

II PETER

What Ought We To Be? Part 1

February 23, 2014

- I. Be holy in all your behavior just as God is holy
 - A. II Peter 3:11-18 . . . 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.
 - B. Pray
- II. What sort of people ought we to be?
 - A. I want to begin today's teaching by reminding you that Peter has remained consistent with his focus from the beginning of his first letter through to the end of his second letter.
 - 1. And here in this last chapter of II Peter, he has come full circle with his focus – for we read in I Peter 1:13-16 . . . Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; [16] because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
 - 2. From these words in I Peter to the last words of II Peter 3, God is making it clear that from the first moments of saving faith to the

last breath of life, the identifying mark of the Christian life is holiness – a complete and thorough holiness that is intended to affect all our behavior.

3. This means that anything other than a serious, purposeful, and persistent pursuit of holiness in all our thoughts, words, and deeds is abnormal Christianity, and unworthy of the Christ who died for us, and unworthy of the blood He shed for us, and unworthy of the Father who sacrificed His son so we could live forever.
 4. However, from the time of the apostles until now, there have been those within Christianity who have lifted up other parts of the Christian life as if they were more important than holiness of life.
 - a. For example, in our time, serving in the church, being active in social justice issues, engaging in soul-stirring worship, attending Bible studies and prayer meetings, defending the faith, doing evangelism and world missions, studying theology, and other genuinely commendable activities are commonly treated as more important than holiness of life.
 - b. Yet Peter proclaims in his two letters that growing in godliness and holy living are to be the priority and marks of born again Christians.
 5. With this in mind, let's turn our attention to II Peter 3:11.
- B. II Peter 3:11-12a . . . Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way (*with fire*), what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, [12a] looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.
1. Peter begins verse 11 with a compelling reason for living a life of holy conduct and godliness in preparation for Christ's return and His final judgment on sin and unrepentant sinners.
 - a. And Peter's reason is the annihilation of this world and all that is temporary, and of the devil, and of the flesh, and of man's pride.
 - b. Or to say it another way, Christ's return will bring the destruction of all that is not God-honoring and all that is unrighteous and all that is not born out of love and not within the boundaries of God's will.
 - c. In other words, all that is not righteous and eternal will be destroyed by fire just as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.
 - d. Paul uses this same imagery in I Corinthians 3:12-15, where he exhorts the pastors, teachers, and elders in the church to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver, and

precious stones rather than wood, hay, and straw. And Paul says this because the day is coming when the quality of each teacher's and leader's work will become evident – being revealed with a fire that will either prove the quality of the gold, silver, and precious stones, or show the worthlessness of the wood, hay, and straw by burning them up.

- e. In his first letter, John adds another motive for living a holy life in light of the return of Christ, and his motive has to do with facing God with confidence rather than fear and shame.

- (1) I John 2:28 . . . Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

- (2) I John 4:16-18 . . . We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. [17] By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

- f. The point here is that pursuing holiness in all our behavior is the best preparation for the return of Christ and the final judgment. Therefore, learning all we can about the end times has merit (*in the sense of being valuable*), but living a progressively godly and spiritually maturing life in preparation for the end times is meritorious (*in the sense of being rewarding*).

- 2. Now you may be wondering why losing anything to the destroying fire of God's final judgment should be motivation for living a holy life? After all, we have been born again and are assured of eternal salvation. Therefore, what is there to fear or to lose when getting to heaven after dying is the treasure we seek? Let me give you three additional reasons why it is wise to prepare for the return of Christ by actively and purposefully pursuing holy living in all your behavior.

- a. First, as born again Christians, we are eternal beings passing through this temporary land on our way to our eternal homeland. And according to the scriptures, what we have there will be affected by how we live here. In other words, we can take into God's eternal kingdom only that which is not destroyed by

fire Therefore, one compelling motive for living a holy life now in preparation for then is that we are here for such a short time in comparison to how long we will be there, and how we live here for a short time has a profound effect on what we will have there for eternity.

- b. Second, imagine being engaged to someone who affirms time and again that she wants to marry you, yet her ongoing selfishness and involvement with other men and other things clearly communicates she doesn't love you above all others. Would you be so naive as to think her love for you would change to what it ought to be on your wedding day, or even in the following months and years?

