

The Second Letter From Peter

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE...

...Ought We to Be?

Notes & Thoughts

(The Unpreached Series)

by
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These notes have been produced from my personal study of Peter's second letter assisted by William Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Early Christian Letters by Tom Wright, various study Bibles and some of the multitude of resources available in e-Sword.

This is not intended to be an academic work, but it is hoped that the reader may gain a deeper and practical insight into God's Word.

People Who Have
The Same Precious Faith
Part 1, Chapter 1:1-2

The Who and The What:

In his Daily Study Bible notes on 2 Peter, William Barclay makes a strong case for the author of this letter *not* being the apostle himself¹. While there were some 'doubts' about whether 2 Peter was genuine, this does not mean that it was broadly considered to be a forgery. Rather it indicates the caution used when accepting writings into the canon of scripture. Whatever doubts existed, they were for all practical purposes overcome by the third or fourth centuries.²

While the doubts may bring into question the authority that this little letter carries, it does not bring into question the letter's worth. That it is intended to be read as if Peter wrote is certain, that there is a great deal of good teaching in it is also certain. The letter contains no heresy but is full of sound teaching. Differences in style between first and second Peter can be rationally put down to 'that Peter employed different amanuenses'³. That it was the last book to be included in the Bible makes it no less worthy to be part of it and so to have a close look at what the author has to say will certainly benefit those who 'share the same precious faith' as the author.

The letter itself testifies that it is Peter's second letter (2 Peter 3:1), so we can conclude that this one is also to 'those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father' (1 Peter 1:1). While we may not meet the geographical description, this letter is also for us, having been chosen even as those in the first century were.

Though Peter has confidence in the steadfastness of his readers' faith, he goes to the trouble of reminding them of the basics once again. For even though we must continue to grow in faith, we must also not lose sight of the foundational principals that brought us back to the Father in the first place – repetition reinforces remembering. But it is when we come to the second chapter that we begin to see Peter's purpose in this.

False teachers became an increasing problem as the church became older and the first generation of eye witnesses to all that Christ did were martyred, or simply 'fell asleep' as Paul so neatly put it. These false teachers were people who had a first-hand knowledge of the Truth and wandered away from it, preferring to satisfy their own lusts instead of chasing down God's standards for their lives. Their end, as well as the end of all that is corrupted by man's sin, is laid out in the final chapter and it is here that Peter asks us, "What kind of people ought we to be?"

A Sent-Out Slave.

In the opening verse, Peter describes himself as a 'slave and apostle of Jesus Christ'. An apostle is one who is sent out on a specific task, usually as a representative of the one sending. We could look at the various references throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus sending out His disciples, but Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 are perhaps the best known and the ones most relevant to us. We have been sent out into all the World, starting with

¹ William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition* (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) p. 284-288

² Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Introduction to 2 Peter, paragraph 2(1) & (2) – e-Sword edition

³ Robinson's Word Pictures, The Second Epistle of Peter, By Way of Introduction, paragraph 5 – e-Sword edition

where we are now so that we can make disciples. Not converts, but disciples. Repentance, or turning away from your current path is just the first step. There must be growth and progress in Faith (as we shall see later).

What struck me about this introduction is Peter's use of the word 'slave', or 'doulos'. Paul and others have used the same word to describe themselves. Being a slave, as opposed to a servant, carries with it a lack of rights, freedoms or entitlements⁴. Here's the thing: Jesus does not call us slaves, or even servants – He calls us friends! In His friendship, we have an intimacy and confidence that no slave could ever have. We have access to the same resources that Christ does.

John in his account of Jesus' last hours before His crucifixion gives us an insight into what it is that binds Jesus' Friends with a loyalty that is deeper and stronger than a slave. It is of course Love (John 15:9-17). It is reasonable to have such a debt of gratitude and love considering that un-payable debt of God's Mercy. The only reasonable response then is to bind ourselves to the Master who bought us out of slavery to sin, willingly placing ourselves under His authority as His slaves. It is here in John also shows us what it is that we are sent out to do. In verse 16 we are told that we are to go out and bear fruit that endures, that does not rot, that produces more fruit and that remains beyond time. That is what 'making disciples' does.

A Share in the Faith.

Those of us who have never seen Jesus in the flesh have an equal share in His inheritance with those who did. The first disciples and apostles who witnessed first-hand His miracles and who heard His voice speak to the crowds are one with those of us who have only ever read their accounts.

Peter makes it clear that this is so, not because of any merit on our part, but because of His 'justice and righteousness'. We know that in Christ God makes no distinction between race, gender or position (Galatians 3:28) and we know that His desire is for all to turn away from their own track and follow His (2 Peter 3:9). It is Love that forms the basis for His fairness; it is Holiness that underpins His Justice.

If we compare verse one here with 1 John 1:9 we find that it is by God's righteousness that we share in the faith of the apostles just as it is by His righteousness that we receive forgiveness when we admit our shortcomings to the Father. More than that – for John says that the Father will 'cleans us from all unrighteousness'. Here also in Peter's letter is the promise of the restorative work of God's Spirit. We are not left to wallow in the decay of the world. Instead, we have at our disposal 'everything we need for a godly life'. None of this has anything to do with what we deserve, but it has everything to do with God's Grace.

More Grace, More Peace.

Grace and Peace. This is obviously a common greeting, seeing as sixteen of the letters we have in the Bible have a variation of it in the introduction. It would be worth having a bit of a look at these qualities, seeing as Peter ties them in here with knowing God and Christ Jesus.

