

SECOND PETER

Lesson 11

Commands in View of Christ's Coming

2 Peter 3:14-18

After eleven messages, we are now coming to the conclusion of the Epistle of Second Peter. We have seen that this little book is a tract for our modern time. It is a power-packed attack on apostate false teachers and those who willfully follow these false teachers who teach heresies of destruction or perdition. Second Peter is living proof that the Word of God is never out of date. The Bible is as relevant today as the day it was written.

In order for the true Christians to be distinguished from the false teachers and their followers, who were teaching that a person could live as sinful a life as he pleased after receiving Christ, the Apostle Peter speaks to them about sovereign election and making that election certain by good spiritual works.

“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Sovereign election demands a changed life because the God of heaven and earth is at work in every true Christian. The elect of God will demonstrate their election by their desire for the pursuit of holiness. Charles Spurgeon said, *“An unchanged life is the mark of an unchanged heart and an unchanged heart is a sign of an unregenerate heart.”*

Another distinguishing mark of a true Christian is that he makes the inspired Bible his authority for life. False teachers always deviate from the truth of Scripture, but the elect of God make the Bible their only rule of faith and practice.

“And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

Our criterion for living is not experience, what we think or what the organized church tells us. Our criterion is the inspired and infallible Bible.

Another mark of a true Christian is that he acknowledges Christ as Lord (God, King, Master, Ruler, Governor) of his life, knowing full well that Jesus Christ paid for his sins and bought him out of the slave market of sin. This is a stark contrast to false teachers and mere professors who deny the Master who they claimed had bought them, and these false teachers are headed for eternal destruction.

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Pet. 2:1).

False teachers are usually apostates; that is, they are men or women who have known the truth of Christ and Christianity, even at times seemingly giving evidence of being true Christians, but after awhile they turn from the true Faith, follow false teaching, and spurn everything about Christianity. They then are guilty of apostasy and may pass the point of no return where God may never save them.

An apostate was never a true believer in the first place as it is impossible for a true, real, genuine Christian to apostatize. The true Christian will persevere in the faith to the end.

The Lord Jesus said, *“And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved” (Matt. 10:22)*. However, an apostate will go back to his old, unsaved lifestyle, even though at one time he seemed to be a very dynamic Christian.

“For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,’ and, ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

True Christians look forward to the Second Coming of Christ whereas false teachers mock the whole idea of a supernatural intervention of Christ into history by a second advent.

“ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 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.’” (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

True Christians wait patiently for Christ's coming and work diligently in evangelism, knowing that Christ's delay is giving opportunity for more people to repent and believe in Christ.

"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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" (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

Christians have an assurance placed in their hearts by the Holy Spirit that Christ is coming again, and when He comes, He will set in motion a whole series of prophetic events spoken of in the Old and New Testaments. These events will be culminated by the destruction of this world by fire and then there will be new heavens and a new earth.

"looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:12-13).

Now with that brief review, we see in this last section of Second Peter four practices that a Christian is to diligently seek to do. In light of the soon coming of Christ (which may well be within our lifetime), the Christian is to get his priorities straight and do the really important things in life which will count for eternity.

The things that really matter in view of Christ's coming and the end of the world are summed up in the form of four commands. In verse 14, *"Be diligent to be found by Him in peace;"* verse 15, *"Regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation;"* verse 17, *"Be on your guard lest you be carried away;"* and verse 18, *"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

COMMAND TO BE RESTFUL (3:14)

"Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things"

Notice how the Apostle loves these Christians. He, with a true pastor's heart, calls them "beloved," those divinely loved by a sovereign God. The motivation for service, the incentive for keeping the commands for holiness, is not fear, but the eternal, unchanging love of God. In view of the second advent, the judgment, the final destruction of the world by fire and the new heavens and new earth, the Christian is to have a different kind of life than the non-Christian world. Because only our righteous character will survive the holocaust of the destruction of the universe, it is imperative that Christians live righteously. It is to Christ and Christ alone who we shall give an account of our actions, thoughts and motivations at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

“be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless”

Whenever Christ comes, Christians are to be diligent (be zealous, strive earnestly) to be found in peace. We, as Christians, are to reflect Christ’s own character of peacefulness. That is, we are to have spiritual restfulness and calm about us as the world is in a frenzy.

