plan of God that went well beyond them and their lifetimes. To them, it was all going to wrap up nicely while they were still alive, and they would see first hand, the glorious return of Jesus to the earth to rule and reign forever. But alas, they came to realize that the plan of God was much larger than they realized, and encompassed a time period that stretched well beyond their years. Both they, and we, easily overlook the fact that when an eternal being, who exists without a beginning, and without an end, says that He's coming quickly, He means from His own perspective, not man's.

And now we're going to get into a portion of Peter's epistle which demonstrates that Peter had, in fact, come to terms with this, and gained a longer range understanding of God's eternal plan, and how it would unfold over time. But before we begin this last portion, I wish to point out something that's of tantamount importance in properly understanding what Peter's going to tell us. To make his point, Peter is going to use a comparison method. Everything that he's going to say, in the entire 18 verses of chapter 3, must be placed on either one side of a chart, or the other side of the chart, there is no mixing and matching. If you will imagine a chart in your mind, and think about a vertical dividing line, with everything on the left side of the dividing line being described as "they, or them" and falling under a heading of judgment, and destruction, an eternal fire. These are the unbelievers, the mockers and scoffers of Christianity and the Lord Jesus.

Then on the right side of that column, there's those who are referred to as "you" with everything falling under a heading of salvation, and patience, and a new heaven and new earth, in which only righteousness dwells. This side of the chart is for the genuine believers, the Christian church, God's chosen children from before creation began. Everything that Peter is going to say, for the rest of this epistle, falls clearly on one side of this chart or the other, there's no straddling the line or splitting the difference. If we keep every single statement that Peter makes from here on out, clearly on one side of the line or the other, and nothing straddling the center, then we'll come away from these verses with a crystal-clear understanding of everything that Peter's about to say. An understanding that's sadly missing from much of mainline evangelicalism because of our compromised view of the sovereignty of God, and the misapplication of what Peter says in some of these verses which literally reverses his intended meaning.

Now, using our two column chart procedure, you can see what a serious dilemma that it would pose if you put one of the statements on the wrong side of the chart. You wouldn't be able to make it fit without some serious inconsistencies. Words have distinct meanings, and actions have inevitable consequences, if it weren't so there would be no way to make sense of anything, and reason and logic would be rendered useless. But such is not the case, the Lord has designed language and actions, and logic and reason, to all interact in such a way that humanity can learn and grow and understand the precepts and concepts of godliness and righteousness.

But a frivolous, sleepy, lighthearted approach, fraught with preconceptions and man centered human reasonings, will not bring anyone to a true knowledge of the righteousness and holiness of God. Therefore, let us pay close attention, and apply our God-given reasoning and powers of logic, as we walk our way through these closing statements of the apostle Peter in his last epistle.

**Why Hasn't The Lord Returned Yet?
(Is He Waiting for Something Specific)**

1 This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.

3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:1-9 (NASB)

In the first two verses, which is actually just one sentence, Peter makes a preparatory statement for what he's about to say next. He says it's the second time that he's written to them, and it was for the purpose of stirring up the sincerity of their minds in regards to all the words of the holy prophets, as well as the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by himself and those present-day apostles. In other words, he's telling them to consider these things well, and make certain of their sincerity of faith, and belief in these words and teachings. The gospel of Jesus Christ, and the call to suffer on His behalf, is not for the faint of heart, or the frivolous. It's not for the halfhearted, it's an all or nothing commitment of total surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, at whatever the cost. Anything less simply isn't genuine, and will not endure to the end. As I quoted from John Calvin's commentaries in an earlier lesson, scarcely one in 10 of those who make a profession of Christ, at some point in their life, actually endure to the end. The vast majority fall away eventually, back into the lustful ways of the world, and go to perdition. He says these things to prepare them for what he's about to say next.