The word we have as 'grace' is *xáris* in the Greek. Helps Word Studies tells us that it comes from:

⁴ William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition* (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) page 293

...another feminine noun from *xar-*, "favour, disposed to, inclined, favourable towards, leaning towards to share benefit". *Xáris* is pre-eminently used of the Lord's favour – freely extended to give Himself away to people (because He is "always leaning toward them").⁵

It is this idea of 'leaning towards to share benefit' that we see in all the good stuff that the Father gives to us, and the more that He so generously wants to pour into our laps. Tom Wright puts it beautifully in his study of 2 Peter, reminding us that 'religion' and even 'Christian faith' is about what God wants to do *for* us, far much more than it is about what He wants *from* us.⁶

What the Father wants is for us to be complete, to be whole. His great desire is to restore us to the 'very good' that existed before the fall. The Greek word for 'peace' here means 'whole', or complete. This is the peace that Christ gives us. This is the peace beyond understanding, 'That quiet strength in the midst of this crazy desperation all around ...'⁷ that enables us to 'keep it together' in spite of all that is going on. This is the kind of wholeness that *eirénē* is, 'when all essential parts are joined together'.⁸

The language used in this verse is that of growth toward maturity⁹. The qualities of God's favour and our wholeness are not completed in us in an instant. As our knowledge and understanding of all that He has done, and continues to do, for us matures we will see an increase in our completeness – a drawing closer to the 'very good' that all of creation groans for.

Perhaps we could paraphrase the verse like this:

May you become fully aware of God's favour and may you fully experience His wholeness as you move towards a complete knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

Knowledge is the starting point, not the goal. Knowledge of God's character gives us confidence in His promises and a picture of the qualities he wants to develop in us. The goal is sharing in His divine nature and being a useful part of His Kingdom. Knowledge must produce fruit or it is useless. Transformed behaviour, what Peter calls 'Righteousness' is one result, but it must also produce an effective example that draws others towards that same transformation.

Choosing and Growth.

Jesus calls us His friends, so we make the choice to be His slave. Paul says that we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice and that such service is reasonable, or logical, in view of God's Mercies shown to us through Christ (Romans 12:1). So, by Christ's choice, we are His friends (if we do what He commands); by His sacrifice we are His family; by our choice and because of God's mercy, we are His slaves – and in doing so our lives become 'a sacrifice of praise'.

It is through this multi-layered relationship that we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God's ways. Quite simply, He does not work to our agenda, but in His own way and in His own time. As we grow in knowledge we understand more and more just how

⁵ HELPS Word-studies copyright © 1987, 2011 by Helps Ministries, Inc. [5485](#)

⁶ Tom Wright *Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011) p.102

⁷ 'Lunatic Friend', Brian Duncan *Anonymous Confessions of a Lunatic Friend*, 1991

⁸ HELPS Word-studies copyright © 1987, 2011 by Helps Ministries, Inc.

⁹ William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition* (The St Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) p. 295

deep and precious His favour is towards us. This increasing maturity, or completeness, enables us to become more and more certain of His love for us to the point where we find that nothing can shake us. It is here, immersed in that 'same precious faith' we find 'Peace beyond understanding', grown because we understand God's favour.

People Who Have
Everything We Need
Part 2, Chapter 1:3-11

The Big Picture:

We don't always feel as if we have what it takes. There always seems to be less money, less time, less energy than we think we need. The demands of work and home press in and at times overwhelm. However, we are people of The Kingdom, we are subjects of the King of all kings, more than that – we are His children!

In these verses, we are shown an overview of our expected progression as those who would follow in the footsteps of Christ Jesus. As we saw in the opening verses, it starts with knowing the One who has called us out of the ordinary to go with Him. This section is not about what God wants *from* us, but rather it is about what He wants *for* us.¹⁰

We need to know that there is nothing that the Father requires of us that He won't give us the resources to do. He is our 'all sufficient One' – the Father is the source of all that we need to live as He requires, He gives us both the desire and the ability to do so (Philippians 2:13). The Father wants us to be part of His family so much that He has spared nothing to make it happen, not even His own Son, surely He will generously pour out all that we need to continue with Him (Romans 8:32). And He started the process while we still hated Him! So, now that we are His friends, part of His family, what good thing will He keep back from us? (Romans 5:9-11). Now, I don't think this necessarily means those things that people might see as a 'good thing', but rather it means those things – experiences, resources, and so on, that we need to 'live a godly life'.

Precious, Magnificent

His power gives us everything that enables us to live the kind of godly life He desires of us. We come to know Him when He calls us – it is His gloriously excellent character that provokes Him to call us to Himself. That same gloriously excellent character has promised us an escape from the slow rotting of this World as we know it. How is this escape made? By getting to know His character, laying aside the attitudes and ambitions of a corrupted world and taking a share in that character.

We have the promise that we will escape this world's corruption. A promise is not 'now'; it is by definition, something that is made good later. However, when we know who gives the promise, we can have confidence (or not) that it will be carried out. It is for this reason that we put our effort into taking hold of as much of what is to come as we can. It is God who initiates, God who sustains, but He does not do our homework for us. He guides, helps, encourages, empowers and makes up for our shortfalls, but still requires us to do the work. Promises are certainties because of Christ, they apply to us because of Christ; they generate the desire to do right because of what Christ has done for us¹¹. Grace is not a reason for laziness. Rather it should provoke Love as our response and when you love someone, you go out of your way to demonstrate it to them.

Whatever we do out of love and obedience to God we do within the framework of His Grace. His promise gives us confidence to tap into His power to enable us to strive for His Kingdom.

¹⁰ Tom Wright Early Christian Letters for Everyone (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011) p.102

¹¹ William Barclay The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) pg 297 para (ii),(iii), (iv)

He is the One who starts and He is the One who finishes the ongoing transformation to the life of godliness that He wants for us¹².

After all, this is why Christ set aside His glory and suffered and died: to be the key that opens the door to intimacy with the Father, to know Him and in knowing Him become transformed, restored to reflect His own glorious excellence. How far have we fallen short of this! Even those who know what has been promised, those who know Who has made these promises, will fall short.

