

## II PETER

First Things First

February 09, 2014

- I. Be holy in all your behavior just as God is holy
  - A. II Peter 3:1-9 . . . 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.
    - B. Pray
- II. First things first
  - A. II Peter 3:1-2 . . . 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.
    1. Beloved: Peter uses the word Beloved three times in chapter 3, and in all three places he is exhorting us to something directly related to how we live the Christian life, both personally and as a church. You will find this in 3:1, 3:14, and 3:17.
    2. By way of reminder: This is the second time Peter said he was writing this letter to remind his readers of certain truths.
      - a. From reading both of Peter's letters, it is obvious he is not just reminding his readers, but is informing and exhorting them about things that seem new to them. Yet he emphasizes that he is reminding them of things they already know. Why?

- b. I think the answer is found in our nature. You see, informing and instructing are only a part of education – and in many cases, a lesser part at that. In most cases, the greater part of learning comes from reminding, practicing, reviewing, and observing.
  - (1) Good parents know that it is foolish to tell their children once what to do and expect them to do it from then on. Children need the addition of reminding, practicing, reviewing, and observing to learn, not just a one-time telling.
  - (2) And the point here is that we all learn best by being informed and instructed, and then being reminded numerous times of what we have been told, practicing what we have been told, reviewing what we have been told, and when possible, watching someone else do it right. This applies to growing in Christ-likeness as well.
- 3. Stirring up your sincere mind: The Greek word for sincere speaks of examining something in sunlight in order to ascertain its purity or worth. This definition adds an interesting twist to Peter's use of the word sincere.
  - a. If we make the sunlight represent God's light – as given to us through His son, Jesus, His Holy Spirit, and His word – then by means of that light we are able to discern how pure or sincere our mind is by comparing what is going on in it to the holiness of God and the truth of His word.
  - b. For example, Paul tells us how to measure the sincerity of our thoughts by telling us what kind of thoughts we Christians ought to maintain. We read this in Philippians 4:8 . . . Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.
  - c. James tells us how to remedy double-mindedness in James 4:8-10 . . . “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”
  - d. The point here is that a sincere mind is a mind free of contaminants – that is, free of selfish or evil motives and fleshly

or worldly desires. And a sincere mind is not something that happens spontaneously, but is gained by vigilantly and continuously examining what is coming into our mind and what our mind is dwelling on. And we do this for the purpose of stopping any contaminants at the door or removing them once we realize they've gotten in.

- B. II Peter 3:2 . . . That you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.
1. Peter is reminding us here that scripture presents a unified progression of truth, beginning with God's chosen prophets in the OT – which includes Moses, and culminating in God's son, Jesus Christ.
  2. The writer of Hebrews affirms this unified progression of truth in Hebrews 1:1-2 . . . “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, [2] in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
  3. In other words, God began speaking truth into our world through his prophets. He enlarged, expanded, clarified, and highlighted His truth through Jesus Christ – who said that he did not come to abolish the OT law, but to fulfill it.
  4. Then, God entrusted this unified truth to the disciples – which includes the apostle Paul – to interpret, teach, affirm, and disseminate it throughout the world – and they did this by passing it on to God's Holy Spirit empowered evangelists, missionaries, church elders, pastors, and teachers, and then to the general membership of the church who are to act as lights in the world.
  5. For me, Peter's statement here is significant, for it infers the OT prophets and the words of Jesus are the foundation or measuring stick for any new teachings or practical application of truth that comes into the church.
    - a. This does not mean we cannot teach new understandings or applications of old truths, for that is how we bring God's truth into a variety of cultures and each age. However, it does mean that anything new must agree in principle and focus with what God spoke through the OT prophets and Jesus.
    - b. Therefore, if a new teaching in any way denies the supremacy of God or the deity of Christ; if it goes outside the boundaries of

what God has already revealed and written, if it alters the standard of holiness God's people are to live up to, or if it exaggerates God's role and leads us to expect God to do what He expects us to do – it is a false teaching. If a new teaching in any way exalts man over God, or encourages pride, or makes light of the practice of sin, or in any way weakens the spiritual strength of the church – it is not of or from God. How do we know? Because we have the words of the prophets and the words of Christ as our measuring stick.

