

Be Diligent!

2 Peter 3:11-18 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 burning will be destroyed, 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 are looking for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,* ¹⁵ *and consider 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 lest you, having been carried away by the error of unprincipled men, 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."*

The purpose for prophetic truth is not speculation about the future but motivation in living out the present. In that regard, Peter concludes this letter with practical admonitions for his readers to heed. Unfortunately, the popular approach to interpreting prophetic scripture is a contrived endeavor to identify its figures and symbolism to predict its fulfillment.

All genuine believers understand that Jesus Christ is coming again. There may be various views of when and how the promised events will occur, but there is general agreement that He is returning as He promised. The realization of His return should motivate the church in both our mission and our hope.

Unfortunately, the varying interpretations of prophetic scriptures often create both confusion and conflict, as well as cause folks to shy away from prophetic scripture studies. Since opposing interpretations cannot be correct, believers should apply themselves to study and try to understand God's Word using good hermeneutical principles of biblical interpretation.

"Be diligent!" (v. 14) is the admonition that Peter wrote as he concluded his letter. He used this word earlier in 2 Peter 1 when he instructed his readers, *"applying all diligence, in your faith"* (v. 5); *"be all the more diligent to make your calling and choosing sure"* (v. 10); *"And I will also be diligent that...you will be able to call these things to mind"* (v. 15). If we are to be faithful Christians, we must learn to be diligent! In the light of the Lord's return, Peter gave three admonitions to encourage His readers in *Christian diligence*.

1. **BE DILIGENT TO LIVE GODLY LIVES** (3:11-14). The key word in these verses is “*looking for*,” which means to “*to await eagerly, to be expectant*.” It describes an attitude of excitement and expectation as we wait for the Lord’s return. Since we expect this world and all therein to be destroyed, we fix our hope only on Jesus and not on anything in this world.

Since we do not know the time of the Lord’s return, we must be ready at all times. If we begin to neglect this “*blessed hope*” (Titus 2:13), we will slowly, but surely, begin to develop a cold heart, a worldly attitude, and an unfaithful life (Luke 12:35-48). In time, we can become like the scoffers who laugh and scoff at the long-awaited promise of Christ’s coming.

An expectant attitude should make a difference in our personal conduct (2 Peter 3:11). The word translated “*manner*” literally means, “*exotic, out of this world, foreign*” Since we have “*escaped the corruption that is in the world* (2 Peter 1:4), we must live differently than people in the world. To them, we should behave like foreigners because this world is not our home! While here, we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” (1 Peter 2:11) headed for a better world, the eternal city of God!

Our conduct should be characterized by holiness and godliness. The word “*holy*” means “*to separate, to cut off*.” Christians are called out from the godless world surrounding us and are set apart for God alone.

The word, “*godliness*” describes a person whose life is devoted to pleasing God. It is the attitude of reverence that demonstrates the commitment of John the Baptist toward Jesus, “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30).

Other New Testament writers teach that an expectancy of Christ’s return should motivate us to live *pure lives* (cf. Romans 13:11-14; 2 Corinthians 5:1-11; Philippians 3:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Titus 2:11-15; 1 John 2:28-3:3). Of course, it is not simply knowing the doctrine of His return that motivates our lives, it is “*loving His appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:8). Not only should an expectant attitude make a difference in our conduct, but it should make a difference in our *witness*. As we see the *day* approaching, our concern for the eternal destiny of family and friends should become critical!

There are two extremes in ministry that we must avoid. One is the attitude that God’s sovereign will and plan is fixed such that nothing we do makes a difference. The other extreme is to think that God cannot get anything done unless we do it! God’s sovereignty can never become an excuse of lazy disobedience, neither must our plans and activities attempt to override His sovereign will.

Is it possible for believers to hasten the coming of the day of the Lord? For one thing, we can pray, as Jesus taught us, “*Your kingdom come*” (Matthew 6:10). In Matthew 24:14, Jesus said, “*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in the whole world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*” Apparently, our prayers and our ministries do affect the timing of God’s promises.

These are mysteries that we cannot fully understand nor explain this side of heaven, but the basic lesson seems clear: the same God who ordains the end also ordains the means to the end—and we are part of that means. Our responsibility is not to speculate but to obediently serve!

This expectant attitude will make a difference when we meet Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:14). It means that He will greet us *“in peace”* and will have no charge against us that could cause us shame at His coming (1 John 2:28). Indeed, the Judgment seat of Christ will be a serious event (2 Corinthians 5:8-11) as we give an account of our service to the Lord (Romans 14:10-13). We will meet *“in peace”* (Revelation 2:16) the One who is *“without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:19).

How do we maintain this eager expectancy that leads to holy living? By keeping His person and His promise before our hearts (2 Peter 3:13). His presence guides us, and His promise is the light that shines brightly in a dark world (2 Peter 1:19).

2. **BE DILIGENT TO WIN THE LOST** (3:15-16)

Long ago God had every reason to judge the world and burn up its works, but in His mercy, He is longsuffering with us, *“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). This is the day of salvation, not the day of judgment!

