

A Study of Second Peter
Week Three
2 Peter 3:1-18

Day One

3:1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

v. 1 – I think that most people don't properly value the power of writing. We are a verbal and visual culture today. We watch or listen to most everything, while book sales decline every year. God chose to introduce Jesus in a day of the written word, not of the visual word. Don't get me wrong; I'm not criticizing the video/digital world in which we live. I enjoy movies and television, but I also read a lot. Reading takes longer and involves more energy to concentrate. I find reading more rewarding than watching, and I find writing most fulfilling of all.

Peter chose to write this second letter by way of reminder to stimulate wholesome thinking. His purpose was clear. He wasn't trying to write new and interesting doctrines. I've found many people don't write because they don't have anything "new" to say. Then perhaps they should restate what they already know in a way that will make sense to others.

How much writing do you do? Do you journal? Do you read? Are you growing in your knowledge of the faith or life in general because you're exposed to ideas and teaching from others beyond what you watch on television or hear in church?

v. 2 – Notice that Peter wasn't trying to establish his own "voice," but direct the attention of the readers to the voices of the prophets and the Lord Jesus. I also find it interesting that Peter acknowledged that Jesus was speaking through him and the apostles, but he was careful to keep the focus on Jesus. Lord, help me to do the same thing.

It is so easy as a speaker to begin to think that you should be the center of attention, that somehow what you are saying or teaching is due to your insights or your ability to speak. But it's never about you or me when we work for Jesus; it's always about Him. That is the thing that so consistently impresses me as I work my way through the New Testament in these studies. These writers always kept the focus on Jesus.

As a leader, do you all within your power to keep the people following focused on God's purpose and will?

Day Two

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

v. 3 – We are in the last days, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the Lord will return in my lifetime as some interpret. I hope He does come (especially before my next rent payment!), but every generation has felt the return of the Lord was imminent. I think this is a byproduct of the Spirit living in us and quickening us to feel that the Lord is near.

I have mentioned that I don't like the fact that some have made so much money off their fairy tales of the end times. That at times has caused me to make light of the fact that they portray the Lord's return as near. I must be careful with that, for I do believe the return of the Lord can be at any time. No one knows for sure.

v. 4 – These evil men to whom Peter referred were scoffers, challenging the Church concerning the return of the Lord. Of course, these scoffers were correct—the Lord didn't return in their lifetime. But I know one thing for sure; while the Lord didn't come to meet them here, they died and met Him there. And if they weren't in right standing with God, they were sentenced to an existence of suffering, separated from Him.

As I get older, I realize how short life truly is. I'm glad that I have devoted what I have to God's service and I regret some lost opportunities. My point is that I am nearer to meeting the Lord than I have ever been and that is the message that we must preach to a lost and dying world. The Lord is near, if not through His imminent return then through death. We do have an urgent message. Time is short, get right with God and prepare to spend eternity with Him or prepare to an eternity of darkness and hopelessness. Someone's introduction to that lost-ness may take place tomorrow; no one knows for sure.

v. 5 – I am not quite sure what Peter was trying to say in this verse. I think he was just setting the stage to talk about Noah's flood. God used water to create the world and then used water to destroy most of it at one point. The very thing that God used for good was the thing that He used in His power to judge. Peter was refuting those nay-sayers who were sure that things would always go on as usual. Peter was urging them to see God's hand behind His creation and to see that God can take what we are so accustomed to and use it for different purposes.

Fire, rain, water and wind are all useful elements for human existence. But God can take those basic elements and turn them into something terrifying. So it is best not ever to take God's mercy for granted, but rather to serve Him and trust that He will spare you from His coming wrath and judgment.

Day Three

6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

v. 6 – The flood is a fascinating study, and I took some time in seminary to do just that. When I fly over some fascinating rock formation or geographic wonder like the Grand Canyon, I don't ever believe that it took millions of years to form. I attribute it to the Noah's Flood. One of the things that dawned on me in my study is that the Flood wasn't regional; it was worldwide. And it had to cover the highest mountain peak with enough water to allow the ark to float over. What's more, many ancient civilizations had their own Flood account, so that the account, while varied, isn't just found in the Bible.

