

2nd PETER BIBLE STUDY

2 Peter 3:10-18

Lesson #8

Introduction

Last week we began our study of chapter 3 of second Peter. We covered verses one through nine, with particular emphasis on verse nine, because we wanted to make certain that we didn't read anything into this verse that's not actually being rightly implied there by the writer.

In the eight preceding verses leading up to verse nine, Peter describes a situation where the saints will be confronted by hostile unbelievers, with tauntings about the return of the Lord Jesus. Now one might ask: what difference does it make to them if Christians believe in the return of Jesus? Why do these people care what Christians believe, after all, we don't force our beliefs on anybody else, or try to do them harm if they disagree. On the contrary, quite the opposite, genuine Christians are gentle and patient with unbelievers, understanding that they too were once unbelieving, and even perhaps hostile, as the apostle Paul was. Only false imposters have implemented violence in the name of Jesus Christ.

So why do these mockers have such hostility towards Christians? They have hostility for the very same reason that the people of the world were hostile to Noah, who was called a preacher of righteousness. In verse three Peter said that these mockers were "following after their own lusts," and herein lies the rub; because the Christians are likewise preachers of righteousness, and godliness, and obedience to the commandments of God, which things these mockers despise. The Scriptures tell us that the natural condition of humanity is a love for the things of the world, and enmity towards God, because He condemns those things that men innately love, and demands those things that men generally despise. (Rom 8:7-8; Col 1:21-22)

For this reason, since the fall of mankind, and the days of Noah, unregenerate mankind has resisted the Commandments of God, and persecuted and mocked all those who advocate living in accordance to them. All of the elect of God began their lives right here among this group, just like everyone else, and were taken out from among this group, because all are born into a fallen and hostile humanity. There's none who are born righteous, no not one; there is no such thing as a pure and innocent little infant, says the word of God. (Ps 51:5; Rom 3:10-12) That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, fallen and sinful flesh, said Jesus, and therefore mankind must be born again, or they will never see, or enter, the kingdom of heaven. (Jn 3:3-6) He made no exceptions for difficulty of circumstances, or nationality, or racial group, or gender, or age. Unless one is born again of the Spirit, they will not see the kingdom of God, were the words of Jesus, and so they are recorded in the holy scriptures for all who wish to know the requirements for salvation, and entrance into the eternal kingdom of God.

But, a fallen and sinful humanity, following after their own lusts, has been inventing and devising an endless list of other alternatives since the beginning. Means which will accommodate their love of the world and lustful ways, and still afford them entry into God's kingdom of righteousness. But these are all simply human inventions, meant to soothe the conscience and ease the fears of a certain and unavoidable judgement that is reserved in heaven for all who reject the words of Christ. (v.7) I never cease to be surprised, at what can only be described as the absurdity of the idea, that pretty much everybody goes to heaven. We see Hollywood movies about utterly godless characters who end up dying or getting killed, and someone says that now they're in a better place. If the Scriptures are true, and if there actually is a place where dead souls reside, then we are repeatedly told that the godless are not in a peaceful place of rest, but rather in a hopeless and endless and inescapable place of judgment and fiery torment.

As a preacher, there are few things more difficult to do than residing at the funeral of a known unbeliever. All of that person's loved ones are gathered around and expecting words of comfort and hope from the preacher. They are heartbroken and sad at the loss of someone they loved, and expecting solace and comfort from him. But the preacher has a serious dilemma, because he knows that he can speak no such words without violating his sacred duty to be faithful to the scriptures. So, we do the best we can at presenting the truth of the gospel to the living, without coming out and stating plainly that their loved one is probably in a place of eternal torment.

It was absolutely amazing how Jesus handled the situation when He was asked about the people who were slain in the temple, and those on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed. Instead of soft and soothing words of comfort, He responded with what most of us would consider today as unthinkable candor. He answered that these people who had been killed in these ways were not one bit more sinful than anybody else, and went on to state outright that unless they repented, they would likewise perish themselves. Now I have to admit that when I was at these funerals, somewhere down inside of me, I wished that I could warn the loved ones of the deceased, with the same straightforward candor as Jesus did, that unless they repented, they would end up in the same place as their dearly departed loved one now is. But being of divine essence, Jesus perhaps has the authority to speak with a candor that exceeds that of mere men.