Starting in verse three, Peter says "know this first of all," by which he means that he wants them to know something in advance, before it happens, so they won't be surprised and taken off guard. He's talking about sequence of events, not priority. When something bad is coming, most of us want to know in advance, so we can be ready, and that's exactly what Peter's doing, he's telling them that people will come and challenge their faith in Christ, and their trust in His holy words. They'll openly mock the Lord Jesus, and in so doing, mock and belittle all those who believe in Him. This should, by no means, surprise us or take us off guard. The whole world mocked the Lord Jesus, openly to His face, and called Him a devil, and a blasphemer. The Lord Jesus told His disciples that if the world hated them, and mocked them, then they should know that it's because it mocked and hated Him first. (Jn 15:18, 24, 25)

Peter says these mockers, which incidentally he says are "following after their own lusts" will taunt the believers, by asking them, just where is this grand promise of His return? After all, ever since the days of our forefathers, nothing is any different, no Savior has returned, nothing has changed in the world, and all those who have suffered for Christ, and believed in His teachings, have received no visible benefit whatsoever, only persecutions and hardships. So, where is this grand promise of a glorious return, and a future kingdom? If it's real, then show it to us, is their taunt. Which of course, they know we can't do. The believing Christian, just as the incarnate Christ, is not meant to win this argument before the appointed time. The Lord Jesus himself, and all of His followers, have been appointed by the decree of God to suffer this taunting for a period of time, to test our faith and perseverance, and our obedience to His Commandments.

We must resolve ourselves to accept this for that appointed time, because the insult is not to us but to the Lord. Therefore, the vindication, the authentication, and the devastating judgment of these mockers, belongs entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And vindicated He will be, and authenticated He will be, and worshiped and respected and feared He will most certainly be, when the appointed time of God has finally come, but not one day sooner. These lustful mockers will one day acknowledge His Lordship with their own tongues, as they bow on their knees, crying, and begging, and pleading, and trembling in fear before His glorious presence. For this day, every true Christian eagerly awaits.

But, in just the same fashion as Satan has been granted his appointed time of freedom, by the sovereignty of God, likewise, these lustful mockers have been granted their appointed time to taunt and belittle the Lord Jesus Christ, and all those who believe in Him and trust in His promises. And this is what Peter was reminding us with his opening sentence, whereby he made reference to the sincerity of our minds. For one to hold his ground in the midst of taunting and persecution, like Jesus on the cross, who could have simply opened His mouth and called 12 legions of angels to His immediate rescue, but did not; we likewise, have been appointed by God, to temporarily suffer these indignities for the sake of the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And so we willingly do, until the appointed time arrives.

And therefore, as an encouragement to the saints, in verses five and six, Peter makes the point that while these mockers continue their taunts, it apparently escapes their notice that the scriptures record an earlier event, whereby God, after much patience and kindness, nevertheless eventually brought total destruction to the entirety of the human race, by a great flood, with the exception of eight people, whom He mercifully spared. And furthermore, we are fairly warned by the word of this very same God, that “the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” (v.7) For over 100 years, Noah, who is called a preacher of righteousness, warned the inhabitants of the earth of God’s pending judgment, as he slowly, day by day, constructed the Ark, which would carry himself and his family to safety. And likewise today, the believers in Christ continue to preach repentance from sin, and righteous behaviors, by obedience to the commandments of God. But the Scriptures tell us that the ungodly didn’t listen to Noah, and they will not listen to us, because they love their sins more than they fear God, at least for now.

But verse seven tells us that the righteous integrity of God demands that justice must prevail in the end, and these mockers, following after their own lusts, are literally being held in reserve for an inevitable final judgment of fiery destruction when that predetermined day finally arrives. For over 100 years the inhabitants of the earth were free to mock and belittle Noah with no apparent repercussions, as he built this silly looking boat; but a day came when their mocking stopped, and they ran to the door of the Ark and pounded and begged and pleaded with Noah to let them in, as the rains came down and the flood waters arose. But it was not to be, those mockers had been appointed by God, and held in reserve for that very day, and that very hour, and when it arrived there was no escape for them. On that day the Lord God vindicated Noah before the eyes of his mockers, and authenticated his warnings regarding ungodly behaviors. But, Noah had to wait for that day; every single day before that day had belonged to his mockers, and so it is today my dear saints. We must wait patiently for the appointed day of the Lord, and give these mockers their time, as the next few verses are going to explain.