- C. II Peter 3:3-4 . . . 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."
1. The first thing I want to point out about these two verses is that Peter is telling us that the end times will be marked by a sequence of events leading up to Christ's return.
    - a. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 24:3-14 . . . As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" [4] And Jesus answered and said to them,
      - (1) "See to it that no one misleads you. [5] For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.
      - (2) [6] You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.
      - (3) [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. [8] But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.
      - (4) [9] Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10] At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.
      - (5) [11] Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.
      - (6) [12] Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. [14] This gospel of the kingdom shall be

preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

- b. Paul also speaks of a sequence of events, though his statement is confined to an increasing degradation of humanity's character. We read about this in II Timothy 3:1-5 . . . But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. [2] For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, [4] treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5] holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power . . .
  - c. The point here is that Christ is returning, and there will be signs that give us a clue that His return is in the near future.
2. The second truth I want to point out about these two verses is that in the end times, there will be those in the church who will mock the requirement of holiness and justify sin and worldliness by claiming there is no reason to fear God's judgment because His promise regarding the soon return of Christ has gone unfulfilled for centuries.
    - a. To mock, or to be a mocker, is to show contempt or ridicule for something that claims to be true or real, but which you believe – either accurately or inaccurately – to be neither true nor real.
    - b. Now we might think this mocking label belongs to someone somewhere out there. And I trust that it has not and never will be an apt description of any of us.
    - c. However, Paul applies this truth in a more personal way when he says in Galatians 6:7-8 . . . Do not be deceived, God is not mocked (*will not be treated with contempt or as if He is not real or His word is not true*); for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
    - d. I am bringing this up because when we knowingly and willingly sin, we are rebelling against God and therefore mocking God.
  3. And I am bring this up because even though we may not have, as yet, entered the end times, a mocking self-justification for practicing one or more sins is not unheard of in the church. It is likely you know someone who practices a particular sin, or who is easily

angered, or who clings to unforgiveness, or who has an ungrateful attitude, or who frequently lives in anxiety or fear, or who openly distrusts God in some way or another – all because, in their opinion, God has not done what they expected Him to do.

- a. In other words, they feel justified in their bad behavior because in their view of life, God has not lived up to their expectations.
- b. Now it is the very mindset that Peter is addressing, and he points out that God has not in the past, is not currently, nor will He in the future fail to keep His word. In other words, we can and ought to trust that God is perfectly good and His lovingkindness is forever.

D. II Peter 3:5-6 . . . 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.

1. For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice: In other words, when those in the church justify their practice sin and participation in the ways of the world on the basis that God's promised return and final judgment have not happened for several thousand years, they are ignoring another reality.
  - a. But lets start with their assumption – for it is true, as they say, that from the time of creation until today, the world has gone on as it always has. This is a reality that cannot be denied.
  - b. But, this reality is only part of the reality at work here, which means by looking at only part of what is happening, they are misreading what they are observing and therefore they are drawing the wrong conclusion.
  - c. So what is the second part of the reality that is at work here? It is God's part, that is, God's past activity of creation and past judgment on sin and sinners. And to press his point home, Peter points out that both God's creation and judgement included water. Peter puts it this way.
2. By the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.
  - a. The point Peter is making is that it is true that the promised end of the world and God's final judgment have not come.

- b. But it is also true that God created the world, with water being one of His main creative elements. And God also judged the world – destroying the advancing growth of sin and sinners with water – and saving only eight persons.
- c. And so Peter is making the point that based on the reality that God created the world and has powerfully judged it already, it is foolish to conclude that God will not keep His promise about the end of this world and the coming final judgment. And it is even more foolish to add insult to injury by using this wrong conclusion to justify returning to old sinful ways and evil practices.

### III. Conclusion

- A. We may be convinced of the Lord's return. We may even be knowledgeable about sequence of events leading up to His return and all the other things the scriptures say about His return.
- B. However, God has not given us His word to only or even mostly inform us, but rather to transform us. So being convinced of Christ's return is good, but looking forward to it while preparing for it by diligently pursuing a transformed life and Christian maturity is best.
- C. May we be those who use God's word to lead us further and further down the path of godliness. May we make a worthy effort to be holy in all our behavior as God is holy. And may we add to this a knowledgeable understanding of the return of Christ and a heart's longing for His kingdom to come.