Now, what I'm attempting to do in this introduction, is to both codify and clarify Peter's thoughts as he presented them in the first nine verses, and clearly establish them in our mind's, so that we can resume in verse 10 without a separation of thought. One of the problems that Bible teachers confront with expository teaching, is that it tends to separate the Scriptures into little groups of verses that were never intended to be separated. And, as I've said so many times before, in the study of scriptures, context is everything. And this was our point of concern in the study of verse nine last week. So permit me if you will, to now briefly refresh our thoughts and put us in proper context, so that we can make a smooth transition from the first nine verses to the last nine verses, because there is no intended break in the middle.

Peter started with an exhortation to the sincerity of their mind, as they considered those words that were spoken beforehand by the prophets, as well as the Commandments of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, spoken by His apostles, of whom Peter himself was one. He went on to warn the saints that there would be, in the latter times, mockers, who would taunt the believers, and challenge them to explain why so much time has gone by, and yet the Lord hasn't made good on His promise to return. And it was this thought that formed the title of last week's lesson, where we asked the question – why hasn't the Lord return yet, is He waiting for something specific?

By careful examination of verse nine, and many corroborating verses, we established that there most certainly is a reason why the Lord hasn't returned yet. And there certainly is something specific that He's patiently waiting for. Peter said the Lord wasn't slow in His actions, or the fulfillment of His promises, but was patient toward the saints, because He was not willing to come back, and bring judgment on the unbelievers, until every last one of God's elect, who had been given to Christ by the Father from before the foundation of the world, had been afforded their opportunity in time to come to repentance through saving faith.

In the eternal plan of God, there are vessels prepared for honor, and vessels prepared for dishonor. Vessels prepared for glory, to demonstrate God's mercy and loving kindness; and vessels prepared for destruction, to demonstrate His power and wrath on the disobedient. (Pro 16:4; Rom 9:21-23) That the Bible teaches this is absolutely beyond any debate. The only debate we might have is how we choose to perceive it, and the scope of the implications that it entails.

But, it is this predetermined and immutable timetable of God, established by His own unchanging will, that governs all activities and events prophesied in the holy scriptures. And it applies equally to the righteous, and to the wicked. The Lord will not establish His kingdom without claiming every single one of His own, and, He will not implement His judgment of wrath and destruction on the wicked until their sins have come to full measure, and their refusal to repent of their lustful wickedness, and accept the loving mercy of God, has run its full course in time. And this is what Peter is telling us in these closing sentences of his last epistle. His words are not addressed to the unbelieving world, but to the believing church.

Peter is saying that the church should consider this extended time interval as a demonstration of the patience of the Lord, who knows those who are His (2Tim 2:19) and knows that there are still some amongst this group of lustful, and perhaps even hostile humanity, who will, in the course of the appointed time of God, respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ, upon the reception of the precious gift of saving faith, received as an unmerited gift of God. As long as there are still some of these in the world, it is our job to faithfully preach the gospel to the unbelieving, because this is God's divinely appointed means of implementing His eternal plan of salvation. It doesn't just happen by heavenly osmosis, it happens by faithfully and accurately preaching the gospel, unedited, undiluted, and never artificially embellished with carnal emotionalism, or cheap theatrics, which has become so popular in our day. (Use lotto ticket example here to demonstrate the use of means)

As a kind of side note here, I'd like to comment on those who object to the biblical teaching of predestination and irresistible grace. The common argument goes something like this: well if that's the case, then let's just bring all our missionaries home and save the effort, if God already knows in advance who He's going to save, and His grace is irresistible. I've faced this argument directly, and I've seen it posted on websites, but the truth is, it isn't really an argument. It's a hostile, kind of knee-jerk reaction to a teaching that's considered offensive to those who support the semi-Pelagian free will salvation concept.

As an argument, it simply falls apart immediately upon examination. Since this is essentially a carnal, not a biblical response, let me use a carnal example of the folly of this supposed argument. Suppose I were to come to you and tell you that I had the six winning numbers to next week's lottery. I assure you they are completely accurate and will, without a doubt, be the numbers that are drawn. What would you do? Would you immediately hurry out and buy a lotto ticket with those numbers, or, would you save your dollar and not waste it on a ticket, because, after all, you already know the numbers, and they can't be altered, so why waste time and money going out and buying a ticket?