But before we get there, I want to spend a little more time with verse seven. The first half of the verse tells us that by the prophetic word of God, that the present-day heavens and earth are being reserved for something. Being reserved means being predetermined, it means there’s something planned in the future that is subsequent to that which is happening now. It isn’t something spontaneous, it isn’t something still waiting to be figured out, it’s something predetermined, and patiently held in reserve for a specific point in time. God has sovereignly preplanned absolutely everything, as Solomon so poignantly pointed out in Proverbs chapter 16:

4 The Lord has prepared everything for His purpose - even the wicked for the day of disaster. Prov 16:4 (HCSB)

(Example: No manufacturer ever produces a product for which he has no predetermined purpose. That would be foolish. Rather, he starts with an idea, and an intended use, and then carefully prepares his product to suit that predetermined purpose. And this same concept is what the scriptures tell us about God and His whole creation. The open Theist’s tell us that God created mankind, and dropped them on the earth, and then stepped back to see for Himself just what they would do. But scripture tells us that God made everything for a predetermined purpose, and has carefully fashioned it specifically for that purpose.)

And again from the New Testament, when Paul was discussing with the Romans, God’s absolute sovereignty over His creatures, to do with them, and use them, in whatever manner He pleases, Paul told them:

22 What [is it to you] if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. Romans 9:22-24 (NASB)

Therefore, understanding this, and acknowledging His absolute sovereignty over all creation, we can only bow our knee in grateful worship for His inexplicable mercy toward us, for providing our unmerited rescue from a sure and certain fiery destruction. Yes, there is a sure and certain fiery destruction, reserved for the ungodly, and God knows it, because He designed it. But, there is also an Ark of rescue, in the person of Jesus Christ, to all who have been appointed unto salvation through saving faith in Him. (Acts 13:48) My dear brothers and sisters, if you are truly one of these, then you understand that even eternity isn't long enough for us to express our gratitude and worship to a loving and merciful God who has provided such a rescue, even though we were all clearly unworthy. To Him alone be all glory, and honor, and praise forevermore. Amen.

Now I want to move into verses eight and nine. These are two very popular verses that are well known throughout Christianity. And it's starting right here that I want to apply the principle that I used in my introduction regarding the chart with two columns. To refresh your memory, on the left side of the chart we have the ungodly, who are called "they or them" and are said to be reserved for fire in the day of judgment and destruction.

Then, on the right side of the column, we have the beloved, referred to as "you" who are rescued, and protected by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pet 1:5) If we take our time going through these two verses, and keep the "them's" and the "us's" in their proper columns, then these two verses will make absolute perfect sense. The implications will all fit with the rest of the scriptures and there will be no troubling dilemmas of theology. But, if we make the mistake of blurring the lines, then we will create for ourselves impossible dilemmas of interpretation, for which we must either make excuses, or just ignore and pretend they don't exist.

But scripture, rightly understood, and properly interpreted, never ever contradicts itself. When we run into sections, and we all do this from time to time, that seem to be inconsistent or contradictory, it is because we are making an error of some kind in our understanding or interpretation. Most, if not all of these situations are temporary, and we eventually resolve them over the course of time, as our understanding of scripture grows and increases. This preacher has had some that took decades to be resolved, but the resolutions come, and when they do the joy is inexpressible.