Richly Gifted

It is because of Who made these promises, that they are 'precious and great'. And it is because of their great value that Peter urges us to pour all of our effort into equipping ourselves with a series of precious and great qualities. The word in verse five that is translated as 'add', 'supplement', and 'supply' in Greek is *epichorēgein* it speaks of a lavish generosity that fully funds a musical production, or equips an armed force with the equipment they need¹³. This is important to understand because it will impact on our ability to accept God's promises. If as a tradesperson, I have the best tools of every possible kind required for my trade, then my job becomes so much easier and even a mediocre tradesperson can do good work.

So, here we have the Father, who has lavished on us with great generosity, every resource that we could ever possibly need to produce the best possible workmanship for Him. There is no need to make-do or find a work around. There is no need to short-cut or dodgy something up. We have all we need to draw the very best out of our lives and in doing so bring even more honour to the One whose lavish generosity made it happen.

He calls us to Himself because of His glory and excellence. It is through His glory and excellence that He gives us His great and precious promises. His promise is that if we come to Him we can escape the decay and corruption of this world. This is because when we come to know Him, we receive all we need for life and godliness; for it is through Christ's life we escape decay. It is through Christ's godliness we escape the damage that comes from pursuing human desires.

Peter doesn't detail what it cost the Father to do this for us, but we know that it was the cost of His Son. Our response to both the Father's excellence and His promises must be in proportion to that cost.

Progressive.

Faith, Virtue, Knowledge, Self-Control, Persistent Endurance, Godliness, Family Affection and Determined Love – these characteristics echo Paul's description of the Fruit the Holy Spirit produces in our lives. A person whose character genuinely shows these traits will produce fruit. This fruit-bearing still requires a conscious effort on your part – there is no harvest without first tilling the soil.

These virtues build on each other – they are a logical progression. This does not mean that you *can't* build self-control before patient endurance, but they are linked. Note that it all starts with faith. Right at the core moral excellence is confidence in things unseen; at the

¹² Tom Wright Early Christian Letters for Everyone (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011) p.103

¹³ William Barclay The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) pg 298-299

foundation of determined love is assurance of things hoped for. So, while each of these qualities builds on the previous one, we can still work to develop them all at the same time.

Each of these characteristics must become a daily habit. Steadfastness, or endurance, must be the hallmark of our lives. There must be ever-increasing consistency in our faith, excellence, knowledge and self-mastery that honours the Father, despite the difficulties that would tear us away from Him.

Again, we see these virtues building up to form a piety that is, in fact, a well-balanced relationship with both the Father and the people around us¹⁴. This attitude results in a sense of family with other people, especially those who also belong to Christ. This is the 'family affection' Peter refers to here. It implies a loyalty that comes from relationship – one that cannot be broken by trivial annoyances. As we develop relationships with this foundation, we will see that family affection and loyalty grow into a determined, covenant Love that seeks the best for others regardless of the cost.

We work hard, not to earn our salvation, not to please people, but to give a practical demonstration that what we believe is real. We must have more than an intellectual acknowledgement of the foundational truths of our Faith – we must believe it by putting it into practise. This is what James urges us to do in his letter (James 2:18). If indeed we pursue the abilities listed here, then they will certainly be visible in all we do. Not only that, but they will form the habit of lifestyle that reflects God's character.

Participation in the promises is not passive. We are required to make every effort to stand, to walk, to abide – to put it another way, we are to be present and to endure.

Bearing Fruit

Or we can be ineffective, unproductive and unfruitful. Knowing Christ must be more than academic, it must produce something useful. It stands to reason that if you find yourself being either ineffective or unproductive it is likely that you have not been putting your effort into cultivating these qualities of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, family affection and covenant love. These qualities of character set us apart in that they are qualities of restoration, qualities that are to be found in the Kingdom of Heaven. They are qualities that memory of our past behaviour drives us towards. Peter makes it very clear in verse 19 that those who fail to pursue these things have forgotten that they have been broken, rusted and run down and that through Christ they are being restored to the OEM's original specifications.

'You will not be wasting your time or failing to bear fruit'. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul urges us to 'buy back time', and to 'make the most of every opportunity' (Ephesians 5:16). There is no guarantee of how long you have, or what opportunities you get. Time is something that no one can afford to waste – you cannot earn more than 24 hours in a day. It is having these qualities that equip us to be fruitful, to make disciples. So where is your sense of urgency in this?

What we know about God's promises must provoke action. Even as faith without action is dead, so too is knowledge. 'A tree is known by its fruit' and we will be known by what grows

¹⁴ William Barclay The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) pg 303, para (vi)

out of the things we know. Ultimately that must be the same kind of determined love that Christ has for us.

Blind

It is all too easy to be blind to our past, blind to our future, short sighted, and only able to see the 'now'. Consider Esau, who gave up his inheritance for a single meal. He was so focused on his immediate circumstance that he could not see the long-term consequences.

Esau was 'Blind' in that he failed to walk in the light and was unable to see things as they really were. He was 'Short-sighted' with limited vision that could only see the here and now and not the end game. The question is: do we pursue our inheritance, or forget where we have come from and in doing so forget where we are going?

Inheritance

It is by making an effort to progress in the characteristics listed in verses 5-7 that we make certain our call and choosing. Not that we are on shaky ground, for our rescue is certain as far as the Father is concerned. Rather it reinforces, not only to ourselves but also those who observe us, the certainty of our position with Christ and as we work at practising these qualities we cannot help but remain in Him¹⁵.

"You are my friends if you do what I ask¹⁶." Christ asks us to love, starting where we are, but not remaining there. Verses 5-7 give a road map to go from faith (where the friendship starts) to love (its consummation). Peter tells us to strain every fibre in this pursuit, and that at times seems like a big ask. Yet he also tells us that God has given us everything we need for this life of godliness.

Christ Himself is our inheritance¹⁷. This is the reason we put the effort into practise the qualities that Peter urges us to. It is to prepare us to receive the lavish generosity the Father has promised and in doing so, confirm the truth of His invitation and selection.