The folly of this thinking is blatantly obvious. Regardless of what anyone knows, about anything, unless they act on that knowledge, then the goal won't be achieved. Unless you buy that ticket you won't win the prize, no matter what you know in advance. The practical implementation of means is an essential part of the progression of events that leads to the eventual winning of the prize.

And so it is with God's elect. Yes, they are foreknown, but that foreknowledge isn't what effectuates their salvation, it simply assures the successful results of the means when they're applied, just like knowing the lotto numbers in advance assures the winning of the prize. Neither predestination, nor irresistible grace has ever saved anybody, only repentance and faith can do that, and that requires the preaching of the gospel.

If anything, the Calvinist is the most fervent evangelist possible, because just like the guy who knows the lotto numbers in advance is eager to go buy that ticket, likewise the Calvinist is eager to preach the gospel, because he knows that all who are chosen will believe it, when they hear it.

One last example that isn't carnal. Remember when Jesus got in a boat and crossed the sea of Galilee to visit the Gadarenes? The only one who received Him was a raving demoniac, whom Jesus cured by casting them out. The rest of that community asked Him to please leave their community, which He freely did. Now, if we believe that Jesus knew in advance what was going to happen over there, then why did He have to go to all that trouble? If the demon possessed man was among the elect, then wouldn't that assure his salvation? Yes, it would, but only because Jesus implemented the necessary means to accomplish that salvation, by a direct visit to that man. Like we said earlier, salvation doesn't just happen by osmosis, it happens as a consequence of hearing and believing the gospel. This process cannot be bypassed. Now, let's return to our study - concerning the Lord's delayed return.

But nevertheless, just like the Lord demonstrated in the days of Noah, that day will come. The Lord's patience will end eventually, and every promise, and every warning will be fulfilled to the uttermost. The righteous, who have waited patiently will be comforted, and the wicked who have taunted the promises of Christ, and entertained their lustful behaviors will be called to give an account and pay the price. Just because the time hasn't come yet, doesn't mean it's never going to come, it simply means that it's getting closer every day, because that day is fixed in the Lord's timetable, and every day that passes brings us one day closer. Like a marathon runner, who knows there is a finish line, fixed and immovable, takes comfort as he sees every mile go by, because he knows it brings him one-mile closer to that finish line. Likewise, every Christian knows there is a day fixed in the heavens, and immovable, and every day of our lives brings us one more day closer to the sure and certain promises of God.

In His divine wisdom, God has appointed a time for the mockers and the unbelievers to indulge their lusts and to taunt His elect, and during this time, we His people, have been appointed to suffer and persevere for the sake of the Name of our Savior, so that in the end, at the final accounting, God's divine righteousness might be demonstrated, and rightly and justly served upon all of His created beings. With this, let's look at our remaining verses:

The Day of the Lord Will Come

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 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.

2 Peter 3:10-18 (NASB)

Against the backdrop of mockers, and taunters, and scoffers, Peter makes the emphatic declaration that the day of the Lord will come. He's already told them what's causing the delay, but here he concentrates on the actual and certain fulfillment. Peter uses an analogy here, where he says His coming will be like a thief. Is Peter saying that the Lord is a thief? Of course not, and I think we're intelligent enough to make the proper association. In just the same way that a thief always catches his victims unaware, and unsuspecting, likewise, will all these mockers be completely unaware and unsuspecting, just like the days of Noah, right up to the very last moment, and destruction will overtake them in an instant.

Unsuspecting humanity will be blissfully enjoying their lives. They'll be getting married, starting families, attending universities, starting new businesses, and making joyful plans for their futures, as they confidently declare, "peace and prosperity, peace and prosperity." But for these there will be no peace, there will be no prosperity, there will be no rest and certainly no joy, when the day of the Lord comes upon an unsuspecting and lustful humanity, who had no fear of God before their eyes, and blatantly and openly disobeyed His Commandments, and called them unjust. For these we have the warning of Isaiah who declared: (Isa 5:20-21)

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight!