I said we're going to move into verses eight and nine, and we are going to do that, but since I've made reference to our two column chart, which we haven't actually implemented yet, I want to catch us up on that chart. Starting in verse three Peter begins to speak of a certain group which he defines as mockers who follow after their own lusts. There shouldn't be any question about which side of the column these guys go on. We said the left side of our chart was for this group. And we said Peter refers to them with various terms like "they and them." These terms form a means of making a definite distinction, like that of "us versus them," and like "we versus they." These terms are used specifically for the purpose of clarifying that a difference of some significance exists between the groups.

From verse three through the end of verse seven, Peter has clearly drawn a distinctive difference for this group from that of the church to whom this epistle was written. He repeatedly refers to this group as following after "their" own lusts, and he says that it escapes "their" notice that God has already once judged the whole earth for rampant violence and ungodliness. And he says that it is "for them" that the earth is being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. Absolutely none of this can be placed on our chart under the column of "you, and beloved."

You can see what a serious dilemma that would create if such a mistake were made. There is no fire of judgement and destruction awaiting a single one of God's redeemed. Jesus paid the price for their redemption with His own lifeblood, and no one can snatch a single one of those from His hand. (Jn 10:29) Regarding both the eternal, and predetermined distinction between these groups, Jesus spoke these words that are recorded in John's gospel:

37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:37-40 (NASB)

Now I've used this reference verse for a purpose, because it contains language that establishes an important precedent. Jesus said, all that the Father gives Him will come to Him. So what does this mean? Well, by the application of inescapable logic, it means two things. First, that every single one that the Father has predestined for salvation will eventually come to saving faith in the course of God's timetable. But secondly, that it is impossible that God has given everybody to Christ, otherwise everybody would have to eventually be saved. And that simply isn't the case.

Irrespective of what our personal opinions might be, or our feelings, this verse, and countless others, several of which we will use in this study, make it absolutely clear that from the very beginning of creation, God has made a distinction between two specific groups of mankind, and predetermined what will be the outcome of each group. If this causes you a dilemma, and I realize that it probably will cause a dilemma for many, as it did this preacher for decades, nevertheless that is the inescapable and undeniable teaching of the Scriptures. That is what they say, and, that is what they mean.

Now it might look like I'm straying a little bit from the point of these verses, but I assure you that I'm not. There's a purpose for making this point. An understanding of the sovereignty of God, as well as His practical implementation of that sovereignty, is mandatory to rightly understand the next two verses.

Verse 8:

8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

Let's establish a couple of things immediately. One, He is addressing the "beloved" that is the redeemed, the church, the true Christians, and the context against which he's speaking is the taunting of the unbelieving mockers who are following after their own lusts. Verse 8 is a switch of sides on our imaginary chart. In verses 3 through 7 he was describing the mockers and the nature of their taunts, and their final judgement and destruction by fire, that was already set and being held in reserve for them on that divinely assigned day of the Lord.

But here, in verses 8 and 9, he's providing the saints with an explanation for those taunts, to comfort their hearts, and encourage their patience, and affirm their faith in the eventual fulfillment of the promise of the Lord's glorious return when the time has finally come. Now there's a lot of speculation as to whether this verse also has some hidden prophetic meanings, because it's easy to make some connections with the millennial kingdom as described in the book of Revelation. And whether this is implied, or whether it's not, makes for some very interesting debate, but it really has nothing to do with the context we're dealing with right here and now. So let's not get diverted from the point.

Which point is, that the perspective of the Lord is very much different than the perspective of men. Just because it's been a long time since the Lord's ascension, as we perceive time, doesn't mean that it's a long time in the Lord's perspective. In fact, in His perspective it's just like yesterday, so we must not become impatient, and lose heart in doing good, for in due season we will reap a harvest of righteousness, if we don't grow weary and fall away, as the apostle Paul reminded us. So now, let's move on to verse nine, and this verse is without a doubt the most important one in this group for us to keep careful attention to the specific groups to which Peter is referring, lest we completely reverse the intended implication of his teaching.