Do we really need anything else?

¹⁵ John 15:5

¹⁶ John 15:14

¹⁷ Revelation 19:7-8

People Who Have
Confidence In The Message
Part 3, Chapter 1:12-21

Legacy:

What is it that you leave behind? There are many things and stories that my mum and dad taught me, but the ones that stick are the ones that were repeated often (sometimes *ad nauseam*). Inheritance is not just about what money is left to you in a will. It is as much, perhaps more so, about those intangible lessons that were taught and learned through relationship.

Stuff sticks in our heads when it is repeated. Good, bad or indifferent – whatever information is continually being received is what will be the first to be recalled and acted on. This is the reason we practice emergency drills – so that when the chaos starts we react instinctively. But what if we have memorised duff gen? What if the information we have been taught is inaccurate, or even worse – dangerously wrong? In this Information Age and the ready availability of the Internet, there is probably more spurious information around than ever before. Fortunately, there are ways of being able to test the quality of information, and it is vital that we should do so.

Remember:

Peter is determined that his readers should not forget these fundamentals of faith and he knows his time to influence is running out. He seems to be saying, “I have a responsibility to you. For the short time I have left, I’m going to keep shaking you awake so that you don’t forget this!”¹⁸ His writing this letter is obviously at least part of that. There is the tradition that Mark’s Gospel account was written from Peter’s sermons¹⁹ and perhaps Peter has this in mind also. Regardless, we have two letters that bear his name and his teaching and it is well worth our while to study them.

We know from verse 11 that Peter is keen for the recipients of this letter to remain confident about their place in the Kingdom. False teachers had begun to teach that Christ was not going to come back²⁰ He wants to ensure that they do not fail to enter into the Promised Rest as the Israelites did²¹. He wants them to prioritise that which is permanent over the things that are rotting away. He is convinced of the importance of this because of what he saw and did while he walked with Jesus in the dust of the Middle East. Entrance into this rest requires an exit from our current place of slavery and is only possible because of the work Christ has already completed.²² In the meantime, we are to make the best of where we are at now.

A tent is by nature a temporary thing. Even as the tabernacle was only ever a temporary place for God to stay, while His people were in a temporary location, so too are the bodies we now have. Consider what is promised when everything is renewed: We will live in His presence, rather than He in ours. The Son Himself has gone ahead of us and is preparing a room in a mansion, a permanent place in a permanent community. For Peter, as for Paul, being absent from us here meant that he would be present with Christ.

¹⁸ Robertson’s Word Pictures – 1930-1933, Public Domain, e-Sword edition

¹⁹ Barclay, William (2011-12-07). New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (p. 355). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Barclay, William (2011-12-07). New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (p. 357). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

²¹ Hebrews 3:7-19

²² Expositions of Holy Scripture (Alexander MacLaren) – 1904-1910, Public Domain, e-Sword edition

How attached do we become to our lives here and now! We must not forget where we have come from, even as we must know where we are going. We must never forget those truths which are at the very foundation of what we believe and hope for. We must never let our temporary surroundings obscure our view of the truly permanent. Such things must be at the forefront of our thinking and thus be the primary influence on all that we do now.

Eyewitness

So, with one eye on his departure and one on his people, Peter now approaches his main purpose for this letter. Having encouraged his readers by reminding them of their well-established faith, he now reminds them of his qualifications as an apostle:

2Pe 1:16 NLT For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw His majestic splendour with our own eyes

Our legal system places a great deal of importance on evidence. Yet evidence does not speak for itself – it must be interpreted within a framework of understanding. If that framework is based on a belief that isn't true, then we will not see what that evidence actually tells us. This is why the testimony of someone who actually saw what happens carries even more weight. So, the first thing we need to ask when we are told something as fact needs to be, "Were you there?" Does the person have first-hand knowledge of what they are talking about, or is it hearsay? Or even worse, merely something they *think* is true?

There would have been scoffers – those who simply could not believe the amazing stories were true²³ despite the Apostles' accounts. There was also a growing trend for people to create their own version of events for their own gain. Indeed, these people are called out later in the letter. For now, Peter emphasises the fact that those who worked with him to tell others about the coming of Messiah did not rely on wise-sounding fairy tales. Like Paul, the Message he brought did not rely on mere words or their delivery to be persuasive:

1Co 2:1-5 NIV And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. (2) For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. (4) My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, (5) so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

Peter, along with James and his brother John saw with their own eyes the transforming Power of God, even as they were also eyewitnesses of Christ's unveiled Majesty on the mountain. This was not something they made up to impress people, it was unequivocally true.

We can be confident that Peter had a good understanding of what the Prophets had written. He would have been familiar with their message and he had certainly witnessed some of it coming to fruition. What he saw of Christ's life and service would have reinforced all that he already knew. He knew that the prophets weren't just making stuff up. They wrote as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. We need to be careful to read and understand their words as the Spirit intended. We must not make up our own ideas about what they mean.

Confidence

²³ Tom Wright (2011-11-15). Early Christian Letters for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 106). SPCK. Kindle Edition

The fact is that we *can* be certain that we have good information, we *can* have confidence that what we believe is from God. It is not merely stuff that someone has made up to sound good, trick people and increase personal influence, power or wealth – these are the marks of those who deny Christ, who believe what they wish to believe instead of accepting the truth from God²⁴. But if we look closely at the foundations of Peter's confidence, we find that it is built on knowing the source of the message – he knows both what was said and who said it. If we look at other letters from the various apostles, we see the same thing. Each of them speaks with authority that is given to them by Christ and not with their own authority. This authority is the basis of Peter's confidence and knowing this will give strength to our own.

So, if their words are from God, then we must understand them in that context. We must not just make up stuff to suit our own ideas of how things are. Rather we need to be asking what the intent of the author was. Who was he writing to? How does this apply to us? And we need to be asking the Holy Spirit to open our minds to what *His* intent is – after all, He is the One who carried the thoughts of godly people along to speak on God's behalf.