Like a thief comes upon his unsuspecting victims, so the day of the Lord will drop like a hammer on the unbelieving, disobedient, and lustful masses, who mocked the commandments and promises of God. Those for whom there has been reserved a day of judgement and fiery torment as their everlasting compensation for a life of fearless disobedience to the commandments of God, and the indulgence of every lustful and shameful behavior. Those who were offered the mercy of God, but chose instead to indulge their own sinful and selfish desires, because they loved them too much to repent and be saved.

In perfect harmony with these verses we're studying from Peter, we also have the words recorded by Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, where he also was speaking of the inescapable fate of the mockers and rejecters of Christ at the end of the age, when the man of lawlessness arises to power. He said:

*8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.** 11 For this reason [not receiving the love of the truth] God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.*

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

2 Thess 2:8-13 (NASB)

Here again we have a perfect example of the two distinct groups, both planned from before creation, and each serving that purpose for which God created them. (Pro 16:4) The first group are those who refused to accept the love of the truth, even though it was freely offered to them. And why did they refuse, because they took pleasure in their wickedness says Paul, and refused to give it up, even for the salvation of their souls. For these there can be only one conclusion to their folly, and that is to be slain by the word of the Lord, and sent into that place of fiery destruction and torment that has been reserved for such as these from before creation.

Then, in the next verse, Paul switches groups and says we should always give thanks to God for having chosen us, the beloved brethren, **from the beginning** for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. Here we have the “**who**,” the “**when**,” and the “**how**” all in one sentence. The “who” is God, who made the choice, the “when” is from the beginning of creation, and the “how” is through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It just doesn’t get any clearer than this. If you can’t grasp this, it’s not because it’s obscure, it’s because you just don’t want to. So, which group do you belong to? Does your life and your priorities demonstrate the sanctifying work of the Spirit, as authentication of your faith, or, are your genuine affections still focused primarily on the pleasures of wickedness? Do you miss those old sinful practices, or do you despise them, and long for the day that you’ll be freed from their continual tempting?

Peter finishes verse 10 with a summary statement. He says that the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. In just a few brief words Peter describes the total and complete reversing of all creation. Everything that is, every element, every molecule, every atomic particle, and even the linear passage of time as we perceive it, will simply cease to exist. The power that was used to create the universe, will be used to terminate it, when it’s work is done. From the very beginning, the entire universe, and our puny little planet Earth, has been entirely disposable. It was meant to serve a particular purpose and then be destroyed.

I guess most of you guys know that I’m a bi-vocational preacher, and I earn my living working in the construction business. In our business we often buy bundles of rags to use on the job because we get dirty doing the work we do. We buy these rags with the full intention of getting them dirty and then throwing them away. We don’t trouble ourselves over trying to preserve them, or keep them clean, they were designed from the beginning to be dirtied and then discarded when their function had been served. And this is a fitting analogy for the entire universe in which we now we reside. God created it from the beginning to serve a purpose, which would cause it to be dirtied, and polluted, and eventually discarded when that purpose had been fulfilled.

And it is this very time of which Peter speaks. A time when all the dirtying, and the polluting, caused by sin, is forever brought to an end. There will be absolutely no residual pollution left in existence. Absolutely everything tainted by sin will be burned up and destroyed; every molecule, every particle, every force and every power; everything damaged by sin will be completely destroyed in an intense nuclear implosion of sorts. In Zechariah chapter 12, verse one, it says that God stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. In Isaiah chapter 40, verse 12, it makes reference to God measuring the universe by the span of His hand.

From those verses, one might make the inference that God took something infinitesimal that He called forth out of nothing, and then stretched it out so that it was the size of what He perceives to be the span of His hand. We call this our universe, and even with our most powerful telescopes we can’t even find the ends of it for its enormity, but to God, as He perceives it, it’s like a little ball that fits comfortably in the palm of His hand. He created it because He had a purpose for it, and He’ll completely dispose of it when that purpose has been served. That which He stretched forth from nothing, He will squeeze back down into nothing once again. We can’t even begin to imagine the amount of heat and energy that will be displayed in this cataclysmic event. But to God, it will most likely represent little more than a faint pop in the palm of His hand.