My point is that I believe that there was a literal Flood whose waters covered the whole earth. I think is an important point, because it points to the reality that God destroyed the earth once and will do it again as promised. God spared Noah, but destroyed all other human life. (Some creation scientists believe that there could have been one billion inhabitants on earth at the time of Noah's flood.)

v. 7 – God promised that He would not destroy the earth by water ever again (see Genesis 9:11). The next judgment will be by fire when the Lord returns to establish a new heaven and new earth. It is fascinating to me how many movies incorporate an end-of-the-world theme, and it usually is considered a "horror" or science fiction movie. There must be something in our human subconscious that attests to the truth of a cataclysmic end. For us as believers, the only one who could orchestrate that end is the Creator, God Himself. For that reason, the believer and only the believer can rest in the truth of the end, for God will destroy the wicked and preserve His righteous ones when the end does indeed come.

v. 8 – I use this verse when I teach on time management. In this context, Peter was refuting those who denied the reality of the coming judgment. They were saying that there would be no judgment, that things would go on in creation as they always had. Peter was warning these skeptics not to misinterpret God's gracious patience. In the next verse, he went on to explain why God delays His coming judgment.

Before we move on, let me explain how I use this verse in time management training. I urge those I train to have faith for time, just like they would for money. I point at that a 1,000 years is like a day to the Lord. That means that one hour would be the equivalent of 47 years and one minute would be equal to nine months. So I go on to say that if the Lord ever indicates that He will help you in just a minute, you may have to wait some time before the help actually comes!

But notice that that the opposite is also true—a thousand years is like a day. That means that something you thought would take a long time could happen quickly. We often procrastinate because we don't think we have enough to do a project or do it well. With

faith, what we thought would take a long time could be done quickly (nine months can be like a minute). So we can use this verse to spur us to action, trusting that God will help us do what we don't think we have time to do. Make sense?

Day Four

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

v. 9 – Some would accuse God of being slow in fulfilling His promise of judgment and others would dismiss it as untrue. God waits and is patient for only one reason: So that as many as possible can be saved from the coming judgment. God waits so that no one can ever accuse Him of hasty action or destruction without adequate warning. God promises that those who don't know Jesus will be judged and then gives people an ample opportunity to accept His gracious offer of salvation. Eventually those who reject His kindness will be judged and they will not be able to complain. They had ample warning.

God is patient but eventually His patience will expire and then He will move swiftly to carry out His promises, even promises of judgment and destruction.

v. 10 – Everyone will have his day of the Lord. For some, they will be alive when the Lord returns as He promised. For others, it will be a date with death, the common experience of all men and women. Recently, I was in a car that went out of control for a moment. I thought to myself: How quickly my life could have ended. There was no time to say goodbye or ask forgiveness for my sins. I have often thought of the poor victims in the Twin Towers on 9/11. They had no time for anything except a quick phone call; their day of the Lord came like a thief in the night.

This is why the Church is to carry out its mission of evangelism with such urgency. The day of the Lord is a reality for all people and we are to work to be agents of God's salvation to as many as possible. The Church must also be careful not to interpret God's "slowness" to fulfill His promise as a sign to relax. His slowness is simply to allow as many as possible to escape His wrath.

So what are you doing where evangelism is concerned? Are you bearing witness to the truth of Christ's love and forgiveness? Are you supporting with prayer and finances those who are taking the message to foreign lands? Do you have a list of those who don't know about the terrible day of the Lord and are you working to see that they enter God's "ark" to flee the coming destruction?

When I write this questions, it sounds so bizarre, so radical. Yet this is the truth as Peter wrote it. The day of the Lord will come and, for those who are not prepared, it will be a terrible day.

Day Five

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

v. 11 – Peter drew the implication and conclusion for his discussion of the return or day of the Lord. If the world will be destroyed suddenly and without warning, then we are to be a holy people. We are not to live as if there is no day of reckoning and we are not to presume that the end is *not* imminent. I try to apply what I heard a man tell me one time: “Pray like everything depends on God and then work like everything depends on you.” I apply that here because that simple saying has kept me from sitting back or taking God’s grace or my time on earth for granted.

Jesus told a parable with the lesson that His servants ought always to be acting like the Lord’s return is imminent. Part of the parable goes like this:

The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers (Luke 12:42-46).

Are you acting like you have all the time in the world, or is there an urgency to what you and how you act that testifies to the reality that the end may be tomorrow?

v. 12 – Peter already mentioned the way the end will come. What does that mean? How does this fit in with the other teaching and theories of the end? I’m not sure and, truthfully, I never spend a lot of time thinking about it. The end will come. When? No one knows. How? Well, we know that fire is involved, but that’s all we know. What will become of us? Those who believe in the Lord and are walking in righteousness will be spared. How? I’m not sure, but there are plenty of those who that they are sure.

v. 13 – The promise of the new heaven and new earth is often lost amidst the speculation of how the end will take place. I like to say that God has a big book and a sharp pencil and records every good thing you do for Him. If He doesn’t reward you in this life, then the good news is that there is another life to come. That latter life will never end and God will then settle all accounts and distribute all rewards and punishment.