It is essential to know the authority behind the command. My job involves carrying out instructions given to me. Sometimes that means following instructions in a publication, other times it will be carrying out verbal orders, often it will be directing others to carry out the appointed task. The authority of the one giving the order is vital to know if the order is lawful or not. Does the verbal command contradict a written order or instruction? Has that written instruction been issued from a higher authority than the verbal command? Often, I'm not even conscious of making these comparisons, it is drilled into us so much that it almost instinctive. If a verbal command contradicts what is written, then I am required to question it. Indeed, I will be held accountable for my actions, if I acted unlawfully, regardless of who has ordered me to act.

So it is with God. If there are people who contradict the written instruction we have in scripture, then we must question what they are saying. There may be no actual contradiction, but it could also be stuff that has been made to sound good – stuff that has no substance or eternal value, harmful even. We have a Standard with which we can measure teaching against, and we are expected to use it. The highest authority we have is The Word and the highest command is Love. Everything else is subordinate to that. If we measure every thought and action against Jesus' command to Love, it becomes clearer if we are on track or not.

A Lamp in a Dark Place

It is obvious from this passage that Peter was confident of Christ's return. His experience on the Mountain, combined with what he knew of the prophetic writing in scripture was more than enough reason for him to be certain of it happening in the end²⁵. What does that mean for us, in practical terms? How should knowing this make a difference to how we live?

Hope. No matter how bad things seem to be, we have the certain hope of the Return of the King, the One who has already begun to establish His kingdom and set all things right. Many seem to be saying in these days that there is no certainty, that we cannot rely on what we think we know. Peter is saying the opposite – that we have certainty, not only because of the

²⁴ Barclay, William (2011-12-07). New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (p. 365). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

²⁵ Barclay, William (2011-12-07). New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (pp. 359-360). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

times when we experience God intervening in our lives but because His Spirit has spoken clearly through His prophets.

What is the message of the prophets? It is a help, a hope to guide us while we wait for the Dawn. The words of the ones who speak on God's behalf give hope in a dark place – an encouragement until that time when the Light of the World shines out of you. The day is coming, there is hope.

People Who Are
Destructive Heretics
Part 4, Chapter 2:1-11

An Overview

Not everything is as it appears. Sometimes, by the time we realise that it is too late to act; the change from delight to destruction has been carefully controlled so as not to be noticed. However, we have a way of escape. Not only that, but we have been given the key things to look for so that we can avoid the danger in the first place.

There are two key thoughts in this passage. The first is a warning, a what to keep your eyes open for so you can be awake to the Lies pedalled by False Teachers. The second is a promise, a promise that means no matter how bad things get, there is always Hope of a Rescue.

Nothing has changed. The same problems that godly people faced thousands of years ago still plague those who would follow Christ today. People are vulnerable to the same lies and deceit and the Deceiver can still use the same old tricks with equal effect. But knowing that such people exist, that they seek out the vulnerable with their home-made ideas and cleverly-crafted words means that we can be ready.

The Warning

It is the Destructive Heretics that dominate Peter's thoughts throughout this letter. This is largely because of the damage they do, both to the individual's faith and the Body's reputation. Peter clearly shows his heart as a pastor in wanting to protect both these things²⁶.

It's worthwhile having a look at the difference between those who choose their own self-focused way of life and those who do not. Ephesians 2 shows the path and progress of those who choose Christ's way. Notice that we all have the same starting point – being dead in spirit because we have missed the mark and fallen by the wayside. We all deserve to be on the receiving end of God's anger and yet we all have access to a way out through His Grace.

Understanding that it is God whom we have offended, then it can only be God who sets the terms of reconciliation. Both the Rescuing and the Judgement are on God's terms and in His timing. We do not get to write our own rules. Yet this is exactly what heretics do. The Greek for heresy comes from the word which means to choose²⁷. Rather than accepting what God has said as being true, they choose to believe what fits in with their own selfish purposes. We must carefully measure doctrine by the standard we have in God's Word and not just make up our own rules and measures.

The Wakening

Not every teaching that is different from what you are used to is evil. Sometimes it is just a different perspective that gives a clearer insight. We must be careful to avoid paranoia, but we must also never assume that everything we hear is true. There is danger in both

²⁶ Barclay, William. New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (p. 355). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

²⁷ Ibid (p. 364, 365).

extremes and it is here we need insight²⁸. All the attributes of heresy can be seen, if we look carefully and seek wisdom and discernment from the Spirit.

False teachers share many of the same traits as false prophets. Just as sure as false prophets existed in the past, it is certain that people who teach lies will continue to arise. Peter gives us a clear picture of the characteristics and fruit of the kind of teaching we are to avoid.

Turning to Ephesians 4:11-16 and especially verse 14, we can see what the Father has provided to help us to counter this false teaching. He has gifted and appointed various people in various ways so that everyone can grow in maturity. This increase in understanding makes us more certain in the foundations of our faith as well as having a clearer insight into the deeper ways of God. In this way, we become less susceptible to dodgy doctrine.

When we compare the behaviour of the 'Gentiles' that Paul mentions in Ephesians 4 with that of the false teachers in Peter's second letter, we can see similarities. That indicates to me that these false teachers have not experienced any fundamental change. It is possible that they have even gone backwards, but they certainly have not truly been walking along the path of discipleship.

Why does this matter? I believe that it matters because we are called to stand out, but in a way which is opposite to how these false teachers do. In his first letter, Peter urges his readers to live in such a way that false accusations have nothing at all to cling to (1 Peter 3:16). Here in his second letter, he condemns selfish and destructive behaviour that ends up staining everyone who says they are following Christ. We can see this type of thing today when people in positions of authority in the church have used others for their own evil purposes. This has damaged the reputation of all who name Christ as Lord.