Just a quick observation here. We often hear it stated just how enormously large God must be. And of course he is immeasurable by our standards. But perhaps we err in our perceptions by using ourselves as the reference point. Perhaps it would be beneficial for us to consider God as the standard of reference, and Him as the normal size, and us

humans as being infinitesimally, tiny little specs of matter by comparison. Such a perspective might add a much needed dose of humility, and present a more proper perspective than we seem to have in regards to our significance and relationship with the true and living God of creation. We think of God as being just like us, but He says we aren't anything like Him at all. If we actually saw ourselves properly in relationship to Him, we might think, and talk, and behave very much differently than we do. Maybe we shouldn't consider so much that God is enormous, but rather that man is just incredibly tiny and insignificant by comparison. I'll leave you now to ponder that thought, and consider its implications.

Moving on now to verse 11, Peter turns his attention off of the mockers, and their certain destruction, and back to the saints. He poses an obviously rhetorical question to them as to just what should be the appropriate response of a people who are aware of these things. What sort of people ought we to be in holy conduct and godliness? If the wicked are to suffer such a fate, then how should the righteous be living their lives so as not to be found among those wicked.

Contrary to much of the false teachings, in the final analysis it's really very simple, it is only those who actually practice righteousness who are considered to be righteous in the eyes of God, said the Apostle John. (1Jn 3:10) It is not by a man's words, or professions, that he's appraised, but by what he does in his daily life. If the tree is good (regenerated) it will bring forth good fruit (righteous behaviors and affections) but if it's bad (unregenerate) it will bring forth bad fruit, regardless of what it says or what it claims. It simply cannot be otherwise.

This might be called the law of inevitability, whereby all things will function according to their innate construct. That which is evil will continue to think and behave evil, and that which has been redeemed and regenerated with a new heart and a new life, will demonstrate that new heart and life by their behaviors and affections. It is inevitable and inescapable.

Those who claim to be Christians, but know that there hasn't been any real change in their heart, will immediately object to this as "works salvation" and condemn it, along with its preachers. But no one who has truly been regenerated will ever make this objection. That's right, I said that no one who has been regenerated in their heart and soul, and received a new life, will ever make this objection, because they know they are a whole new person, from the inside out, and that can't happen without one fully knowing it. You can't go from loving sin to hating it, and agonizing over its continued influence on your behaviors, without being fully and painfully aware of it. It is an inevitable, and inescapable consequence of God's design plan, and thereby, we may rightly consider it an immutable law.

And for this reason we said that Peter's question was rhetorical, because every born-again Christian knows full well, in their heart, precisely what kind of person they ought to be in holy conduct and godliness, and longs desperately for the day to come when we are freed from these sinful bodies, and given a new body, fashioned in the likeness of Christ's glorious body. (Phi 3:21) That day in which these perishable bodies take on imperishability, and these mortal bodies put on immortality, and sin no longer holds any sway over our affections or behaviors. (1Co 15:53-54)

And this is Peter's point in verse 13, where, against the backdrop of the massive destruction of this earth and universe, we have the sure and certain promise of God of a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. What is the stated significance of the newness of this creation, it is the obvious eradication of sin and unrighteousness.

It is a place of perfect righteousness and holiness, where absolutely nothing that is sinful or defiling will ever be granted entrance. Peter sums up the whole of the promise for a new creation with a single statement, that it is where righteousness dwells. Certainly the promise of eternal life has value beyond measure, but as we all know from living on this earth, the actual value we place on life is based very much on the quality of it. The inescapable fact is, even the other group that Peter has talked about, the mockers, who lived for the fulfillment of their lusts, will have a form of eternal existence, and ultimately, it is the quality and conditions of that existence which defines the difference between heaven and hell.

The whole difference is summed up in a single word, the difference between heaven and hell is righteousness; in one place it exists, in the other it does not. God's greatest and most valuable gift to created beings is the gift of righteousness. He is the sole source, and dispenses it according to His own will as a gracious gift to His beloved.

It's quite commonplace to hear conversations about heaven, and the descriptions of it that we get from the book of Revelation and other places. Certainly it has marvelous sights to behold. Entrance gates made out of a single pearl, and streets of transparent gold, and foundation stones of precious gems so large that 12 of them form a square that's 1500 miles on each side. Surely these will be marvelous sights to behold. And then there are others who perceive heaven as the place where they are finally and permanently reunited with their earthly loved ones, who have previously departed.