I also don't hold to the thought that the next age will be nothing but one eternal song service. When Jesus returned, He had a glorified body, but He went on to heaven to "work"—to intercede at the right hand of the father. When Jesus came back from the dead, He ate, had memory of all that had happened before His death, and taught the disciples. He was not idle nor did He float around in meaningless activity. I think we will be the same when we return to the new heaven and new earth.

My own theory is that the next age will be a chance for you and me to fulfill our purpose without the limitations of hunger, fatigue or disease. That excites me much more than an eternal song service. You may ask, "On what basis do you rest this theory?" I think I have as much Scripture for this as those who purport more radical or romantic theories of how the end will take place. What's more, I'm not writing novels making tons of money from my biblical theories, which tells me something of the motivation of those who hold other theories (and they are just theories for all of us).

Day Six

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

v. 14 – God doesn't solely motivate by fear, but there is a fear factor involved in the end of creation as we know it. If we can't stay holy by means of our love for God, then at least we can stay holy because of our fear of judgment. We are to make a conscious effort to do what God requires and to maintain our right standing with Him. Our right standing doesn't stem from our efforts, but we must work to maintain the right standing that the blood of Jesus provides by walking in obedience.

v. 15 – Peter referred to Paul's writings and referred to them as Scripture—divinely-inspired writings. It is so significant that Peter acknowledged this in his lifetime about another writer. There was no jealousy or competition, just recognition of how God was using another worker in God's field.

Peter referred to the fact that Paul wrote about God's patience being a strategy for as many to be saved as possible. I think Peter was probably referring to the following passages:

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:3-5).

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior (Colossians 1:21).

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:2-4).

While the Bible clearly states that God desires all men to be saved, it by no means says that all will, as some have erroneously concluded.

It is always interesting to me how seamless the Bible is. The writers, even though spread out over several millennia, agree with one another. The Bible is an amazing book, one worthy of my study for the rest of my life.

v. 16 – If people distorted the Scriptures in Peter’s day, they will certainly do so today. When I was 37 years of age, I went back to school to study the Bible. I knew I was ignorant, but had been in ministry for a few years based on my “gifts” and skills. I knew, however, that if I was ignorant and God anointed me, then I would have anointed ignorance. That anointed ignorance had the potential to misinform people at best or deceive them at worst. So I decided to do something about it.

Today, I am still working to dispel my ignorance, and these studies are part of my effort. I pray regularly, “Lord, keep me from strange doctrine. Correct my errors and give me wisdom to teach your people accurately.” Will you join me in that prayer?

And if you feel so moved, will you do something beyond these studies to grow in your knowledge of God’s word? Perhaps you can or should go to school. Maybe you can do extra reading or take a class offered by a church or local Bible school. There are also online study programs in which you could enroll. I’m not saying you have to earn a degree in the Bible to read or teach the Bible. I am saying you need to do more than rely on God’s anointing to handle the Bible effectively.

Day Seven

17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.
18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

v. 17 – There are unscrupulous men and women who twist the Bible for their own ends, either to attract a following or to make money.

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God (2 Corinthians 2:17).

Paul stated that many peddled God's word. On another occasion, he pointed out that there were others teaching God's word who were deceiving those they taught for selfish purposes:

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:2-6).

Pray to be delivered from such deceivers and pray not to be one yourself.

v. 18 – As I have stated many times, it's all about Jesus and not about cute doctrines that impress those listening with the speaker's insight. I have found that the more I study the Word, the less "freedom" I have to interpret the verses. I must work hard to stick to the meaning that the Holy Spirit intended and not read my own interpretation into the text. That requires discipline. I must also put myself aside, not an easy thing to do. For I am standing before the people, but I am saying what Jesus would say if He were standing there.

Peter ended his letter rather abruptly, but he left the reader with the thought that it's all about Jesus. He also exhorted the reader to grow in the knowledge of Jesus and His word. Are you growing in grace and knowledge? That is one of the reasons I write—it is one means by which I can grow and study. What can you do to increase in the knowledge of God?

Whenever I see the command to grow in knowledge, I think of Paul's words to the Colossians, and with those words and prayer, we will close this study of Peter's letters:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, **growing in the knowledge of God**, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:9-14).

Amen, and amen!