Verse 9:

9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Continuing with the thought from verse eight, Peter goes on to state that the Lord is not slow about His promise. This term "slow" in its original language, isn't simply confined to speed, it carries with it the implications of laxness of diligence. Peter is telling the saints that the Lord is not lax, nor disinterested, in His previous promises, but quite the contrary, His delay is entirely a demonstration of His patience toward "**you**" says Peter. Now let's immediately put this "**you**" on the correct side of our chart. Peter is not saying that God's patience is towards "**them**," the unbelieving mockers who are following after their own lusts; but quite the contrary, His patience is towards "**you**," clearly meaning the believers, the church, the beloved children of God.

What does Peter mean by this? Well, think about it. Peter is writing this epistle some 30 odd years after the Lord's ascension. What if the Lord had returned again after one or two years? What would that mean to the saints standing there 30 years later, most of whom, if not all, were relatively new converts? To say nothing of us today, who are nearly 2000 years down that timeline. I've been told that the United States Marines have a policy whereby they never leave their own behind. I was in the Air Force, and not the Marine Corps, so I don't know for sure, but I do know for sure that the Lord knows those who are His, (2Tim 2:19; Eph 1:4-5; 1Pet 1:2) and Peter is telling us that the Lord is not willing to alleviate the aggravations of continuous blasphemies to His Name, by cutting the time short, and thereby leaving some of us behind, who have not yet come to repentance and faith in that predetermined allotted time.

Peter says that God is not willing to let a single one of His predetermined elect to perish. Now it's at this point that many people start to make a mistake. It's commonly interpreted that Peter is speaking to humanity at large, rather than the elect specifically. But this interpretation is absolutely impossible to reconcile, with either this verse specifically, or the entirety of scripture in large. In English, we render this Greek word as "wishing," but it is also equally used as desiring or willing. The prevailing concept is that all humanity is literally a free agent, with the innate capacity, and human capability, of self-determination, and that this book of life, mentioned in the Bible, simply started with a bunch of blank pages, which gets filled in day by day, as time goes by, and men and women make their own decisions.

Now frankly, I have to say that within the denomination with which I'm affiliated, this is by far the most prevailing interpretation. But there isn't a single shred of scriptural evidence to support it. Rather, it is the logical extrapolation of a pre-existing misconception that is inherent in the theological perspective of Semi-Pelagianism, which we also call Arminianism. But the Scriptures clearly and plainly state otherwise. Acts 13:48 says that there are those who are **appointed** unto salvation. Ephesians 1:4-5 says He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him, and it was in love that **He predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself. First Peter 1:2 says that we were chosen according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father.

The book of Revelation, chapter 13, verse eight, says that every single one whose name was not recorded in the book of life **from before the foundation of the world**, will be given over to a beast that we call the Antichrist. And in chapter 17, verse eight, it says that everyone whose name was not recorded in the book of life **from before the foundation of the world** will go to destruction with this Antichrist.

Was the Apostle John mistaken when he wrote this? Does he actually mean that if our individual names weren't written down in this "Lamb's Book of Life" already, when the Lord spoke the creation into existence, then we will go to eternal destruction with this Antichrist and his followers? That is, without argument, certainly what he says.

So now I ask you, when do the scriptures tell us that the names of God's elect were recorded in the book of life? On a day-to-day basis, over thousands of years, or, all at once before the foundation of the world? There is no validity in arguing this point, the scriptures speak with absolute clarity, and absolute authority; our only choices are to accept it or ignore it, but we cannot change it. Neither can we argue that the Scripture is vague or unclear on this point, as so many try to do, but it's not that it's difficult to understand that's the problem, it's that it's difficult to accept, because it doesn't square with certain long held and valued preconceptions. So many simply shrug their shoulders and readily accept the contradiction as one of those mysterious things of God. I can say this with authority, because for about 2 decades I myself was one of these. But thank God He finally made me teachable, where before I had simply been obstinate. Things that are impossible for man are nevertheless possible with God.