Now I don't want to in any way devalue any of these things, surely they are marvelous and valuable. But for the life of me I can't understand how anyone could see heaven in these terms. For a born-again Christian, who has spent a lifetime engaged in a fiercely raging, and losing battle with sin, to be finally set free of that torment, and brought into a place of perfect peace and righteousness, where the One whom I truly love above all others, will receive me with loving arms, and actually address me by name; this is so utterly captivating, that all other considerations seem to simply melt away into oblivion. Jesus, the first love of my life, will be there waiting, sin and temptation will be gone forever, and that righteousness for which I hungered and thirsted, but could never attain, will be granted in full measure. After this, anything and everything else, no matter how magnificent, can only be like icing on the cake. I won't presume to speak for everyone else, but for me, to visualize and anticipate heaven from any other perspective is simply unimaginable.

Heaven holds the promise of righteousness, in the person of Jesus Christ, and in the practice of all the inhabitants; that's the promised treasure that awaits those who are destined for heaven. Those chosen and predestined by the gracious loving mercy of God the Father. Who made this choice from before creation, and then chose to implement this gracious mercy through the means of His beloved Son, who took on humanity to fulfill the requirements of righteousness that we could not, and paid the penalty of death that we rightly owed, which work was then applied and dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit, who took the Father's choice, and the Son's accomplishments, and applied them to us by literally indwelling us with His Spirit. Our salvation is fully a work of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who represent the **choice**, the **accomplishment**, and the **application** of God's predetermined will. According to the infinite wisdom of God, all three are essential elements of His predetermined process for the redemption and eventual glorification of His foreknown and beloved children. (Rom 8:29-30)

With this I echo Peter's words; knowing this, what kind of people should we be in holy conduct and godliness? The obvious answer is, a whole lot holier and godlier than we are, but that's precisely what this promise is all about, it's about God's gracious gift of perfect righteousness, not just externally, but even more significant internally, and I hope that we fathom the value of this incredible gift, and desperately hunger and thirst for it right now, every hour of every day. Of all the promises that Heaven holds, none would be of any lasting value apart from eternal righteousness. Oh thank God for His marvelous gift.

Now, while I would dearly love to just continue to speak of God's gracious gift of righteousness for hours on end, nevertheless I suppose it's necessary that we move on into the final verses. Starting in verse 14 Peter says, therefore. Therefore is a conclusionary word, a word signifying an action taken as a direct and logical result of something else. As a direct and logical result of our hopes and our aspirations for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, therefore, we are exhorted to be diligent in our efforts to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless; and we are to regard this time of waiting for His return as a demonstration of His patience toward us, His beloved elect.

Then Peter does something very interesting. By making reference to the apostle Paul, and all of Paul's writings, which Peter says contained things which are sometimes difficult to understand, he puts his seal of endorsement on Paul's writings as inspired holy Scripture. Both Peter and Paul, and all of those contributing to the New Testament understood what they were writing. These men understood that they were being used by the Holy Spirit to record the very words of God, and both here and numerous other places, both Peter and the other apostles continually reminded their readers that they were genuine apostles of Jesus Christ, and their words carried all of His divine authority.

Peter acknowledges that it's not always easy to understand and interpret all things that are recorded in the holy Scriptures, and reminds us that there is an endless array of self-proclaimed Bible expositors who are ready to exploit this for their own devious purposes. Peter says they do this to their own destruction. To distort the holy Scriptures for personal

motivations will result in eventual destruction says Peter, which authenticates the divine nature of these writings. One does not go to divine destruction for distorting simple human literature, but for distorting the word of God.

There is a sad and dangerous practice that's very common in our churches today. We are prone to play fast and loose with the word of God. In the process of looking for Sunday school teachers we've heard it said that anybody can teach the word, just follow this preprinted outline which you're given, and anybody can do it. And that's exactly what we do. Old or young, experienced or novice, male or female, and sad but true, even regenerate or unregenerate; if you're willing to teach a class then you're a teacher. And this is how we get the popular Bible theology by consensus of opinion. Not the consensus of opinion of trained and diligent Bible students, but the consensus of opinions of mature believers, immature believers, and complete unbelievers, all trying to reconcile their perspectives and opinions.