Peter referred to Paul’s writings because Paul explained God’s plan for mankind in this present age. Especially in Romans and Ephesians, Paul explained the relationship between Israel and the church. He noted that God used the nation of Israel to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, the Savior. But Israel rejected their Messiah King and had Him crucified.

Did this destroy God’s Plan? Of course, NOT! He set Israel aside and is saving both Jews and Gentiles to make them one in the church! The church is a *“mystery”* that was hidden in God’s plan but later revealed in the New Testament (cf. Ephesians 3).

The Jewish nation was God’s great testimony to the law, but the church is His witness to grace (cf. Ephesians 1-2). Law demonstrated man incapacity for righteousness, and grace enables man to receive righteousness through faith apart from the law (as Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 make clear).

These are difficult teachings! Even during Paul’s ministry, there were those who twisted his words and tried to defend their ignorance. They accused Paul of teaching that, since we are saved by grace, it makes no difference how we then live—*“let us do evil that good may come”* (Romans 3:8; cf. Romans 6:1ff). Others accused Paul of being against the law because he taught the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church (Galatians 3:28) and their liberty in Christ.

Note that Peter classified Paul’s letters as *Scripture*—the inspired Word of God, which means that the apostles agreed with one another. Apparently, the recipients of Peter’s

second letter had also read some of Paul's letters, and Peter assured them that there was agreement.

Peter indicated that people who blindly twist the Scriptures do it *"to their own destruction."* Of course, Peter was not writing about believers who have difficulty interpreting God's Word—certainly, no one has a perfect understanding of all the Bible! Peter was describing false teachers who "tortured" the Word of God to prove their own false doctrines.

The word, *destruction*, is repeated often in this letter (2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:7, 16). It means the rejection of eternal life, which results in eternal death.

Since this is the day of salvation, we must be diligent to do all we can to win the lost. We do not know how long the Lord will be "longsuffering" toward this evil world, and we must not presume upon His grace. As disciples, we must be motivated by love for the lost (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14), as well as have the desire to obey and please the Lord. Indeed, the time is short!

3. **BE DILIGENT TO GROW SPIRITUALLY** (3:17-18)

There are four "*beloved*" statements in 2 Peter 3 that summarizes what Peter wanted to emphasize as he brought this letter to a close:

- Beloved...be mindful (vv. 1-2).
- Beloved...be not ignorant (v. 8).
- Beloved...be diligent (v. 14).
- Beloved...beware (v. 17).

The word translated "*beware*" means "*be constantly guarding yourself.*" Peter's readers knew the truth, but he warned them that knowledge alone was not sufficient protection. They needed to be on *guard*—they had to be alert!

When we think that we have a good knowledge of the Bible, we tend to grow overconfident and forget the warning, "*let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

What special danger did Peter see? The true believers would be "*carried away by the error of unprincipled men, fall from your own steadfastness.*" In a foolish, simplistic desire to establish friendship with false teachers, we must not break down the walls of separation that stand between truth and lies. There can be no communion between truth and error. The false teachers "*live in error*" (2 Peter 2:18), while true believers live in the word of truth (2 John 1-2).

Peter's description of the false teachers reveals how lawless they are. They promise their converts freedom (v.19), but that freedom turns out to be lawlessness.

Of course, true believers cannot fall from salvation, but they can fall from **“steadfastness!”** Steadfastness is being firmly established in the truth (2 Peter 1:12). A Christian’s stability comes from his faith in God’s Word, his knowledge of God’s Word, and his ability to use that Word in the practical decisions of life.

One of the great tragedies of evangelism is leading people to faith and then failing to feed them, nurture them, and help them grow in Christ. False teachers prey on new-born believers and excitedly lead them into error.

Believers can maintain their steadfastness and avoid being beguiled and led astray by intentionally growing spiritually. We must grow **“in grace.”** We were saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)—**grace starts there, but it does not end there.** We must be strengthened by grace (2 Timothy 2:1-4). God’s grace enables us to endure suffering (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). His grace empowers us to **give** when giving is difficult (2 Corinthians 8:1ff), to **obey** when it does not make sense, and to **sing** when praise is just matter of discipline (Colossians 3:16). There is grace for every situation and every challenge of life. Paul wrote, **“But by the grace of God I am what I am”** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Believers must also grow in knowledge! Unfortunately, we all know more Bible than we are living! When we combine grace and knowledge, we have a wonderful tool for building our lives and for growing the church. The better we know Jesus through the Word, the more we grow in grace; and the more we grow in grace, the better we understand the Word of God!

Steadfast believers must constantly be guarding themselves, lest they be led away into error. We must also be constantly growing in grace and knowledge. Of course, this requires diligence! It demands discipline and establishing priorities. We grow best in a loving family, and this is how the local church fits into the process of spiritual strength and maturity.

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers and enables us to persevere and be transformed into the *Image of Christ* (2 Corinthians 3:18). The result of such spiritual growth: **Glory to God!** **“To Him be glory now and forever!”**

ⁱ Wiersbe, Warren W., *Be Alert* (2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude): Beware of the Religious Impostors (The BE Series Commentary) David C Cook. Kindle Edition.