God has a timetable that was established before the foundation of the earth. He knows, by name, those who are His, and has recorded this in a book called the Lamb's book of life. This is not vague or mysterious, in fact this is just about as clear and understandable as human language can possibly be. And because of His patience toward these, His beloved children, He patiently waits, enduring the disobedience, and sinful indulgences of pride and lust by a willfully unrepentant humanity, for which, there is held in reserve, a judgment and destruction of fiery hell. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that the Lord patiently awaits the appointed time until every single person who was appointed unto salvation, and recorded by name in the book of life, from eternity past, is given the allotted time for that to take place.

In his epistle to the Romans, where Paul was speaking to the church regarding their attitude towards the Jews, Paul told the church, in chapter 11 verse 25, that it was according to God's own plan that He was temporarily blinding the eyes of the Jews to the truth of the gospel, so that the full number of Gentiles, who had been predetermined from before creation, had their time to come into the kingdom of God through repentance and faith upon hearing the gospel. But, when that final predetermined number was fulfilled, that last name completed, these would be snatched away to be with the Lord, and God's emphasis would return to the salvation of a predetermined remnant of the Jews, and His fulfillment of those promises formerly made to them through Abraham.

In this verse, second Peter 3:9, it is within in this context, that we've just discussed, that one finds the proper interpretation of Peter's teaching. To misapply the "you" to mean the general populace at large, and infer that Peter is telling us that God is not willing for any human beings on earth to be lost, is simply not a tenable argument. Because he's just gotten through telling us that there is, by God's own decree, a judgment and destruction of fire being held in reserve for many. So, are we to conclude that even though God is not wishing, or willing, for anyone whatsoever to be lost, nevertheless He has Himself created and reserved a destruction of fire for them?

And this is where we simply have to use our God-given faculties of reason and comprehension. Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that anything whatsoever happens in this universe that God is absolutely unwilling to have happen? I'm not asking if God approves of everything that happens, I'm asking if you believe that either men or angels have the power, and capability, to do anything whatsoever that God is absolutely unwilling to happen. Yes, men sin, and yes, angels sin, and we know that God does not approve of sin, but does it happen completely against His will? If God is truly sovereign, then it is an inescapable fact that He has the power to either allow, or prevent, anything whatsoever He desires. Where we make our mistake is concluding that His allowing of sin in the world means that He approves of it.

Let me attempt to make a feeble analogy. I myself, and all of us, willingly pay taxes to our government because we realize the necessity of a national army for our protection, and national highways for our transportation, and national laws of commerce to regulate free trade. You see, as unpleasant as paying taxes is, we nonetheless realize that it serves a greater purpose that we absolutely need. So therefore we willingly, albeit begrudgingly, approve of the collection of taxes from our wages and property. But I have yet to hear anyone say that they like paying taxes. We tolerate it because it serves a vital purpose in our overall national plan, and affects the resultant outcome of our lives.

When we come to a deep enough knowledge of God, and comprehension of the vastness and intricate detail of His divine creation plan, we start to gain an understanding of just how it is that absolutely everything eventually works out for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to His divine and eternal purpose. Certainly God does not approve of sin, but equally as certain, is that He has, of His own free will, chosen to temporarily include it into His overall creation plan, because it serves a purpose that He knows is both useful and necessary for the proper preparation of His children to take their place in His eternal kingdom.

Sin, which is simply disobedience of God, must be exposed for what it is, and for what it does, before the very eyes, and within the very lives of God's elect, before they are ready to take their place beside their Savior in the eternal kingdom of God. It is imperative that unrepentant sinners must suffer judgment and fiery destruction, because it is God who stated that the wages of sin is death. And while no rational person would argue that God takes pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, nevertheless, destroyed they will be, because, just like paying taxes, it's an unpleasant, but necessary consequence of God's revelations and instructions of His holiness, and righteousness, and glory to humanity.