With Open Eyes

Knowing that we have everything at our disposal with which to stand against such people, what exactly are we looking for? Do we trust our own sense of what 'feels right' or are there distinct characteristics that ought to be obvious to anyone who sees clearly? Peter's description of their behaviour is brief and generalised, but he is also unambiguous.

Perhaps the most difficult characteristic is that their lies are covert. It is not obvious, at least at first, that they are false teachers. False teaching is called 'heresy' here. That means it is of their own making rather than from God²⁹. Compare this to 1:21 where true prophecy is shown to come from God, through faithful people who spoke as the Holy Spirit inspired them to.

Another serious concern is that their lies are destructive. The word Peter uses here, *apóleia*, refers to the state after death wherein exclusion from salvation is a realized fact. Thus, the person does not become what they might have been, but is lost and ruined³⁰. The lies these heretics teach break down relationships and cause people to follow their own path, rather than God's way, leading to their ultimate destruction. The gifts of the Spirit build up, as does

²⁸ Tom, Wright (2011-11-15). Early Christian Letters for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 110). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

²⁹ Jamieson, Faussett and Brown Commentary 1871 Public Domain e-Sword edition

³⁰ The Complete Word Study Dictionary, AMG International 1992, e-Sword edition

the fruit He produces (Eph 4:12). Sound teaching from the Holy Spirit will always build up and 'give grace to those who hear' (Eph 4:29).

Tragically, they also deny Christ's right to rule. Peter uses a term that is given to one who has absolute authority by right³¹. Christ's right to Lordship is directly related to what He has done for us. Throughout Scripture we see the concept of 'Redeemer'. Boaz buying back Ruth and her dead husband's field as 'Kinsman Redeemer' is a picture of Christ's work on our behalf. As Christ Himself said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The cost He paid to rescue us from slavery places us under obligation to Him. Despite this, they reject His lordship and refusing to submit to His sacrificial Love.

Their conduct is depraved. Peter doesn't go into any specific details here, but the word itself gives us plenty. The Complete Word Study Dictionary uses the following to capture its full meaning: licentious, brutal, lasciviousness, license, debauchery, sexual excess, absence of restraint, insatiable desire for pleasure, arrogance, insolence, wantonness, lustfulness, excessive pleasure, debauchery, perversion in general.

We see this same kind of conduct mentioned in Galatians 5. There Paul contrasts what we produce by our own efforts (verses 19-21) with what the Spirit grows through His (verses 22-23) – the difference could not be more stark. So, what is being taught by these teachers? Does it give license to behaviour that Christians have generally considered to be abhorrent? That should be enough to put us on high alert.³²

Their words are skilfully crafted, not only to hide the fact that their teaching is false, but to draw people in. Paul tells Timothy in his second letter (2 Timothy 4:3) that people will surround themselves with those who tell them what they want to hear – just like the false prophets spoke what they thought the Kings wanted to hear. For this reason, we need to ask the Father for wisdom. Only through the Holy Spirit can hope to have the kind of discernment that will cut through subtle lies.

They exploit others for their own personal gain, just like Balaam did. They shape words like clay, not to build people up, but to rip them off and increase their own comfort. It is more than that though. What they are doing is essentially buying people with words and selling them for whatever they lust after.³³

There are two certain results from this kind of behaviour. Firstly, Truth will have her reputation injured. As we know, it is far easier to lose a good reputation than to gain one. How much more good work and teaching will be required consistently over a long time to restore what was lost!

Secondly, their destruction is already being prepared.

A Certainty

³¹ Ibid – 'Master' is translated so from the Greek '*despôtēs*'.

³² Tom, Wright (2011-11-15). Early Christian Letters for Everyone (pp. 110-111). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

³³ Word Pictures in the New Testament (AT Robertson) 1930-1933 Public Domain, e-Sword edition.

We grieve when we think that someone has 'got away with it', when their evil actions seem to go unpunished. But we can have confidence that God's Justice will prevail. For while we know that He will show mercy when there is a true turning away from evil towards Himself, we can also be certain that He will exercise Justice. Not that we always see it. Yet we must look at things with a Kingdom Perspective, we must seek to understand what goes on around us with the light of Eternity, for the Father is eternal.

Our confidence in His Justice is based on our understanding of His character, and His actions in the past. The examples that Peter puts in front of us are a history of God executing Judgement and Justice as well as Mercy.

There are many things in Scripture that is unclear to us. We do not have the assumed knowledge or cultural context to understand exactly what the writer is pointing us to. The second part of this passage may come under that category, however its meaning for us should be clear. Angels sinned and God acted in righteous judgement. There was no rescuing, no grace, no mercy – only justice. They were not able to escape judgement simply because they were angels. How much more will we face the consequences of our own rebellion?³⁴

Moving forward to Noah, the ancient world sinned, to the point where it had become so ingrained that there was no hope or likelihood of any change in behaviour ever occurring. Again, God put into action His righteousness and judged them (Genesis 6). Noah alone listened to God and spoke on His behalf. His declaration of the coming judgement left no one without excuse. Because of Noah's faith and obedience both he and his family were rescued from annihilation. This did not mean a trouble-free ride – they still had to endure the storm.

Then there are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were also condemned because of their sin (Genesis 19). The depravity of those cities had become so bad that strangers were a thing to be exploited rather than people who were to be shown hospitality. Only Lot exercised hospitality and went out of his way to look after the visitors. Lot's actions were an indication of his righteousness. Somehow, he managed to retain a mindset that caused him to treat others in a way that honoured God, despite the pressure of those around him to conform. Peter tells us that this depravity that Lot witnessed 'tortured his soul'.

We might wonder why Lot remained in such a place for so long, that is until we see his wife's reaction to leaving. His sons-in-law thought he was joking and would have no part in leaving. They had no idea that things were as bad as they were, most likely because that was all they ever knew. The angels had to basically drag Lot, his wife and daughters out. Lot's wife could not bear to leave her home, she simply did not have the faith to see the city through God's eyes, or to believe that judgement was coming so quickly.