If there's anything at all that matters concerning the study of scriptures, it would seem to be matter of whether or not they're actually true. If they aren't then why in the world do we bother studying them in the first place? Why don't we just sit around in a circle and all give our individual opinions? The fact is, this is quite often exactly what happens. But if the Scriptures are true, and the things that are spoken in them have eternal consequences, then can we afford to take them so lightly? Do we dare treat them as a book of helpful suggestions, and implement the parts that we think are useful, and just simply ignore the parts we don't like, with no fear whatsoever of divine retribution, like Saul did with king Agag?

The fact is, there's no such thing as partial, or selective obedience. That's a linguistic term for a non-existent entity. Obedience to some of God's commandments, while knowingly disobeying others is not a sustainable situation. What we might want to call selective "obedience" is simply selective "disobedience" in the eyes of God, and just like king Saul, it results in rejection and replacement of position. We tolerate all sorts of sinful practices among our church members in the name of love and tolerance, but the inescapable result of this will be the removal of our lampstand, unless we repent and return to righteousness. (Rev 2:5, 2:16, 2:21; 3:3, 3:19)

In other words, our churches, as a visible display of virtuous godliness, will simply dissolve and fade away into obscurity, as so many already have. A church, no matter how loving or how prosperous, but without righteousness in its behaviors, is not a lampstand to the world for the display of the holiness of God and His manifest glory. There is no substitute for righteousness, nor any continued life for a church without it.

I'm saying these things because this is what Peter is trying to warn us about. About the mishandling of the Scriptures and the loose and whimsical perception of their authority. If we don't study them diligently, and choose our teachers very carefully, then these false teachers, of which we were warned in Chapter 2, and these mockers from chapter 3, will undermine our steadfastness in the truth of the gospel. They will successfully carry us away into every worldly and ungodly practice, and they'll do so, all the while using the name and title of the Lord Jesus, but denying the sanctifying and purifying power of the Holy Spirit that produces careful obedience His words. (1Pet 1:2)

Peter foresees the danger, and doesn't want to see these things happen to the churches that he's worked his whole lifetime to help raise up and bring to maturity. He's telling them, and us, to be alert, to be on guard, to make ourselves aware of the truth, so we won't be deceived by unprincipled men, and women, who infiltrate our churches and work their bizarre angles, and strange practices, that completely contradict all sound teaching and godly behaviors.

He's telling us not just to be able to recognize them, but to also be prepared to effectively deal with them. They must be rightly identified and then exposed for what they are, and the true saints warned to avoid them like the plague, which is exactly what they are. Our only protection is a proper, unbiased, unpolluted, interpretation of the holy scriptures, coupled with the courage and conviction to strictly adhere to them, because they do not change, or evolve with the culture, but are those divine and precious truths that endure forever, as Peter had previously said in his first epistle. (1:25) With this I'll move into my conclusion.

Conclusion:

First of all, I wish to thank all of you who have listened to our audio bible studies, and helped support our ministry. You probably all know that no one in our ministry accepts any compensation for our efforts, but do all for the joy of serving the Lord through the ministry of His word. I'm saying this because it's December 31st, 2010, and we're about to end one year and begin a whole new one. We don't know if this coming year will be the one that we hear the trumpet sound, and the voice from heaven call "come up here," and all our hopes and expectations become tangible reality, as we behold the face of our beloved Savior, and take hold of that precious gift of perfect righteousness. But either way, we patiently wait, regarding the time as salvation for our dear brothers and sisters, who have yet to come to saving faith, but surely will do so, in that immutable timetable of God the Father.

So, therefore we preach the gospel faithfully, and encourage, and warn the saints concerning holiness and godliness, and steadfastness in the teachings of the holy scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto the means of salvation and holiness. And, through which, we visibly display our gratitude and affection to God our Father, and Jesus our beloved Savior, and the Holy Spirit our teacher and our guide, through this marvelous journey of life, which the Lord has graciously granted to every living being, even to those whom He knows will reject His loving kindness.

I can think of no more fitting way to close this teaching of second Peter than to use his own words, as he formed what he knew was to be his final farewell to his beloved brethren, and soon departure to be in the presence of his beloved Savior. He closes with these words:

17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 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.

From myself and everyone at Narrow Gate Baptist Church, I pray that God will richly bless, and provide for, and protect each and everyone of you through whatever perils this coming year might reveal, and your faith may grow, and your understanding and steadfastness ever expanded in the true knowledge of God, in all His glory. God bless you all.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
12/31/10