Just as God cannot, and will not, allow any of His redeemed to perish, He equally cannot, and will not, allow any of the unrepentant and unbelieving to escape judgment. According to the Scriptures, this is an immutable characteristic of the true and living God. Strangely, some infer from this that God is unjust, or even unrighteous, because He has the audacity to actually, physically, implement His divine sovereignty over the lives and destinies of His creatures. And this was the thrust of the apostle Paul's teaching to the Romans in chapter 9, especially verses 14 through 18, where he tells the Romans, and us, that God has every sovereign right, and authority, just as a potter over the clay, to make both vessels for honor, and vessels for dishonor, as it suits His own particular needs, and purposes, and desires.

How incredibly humbling this is to man, to be told that we aren't the most important thing in the universe, and we must bow our knee, and answer to the absolute sovereign authority of a higher power, who creates and uses us like clay pots, to serve a specific purpose of His own divine choosing. We are appalled and insulted at the thought that we are not ultimately the captains of our souls, nor the masters of our fate, even though we are entirely responsible for our actions, because we choose them willingly, without external coercion. We do what we do, because we are what we are, but because we're not forced to be what we are, but choose to be so willingly, we are therefore rightly and justly responsible for our actions. This is God's way, and we're not asked to render a verdict, or to give an opinion, but are exhorted and admonished to comply, to the salvation of our souls, lest we perish through our own wilful disobedience. God has made some vessels for honor, and some vessels for dishonor, and each will, in the final accounting, and of its own free choosing, serve the specific purpose for which God specifically made it. (Romans Ch. 9)

When we understand the big picture, the smaller pieces fit perfectly into place, without forcing them or distorting their shape. Peter's words in this epistle are perfectly clear, and fit precisely into place in the master plan of God, as long as they're kept within their proper context, and applied to the proper parties. The delay of which Peter speaks, is for the sake of a specific and predetermined number of persons, whose names have been recorded in a book from before creation. We have established this to be absolute fact, beyond any reasonable doubt, from numerous passages of scriptures. To infer that this delay is for general humanity at large, is to also infer that God is not truly sovereign over the happenings of His creatures, but has willingly abrogated His authority to the will of mankind.

This belief is popular, and I once held it myself, but it isn't rational nor is it scriptural, and it severely intrudes on the high and holy view of God, and His absolute sovereignty over His own creation. It elevates man to a position that even exceeds God, and makes God subservient men, obligated and trapped by His own rules and regulations, to passively react to man's own personal decisions. This is not the God of the Bible, this is a god created in the sentimental emotions and reasonings of man, who sees himself, and his own salvation and prosperity, as the whole purpose of creation, and the only reason that God exists.

The Lord does not delay His return because He doesn't yet know all those who are His, and wants as many as possible to get saved, but because He **does know**; every single one, by name, and He will not return ahead of time, and thereby lose any of those who have not yet had their appointed time to come to repentance and faith. This is the only interpretation that fits the big picture, and remains consistent with all of scripture. The Semi-Pelagian concept requires the redefining of God, and the abrogation of His divine sovereignty, which contradicts scriptures that boldly declares:

8 "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors.

9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not [yet] been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

Isaiah 46:8-10 (NASB)

Does this sound like a God who has abrogated His authority to humanity? Who is locked into a future that has been put into the hands of humans, who now call the shots and make the decisions. That's apparently the god that we want, because that's the god that's most described from the pulpits, and talked about in the Sunday school classes, and worshiped in the churches; but we have seen from holy scriptures that it is not anything like the high and lifted up, the sovereign and holy God of the Bible.