An Open Door

Now is the time of Grace (Acts 17:30-31). *Now* is when we have an opportunity to take hold of God's hand and be rescued from the coming judgement. Even as God stepped in and saved Noah and Lot, He has intervened and made a way of escape for us also. This is not something that we can ever deserve – it is only because of the Father's unfailing love for us that we have Grace extended to us through the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf.

³⁴ Barclay, William. *New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter* (pp. 374-375). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

We need to be aware of false teachers, but not afraid. We need to be aware of ungodly people, but not overwhelmed. What Peter has given us here show us that God can and will have Mercy and rescue those who are His, yet will also deal rightly with those who chose a path of their own making.

People Who Are
Slaves to Sin
Part 5, Chapter 2:12-22

Intro:

The second half of this chapter is really a continuation of the first. It is here that Peter adds detail to his description of the behaviour of the Destructive Heretics. They are ignorant or blind to Kingdom thinking. So given over to their appetites have they become, that they are no more than slaves to them. The worst thing of all is that they go out of their way to ruin the lives of others by enslaving them again.

You may be wondering what point is there in spending so much time examining the behaviour of false teachers. Haven't we done enough already? The more aware we are of what they do, and what drives them, the better equipped we will be to both recognise it and warn others.

Ignorant of Angels

Rejection of proper authority is the very root of sin, as seen in The Garden with Adam and Eve rejecting the very clear command of God. This term 'glorious ones' either refers to supernatural beings, or to people in positions of authority. Either way, the final product is the same: at the bottom of all rebellion against God there is a rejection of appropriate authority and in Peter's day, this was also seen in making defamatory remarks against angels³⁵.

What is being described here is what we see also today. That is, people who deny the existence of anything beyond the physical. These are the ones who say that if cannot be explained by natural, physical processes then it cannot be true. This thought process not only holds spiritual 'principalities and powers' in contempt, but the Creator Himself. If there is no ultimate authority, then there is no real authority at all. These false teachers hold all authority, except their own, as illegitimate.

In their ignorance, they seek to damage the reputation of those whom they do not understand. Such is their character.

Beasts without Reason

When we look at animals, we often see some kind of personality, yet for the most part they do not apply reason to their behaviour. Their actions are primarily driven by instinct, without any thought of consequences. In the case of livestock, they are bred only for what they can provide for the farmer, with no higher purpose than to feed and clothe. Likewise, those who are slaves to sin and corruption do not apply reason to their actions. They are driven by basic desires that are unrestrained by any thought of consequence. In some ways, their purpose is even lower than livestock, for they do not even provide for the needs of others. The only destiny that awaits them is destruction.

Here's the thing with addiction – gradually it becomes less about enjoyment and more about necessity. More and more of the thing is required to achieve the 'buzz' that it cannot be moderated. That which was started because it 'felt good' now is required simply to function. In the end, there is nothing but emptiness and self-destruction.

³⁵ Tom, Wright. Early Christian Letters for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 114-115). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

Cost to Carouse

Yet they see this as merely the cost of doing business. If suffering is required to get their own way, then it matters little if it is theirs or someone else's. The whole purpose of their being is bent towards living a life of *Now* and seeking that which provides pleasure and comfort in the immediate. Their lifestyle is funded by their deceptions, from the resources extorted from those whom they conned into following their lies³⁶.

Paul urges the Thessalonians to live a life of productive labour and service in both of his letters to them, (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11), setting his own behaviour among them as the example to follow. All Paul's efforts were bent to serving the church there in order that nothing would get in the way of them hearing the Gospel. Though he had every right to be supported by the people he served, he chose not to, so that there could be no accusation of profiteering from the Gospel. This is in stark contrast to the False Teachers that Peter warns against, for whom everyone they look at is an object of desire and every effort they expend is driven by how they can gain from it.

Accepting discipline and allowing yourself to be trained by it leads to maturity in Christ that produces the Righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). However, those who are slaves of sin train themselves, with all the discipline of an Olympian, in the ways of grasping hold of those things that no one should lust after³⁷.

Nothing but Lust

This same attitude of exploitation for personal satisfaction is seen in Balaam. He was not driven by any sense of service or sacrifice, but purely by what he could add to his pocket. At first he seems as if he is being reasonable, even to the point of telling Balak, "Whatever the LORD speaks, that I must do". What we can't see is his heart. In Numbers 31:16 it is revealed that it was Balaam who 'advised the Midianites to send their women into the camp of Israel, and allure them to uncleanness, and so draw them into idolatry'³⁸. Surely the only reason Balaam went with Balak's messengers was in the hope of the reward he would receive and in doing so has become an archetype of the false teachers that have risen since.

Empty Promises

Such people are Clouds that promise life-giving rain and yet pass by leaving the drought unbroken. They do not often stay long enough for people to realise what they are up to, exploiting the vulnerable and moving on before anyone wises up. Those who are not firmly grounded in their Faith are easy targets. Still wobbly on their own feet, they can be persuaded with little effort by those whose art is words. And this is why Community is so vital for those who are part of the Kingdom, for if the weak are not surrounded by those who are strong, how will they stand?

So we need to stand – in contrast to those who seek to exploit the Vulnerable, in contrast to those who are self-focused emptiness. When we make promises, they must be based on what the Father desires, on those things that He has made clear – and we need to follow through with them. We are to be springs that give refreshment to weary travellers, people who remain and give Life, because of the Life that flows out from us.

³⁶ Wuest's Word Studies 1942-1955 Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, e-Sword Edition

³⁷ Barclay, William. New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (p. 382). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

³⁸ John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible 1809, Public Domain

Of Freedom and Slavery

This Living Water is the source of true life and it is only in that true life where true freedom can be found. The Lie of the false prophet is that freedom is only in doing whatever you feel like and that service is slavery. Yet we know that Sin has warped all of Humanity, and when we look at Jesus' teaching on His Kingdom, we see the Wisdom of Man turned upside down through the Foolishness of Christ³⁹. Service in the Kingdom of God is true and enduring Freedom. I've already mentioned how debilitating addiction can be, Peter reminds in verse 19 that we are a slave to whatever controls us – and that will either be our human appetites, or it will be the Spirit of God.