- (1) Yet when we live a hap-hazard, spiritually weak, marginally holy Christian life focused more on self and this world than on loving God and doing His will, we are treating God as if He is unworthy of being loved above all others while wanting Him to give us the full privileges of marriage.

- (2) If we treat His heaven as worthy of living there for eternity, ought we not treat Him as worthy of being loved above all others?

- (3) Therefore, another compelling reason to live a godly life in preparation for the end times is that it brings us into that spiritual condition whereby we love God above all others, now, so that when we pass through the door of death, we will simply continue loving Him as we ought.

- c. Third, the Christian life is a life of faith, and the scriptures go so far as to say that without faith it is impossible to please God. Now an important truth about faith that some overlook is that our daily thoughts, words, and behavior are a direct reflection of what we believe and who we trust in. To claim faith in God and not zealously pursue holy living is to make a false claim. Therefore, any claim to faith in God that does not directly, significantly, and continuously transform us from sinners into saints is neither saving faith nor God pleasing faith. And this my third reason why we must prepare for the return of Christ by living a godly life.

- 3. Moving on to verse 12, Peter speaks of looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

- a. Certainly we understand what it means to look for the coming day of God with expectation and hope, knowing that when it comes we will finally, along with all God's people, enter together into God's new heaven and new earth. When I think of this, several thoughts come to mind:
 - (1) First, I will be free from my flesh – that part of me that clings to this earth, to sin, and to selfishness.
 - (2) Second, I will be with God in a face-to-face way that can only be touched or tasted in part here on earth. And knowing how good it is here makes me long for it in its fullest way there.
 - (3) Third, it will not be just God and me, but God and us. All God's people will dwell together as a community or a family of believers. And if a loving marriage and a good family is wonderful here, you can be sure that being with God's family there will be immeasurably wonderful.
 - b. But what might Peter mean when he speaks of hastening the coming of the day of God? How can we do that? There are several scriptures that seem to answer this question. Taking them in the order in which they appear –
 - (1) One of the things we can do to hasten the return of Christ is to pray for His kingdom to come. Matthew 6:10 . . . Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 - (2) A second thing we can do is to be active in evangelism, here and around the world. Matthew 24:14 . . . 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.
 - (3) And the third thing the scriptures speak of is to personally repent unto salvation and give serious attention and effort, by God's grace and empowerment, to growing in godliness and holiness of life. Acts 3:19-21 . . . Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; [20] and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, [21] whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.
4. And this brings us to verse 13.

III. New heavens and new earth

A. II Peter 3:13 . . . But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

1. The idea of God destroying our present heavens and earth and replacing it with a new heaven and earth is not unique to Peter. There are other scriptures that speak to this same truth, but I will read just two.
2. For example, we read in Isaiah 60:19-21 . . . No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. [20] Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; for you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be over. [21] Then all your people will be righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified.
3. Revelation 21:1-4 . . . Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, [4] and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.
4. Now the interesting thing about the new heavens and new earth is that though there are a variety of descriptions, none of the descriptions give us a clear picture of how far reaching the destruction is of our current heavens and earth and what exactly the new heavens and new earth will look like.
 - a. For example, will the fire of God's judgment burn up our atmosphere and burn off the surface of the earth – with the idea being that God will replace both without totally destroying the heavens beyond or the earth beneath?
 - b. Or does destroying the heavens refer to our galaxy? And when God speaks of destroying the earth by fire, is it a surface cleansing or the total destruction of our planet so that God will need to replace our galaxy and our planet?

5. Another interesting thing about the new heavens and new earth is that we do not know how the fire will accomplish its task. Will it be like the instantly destroying fire of an atomic bomb, or like a raging forest fire that is swept by the wind and uncontrollably consumes everything in its path?
6. Well, regardless of what we don't know and in spite of how much we might like knowing or even discussing these things, they are irrelevant to the point Peter is making – which is that God is serious about bringing an end to the presence of sin and unrepentant sinners in our world, and that the new heavens and new earth will be filled with righteousness and righteous people. Therefore, we are wise to live accordingly in preparation and expectation of what God will do.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The study of the end times can be very interesting and exciting as we figure out details and images and implications of what is coming.
- B. But far more important than that is using the information given to us concerning the end times to motivate us to persevere in our pursuit of being holy in all our behavior just as God is holy.
- C. In other words, rather than studying the end times for information, let us study it for transformation.