The Semi-Pelagian, Arminian perspective, demands a limp wristed, impotent god, who has become a powerless victim of His own creation. Though I doubt many would put it so boldly. A god who is unable to take affirmative actions in the lives of men without infringing on their rights of free will and self-determination. How I could have accepted this obvious discrepancy for some 20 years is now a mystery to me, but at the time it truly seemed to make perfect sense. And the obvious intrusion on the sovereignty of God, and the incredible disrespect of His glory and position that it displayed, caused me no discomfort, in fact, I might even have been somewhat self-righteously proud, because I saw everything from the perspective of man and his prosperity, not of God, and His glory.

The “**you**” and the “**any**” and the “**all**”, in verse 9, which are the keys to rightly understanding this verse, can only be understood as the **you** who are the redeemed of God, the children who were loved from before creation, not the whole world in general, whom we are told were prepared beforehand for destruction. And the **any**, and the **all**, as those whose names were recorded in the Lamb’s book of life from before the creation of the world, and will not be sacrificed by an early return of Christ before the appointed time. Those vessels of honor, for whom the Lord patiently forestalls His demonstration of wrath on the disobedient; awaiting the full number of those who were prepared beforehand for glory. (Rom 9:14-15)

To infer anything else is to reverse the intention, and bring confusion and error into the teaching of scriptures. The Arminians who use this verse to support their viewpoint that God desperately wants everyone on earth to be saved, but can’t do it because it would exceed the boundaries of His own self-imposed authority over His creatures, and that men themselves control their destinies, with their own innate faculties of free will, rather than God, who grants saving faith to whom He wills; are in serious interpretive error, and without intending to do so, are actually dishonoring the value of the grace of God in the process.

Conclusion:

I’ve looked forward to teaching on these verses for a long time, and there’s no end to all that I wish I could say and discuss, and how incredible it was for me to finally come the actual and accurate knowledge of the truth that’s contained in these verses, but no matter how much more we say, the fact is, we either see the truth, or we don’t, and the number of words isn’t likely to be the determining factor.

For 20 years I read my Bible, and even taught the Bible, but this truth, which was right under my nose the whole time, escaped my notice, until the Holy Spirit shined the light of truth on those scriptures, and I was able to see what I had previously missed entirely. The Holy Spirit is God’s divine teacher, and the scriptures are the tools of His trade; if you’re teachable, and you earnestly desire to know the truth, then continue to pray for understanding, and stay diligent in your study of those scriptures, and He’ll do His work in your mind and heart, because this honors God the Father, and glorifies the Son, Jesus Christ, which is the will and the work of the holy Spirit.

In closing, to my dear Calvinist brothers and sisters, we’ve probably not told you anything in this study that you don’t already know, but perhaps we’ve helped put it into clear words, and supported it with appropriate scriptures. And, to my other dear brothers and sisters, who are still perhaps among the Arminian persuasion, I ask you to hear this teaching without taking offense, because I assure you it wasn’t meant to do so. If you’re still Semi-Pelagian in your thinking, then you probably consider this teaching to be an assault on all those things you hold dear, and consider sacred. I say this because that’s exactly how I felt at the time, I refused to even listen, and give them a genuine hearing, for years.

But do yourself this one favor. Ask yourself if a scriptural interpretation that exalts and glorifies God, and humbles man before Him, is blasphemous. If a perspective that gives all the glory and honor and praise for everything whatsoever, even our saving faith itself (Eph 2:8-10) and eliminates any human boasting or claims or credit, and instead affords God all the credit for our salvation, by His glorious and merciful grace; does this dishonor God, or in any way contradict the holy scriptures? We know full well that it doesn’t. It just severely humbles man, and clearly delineates the nature of the relationship between a perfect and holy God, and a sinful and impotent humanity, that is hopelessly lost, and dead in its sins and trespasses. Romans chapter 3, verses 10-18, are God’s assessment of the condition of all mankind, and should be taught and clearly understood by every one who seeks forgiveness of sin and eternal life in the kingdom of God.

To Him and Him alone, be all honor, and glory, and praise; both now and for evermore. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
12/15/10