In the midst of a crumbling world politically, morally, economically and sociologically, we Christians can know something of the sovereign rest of God, realizing that He has a plan for this world and for us. Isaiah 46:10 in the King James Version says, *“Be still and know that I am God,”* but the New American Standard Version says, *“Cease striving and know that I am God”* or as the margin reads, *“Relax and know that I am God.”*

Peter says that Christians are not to be feverishly panicking in the midst of personal or world crisis. God has given the technique of spiritual rest when it seems like the world is crushing in on us. We are to relax in Christ in adverse circumstances and we will experience the peace that passes all human understanding. This is the faith-rest life that every Christian can have providing he turns to the Lord by faith in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Personal peace is God’s mind control, for Isaiah 26: 3 says, *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (KJV).* When we are resting in Christ, we are spotless and blameless before God, for the life of trust is what pleases our Lord.

We are to be different and not accept the world’s philosophy of frenzy. We are to be peaceful, quiet in spirit, knowing that God is at work to bring the world as we now know it to an end. All down through the ages it has been normally the case that men who have their hope set on the returning Christ have lives that are holy and attractive. *“And 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” (1 John 2:28).*

COMMAND TO BE HOPEFUL (3:15-16)

“and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation”

This refers to the day of opportunity for men and women to receive Christ before the Second Advent and the judgment. When Christ returns, the day of opportunity for salvation will be closed. God is long-suffering toward the elect and is not willing that any of the elect should perish but that all the elect should come to repentance.

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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” (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

Christians should have a very positive outlook toward the long delay (almost two thousand years) in Christ’s coming. The lack of God’s supernatural intervention into the

world by the Second Advent is not a sign that He is not coming back, but it displays the patience and long-suffering of God in granting people an opportunity to repent and be saved before the day of opportunity is closed at the Second Advent.

We should not panic, be discouraged or despair when we see current events happening, for they are setting the stage for the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Our task is to get the gospel of Jesus Christ to every man, woman, boy and girl on the face of the earth. We Christians do not have to be negative. We can be positive. We can exude hope to a despairing world. Our positive biblical attitudes towards a deteriorating world system will have a great effect upon the non-Christian world.

Do you project to the world a confident hope that God is on the throne of history and will one day send His Son back to this earth to straighten out this crazy, mixed up world? Positive attitudes are infectious.

“just as also our beloved brother Paul , according to the wisdom given him wrote you.”

The Apostle Paul also taught that God is long-suffering so that men can repent and turn to Christ (Rom. 2:4; 9:22-23; 11:22).

Notice how Peter addresses Paul as “our beloved brother.” What a great way to speak of another fellow minister. There is no jealousy or competition even though it was Paul who had to rebuke Peter for his legalistic spirit about table fellowship with the Gentiles. Can you say of another Christian who has rebuked you or exhorted you, “That is a beloved brother or sister”? If you can’t, you have a way to go in your Christian maturity.

“as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand”

It is very comforting to note that Peter found some things that Paul wrote hard to understand. Peter did not say that all things Paul wrote were hard to grasp, but some things were, and in context he must be referring to Paul’s viewpoints of the Second Coming and the events surrounding it. Surely if Peter got a little fuzzy on Paul’s prophetic scheme, then we ought not to feel too bad if we cannot grasp everything there is to know about the subject. There are certain subjects in the Bible that you have to dig for if you are going to understand them.

“which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

Untaught and unstable professing Christians, who are not really regenerate, will distort (twist, torture) the teachings of the Bible to make them fit their own evil system. Men torture people to get them to say things they really do not want to say. So, too, false teachers twist the Word of God to make it say things it really does not say.

A person who takes verses out of context can make the Bible say anything he wants it to say. That is why the Bible must be read in context and preached expositionally

(verse by verse). Notice what happens to false teachers who distort the Bible. They are destroyed; that is, eternal destruction is their destiny.

COMMAND TO BE WATCHFUL (3:17)

“You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand”

These Christians had been given information about and been warned about false teachers and now they were to act in a certain way.

“be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness”

Christians are to guard themselves, on the alert for false teachers and false teaching. They need to be grounded well enough in the Bible that they can spot a false teacher. As Christians, we need to check out everything we hear on the basis of the Word. The Bible alone is our authority for Christian living.

Christians are to avoid false teachers like the plague, for if they keep too close company, they will be led astray, not only doctrinally but morally. *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’”* (1 Cor. 15:33). Our Lord said, *“Take heed, watch and pray”* (Mark 13:5); *“Take heed lest any man deceive you”* (Mark 13:9); and *“Take heed to yourselves”* (Mark 13:33).

If Christians do not guard themselves from false teachers and teaching, they will fall into a weak doctrinal position, or it may mean that without continuance in doctrine a professing Christian may fall away into apostasy. Whatever view is accepted, they both end up with a person making shipwreck of the faith.

COMMAND TO BE FRUITFUL (3:18)

“but grow in the grace”

The Christian is commanded to be constantly growing in God’s grace. Christians were saved by God’s grace and are to bask in God’s grace as Christians. We are not to get bogged down with legalism, judgmental attitudes, harsh spirits, critical attitudes and negative thoughts, but we are to flourish in an ever growing awareness of God’s love, forgiveness, encouragement, confidence and assurance.

God is a gracious God and He always deals with His people in grace. The more we grow in God’s grace (not fear), the more gracious we will become as God’s people. It is impossible not to grow in an environment of sovereign grace.

“and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The Christian is also commanded to be constantly growing in knowledge of Christ and about Christ. This is knowledge (fact) that is to be experienced (faith). Peter in no way shies away from knowledge because faith without knowledge always degenerates into pure emotional religion. However, pure knowledge without faith degenerates into

dead, cold orthodoxy. Knowledge about Christ (doctrine) and knowledge of Christ (doctrine applied by faith) are the surest safeguards against heresy and apostasy. The Apostle Peter began this letter stressing the importance of knowledge.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord ... Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge.” (2 Pet. 1:2, 5).

Now he closes this letter on knowledge. Never, never say that doctrine is unimportant or tedious or boring. If you do, you may well become an open target for false teaching.

Notice carefully how Peter stresses growth. The Christian life is like riding a bicycle. Unless we keep moving, we will fall off. Those who keep gaining knowledge and keep exercising faith will keep growing spiritually, and they shall be victorious. Is it true that this life is a rat race and the rats are winning? From a human viewpoint, it looks like the rats are winning, but from the divine viewpoint, Christians are winning. How do we know? It is in the Good Book, the Bible. God is working all things together for the good of His elect, for the return of His dear Son, Christ Jesus the Lord, and for His own glorious ends. The last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, tells us that Jesus Christ will be victorious; He will overcome and all those who own Him as Savior and Lord will overcome with Him. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

“To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

Glory is ascribed to Christ who is full deity. This glory is to be given to Christ now and right on through to the day of eternity when God shall establish the new heavens and new earth. Christ is acknowledged as full deity by Peter to counteract the heresy of the false teachers who denied that Jesus was Lord (2 Pet. 2:1).

CONCLUSION

What lessons does God want us Christians to learn from this section of Scripture? First, we must learn to rest in the sovereign purposes of God by faith, for this attitude will speak louder than words to a Christ rejecting world that God is in control of history.

Second, God is presently and actively at work in this world saving men, and it is our task to spread the good news of Jesus Christ everywhere, trusting God to save souls.

Third, we must be on guard for false teachers lest we fall from the Faith and dishonor Christ who we claim to represent on this earth.

Fourth, we must continue to grow in both knowledge and grace, for knowledge provides the foundation for growth and grace the environment for growth. A plant that is not growing is either sick or dead, and a professing Christian not growing spiritually is either a Christian who is sick or spurious, who has never been born again.

Fifth, Christ is Lord. He is God. He is full deity and it is this doctrine that makes one of the main differences between true Christians and false Christians. The Roman governor, Pliny, about AD 112, said that Christians “sing a hymn to Christ as God.” Almost every cult in the world denies that Jesus is God.

If you are not a Christian, you, in order to become one, must not only believe that Christ died for your sins but also that He is God. You must acknowledge that He is God who has the right to rule, govern and direct your life as He sees fit.

Accept Christ as the one who died for you, a sinner with all your hideous sins, and bow to Him as your God, calling Him Lord, Master and King. When you do, you will be saved from the guilt and penalty of sin and you will be set on a new course—to see Jesus Christ personally at the Second Advent or death—and to be with Him forever in the new heavens and new earth..