Entangled Again

So it is when you allow the Spirit full access to yourself that you can be made free from those sins that entangle you. But why does Peter say "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them"? The Writer to the Hebrews answers that in chapter 6, where he writes:

Heb 6:4-6 ESV For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

'Enlightened' brings the idea of the sun rising and things which were unidentifiable shadows become clearly seen for what they are. Those who have been enlightened have stepped out of the darkness into the light, coming to understand what is True. However, while the teaching may be understood, it does not automatically follow that it will be taken to heart. 'Tasted the heavenly gift' uses another of the senses to make the point. Here tasting is enough to know what something is like, but not enough to be nourished by it.

The kind of person mentioned in this warning has been exposed to and even participated in the things of the Kingdom of God. In spite of all that they have seen and heard and experienced (or 'tasted') they deliberately choose to reject Christ, to walk away from what He uniquely offers. They had to be there to fall away from it. This must be a deliberate choice, because as long as we remain in Christ our lives are secure.

Now this is why such a person is worse off than if they had never known the Truth – having held Christ's sacrifice in contempt, there is now no other means of restoration.

Washed

These destructive heretics reject all that Christ Jesus offers. They function on instinct like an animal. A dog remains a dog and will continue to behave like one, no matter how well trained. As often you wash the mud off a pig, it will remain a pig, and continue to do what pigs do. It doesn't matter how good their words sound, the things that the false teachers *do* mark them as being slaves to sin.

But for those who would reject the self-focused life of 'Now' and find Freedom in Service to the One who 'gave His life as a ransom for many', there is an 'otherness', a 'set-apartness' that marks us and makes us stand out. Paul lays it out in his letter to the Ephesians:

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Eph 5:3-5 NIV But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (4) Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (5) For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

“No hint... not even mentioned...” This is not how we are to live, this is not the kind of people we ought to be! Would you really want to set aside an eternal inheritance for such a short-lived thing? Paul takes things still further as he condemns not only actual immorality and impurity, but coarse language, foolish talk, obscenities and vulgar jokes. This reinforces his words in Ephesians 4:29 where we are to lay aside worthless conversation and carefully consider what we say. Does it build others up? Does it reach out with grace? Is it the truth? Am I motivated by love? (Eph 4:15).

What kind of people should we be? We have been set free by Christ so that we can remain free, not to become slaves again to sin. We are free to be people who are increasing in the likeness of Christ's character, free to serve out of Love, free to draw others towards *His* example.

People Who Are
Looking Forward
Part 6, Chapter 3:1-18

Stirring Up

How much benefit is there in looking back, in remembering the past? I guess it depends on why we are doing it. If we are longing for things of days gone by, that is unhelpful. If we look at history so that we can learn from it, that is something else again. As I get older, I find myself opening doors and wondering why with increasing frequency. It's a bit of a worry, but it's more of an inconvenience than a problem. The kind of reminder that Peter is wanting to give here has far graver consequences than my forgetting what I'm looking for in the fridge. We have a need to call to mind the teaching of Christ. That of the True Prophets before Him and of His Apostles after Him, are just as important as they give us the context for properly understanding His own words. We need that context if we are to look to what lies ahead with any real clarity.

'Stirring up your mind' takes me straight to Hebrews 10:24 where the Writer calls us to 'spur one another on to love and good deeds'. Now I know the context and focus of these passages are different, but both are about provoking each other into action. They show us how important it is to remind each other of the Truth and to encourage one another to live it. Peter is focused on stimulating thinking and memory – he is wanting to wake up our minds to clear thinking. Stimulating wholesome thinking will lead to wholesome action. All through this letter, Peter has been reminding his readers of what *was*, in order to help them see what *is*. Pointing to the historical fact of false prophets so that the current danger of false teachers might be clearly seen. He highlights their typical behaviour to make it stand out when we meet them.

Scoffers and Sceptics

Here in the final chapter, Peter looks ahead to the 'Last Days'. Based on what has happened in the past and what is currently happening, this is what can be expected in the future. Indeed, there is the implicit understanding that we are now in those last days and so these things can be expected now! Now I'm not sure about you, but the mockers, or scoffers, mentioned here in chapter three look awfully familiar. Scoffers are not necessarily the same as false teachers or prophets. These are simply people who do not believe and want to discourage others from believing. Today's mockers question the truth revealed by the true prophets and apostles who spoke with Christ's authority. We see many of these in the media today. They belittle and put down any who do not see the world as they do. They bully into silence any who do speak Truth out of Love, because they cannot bear to have their lies exposed.

The thinking of these sceptics is based in their belief in long ages and uniformitarian thinking. "This world has been like this for eons – nothing is going to change now!" Either by deliberately ignoring the evidence, or by simple ignorance, they have their eyes shut to what should be plainly visible. Why on earth would they do that? Paul gives us some insight to this in Romans 1, where we are shown that God has made 'His eternal power and divine nature' abundantly clear through all that He has made. Despite this, they set aside the wisdom of God for their own foolishness and in doing so become blind to His character. Twice in that passage Paul says, '...God gave them over...' This phrase carries with it the sense of justice being carried out, where a magistrate hands a prisoner over to the gaolers for their deserved

punishment. They had already wilfully deserted God – He merely gives them what they wanted⁴⁰.

Having made the choice to walk away from the Truth, they now are unable to see it. So, they claim that such a God of Love could never be a God of Righteous Judgement. They wilfully ignore the historical narrative and even the physical evidence of the world-wide flood of Noah's time. There are even some who say they follow Jesus that reject these things and in doing so, put themselves in the place of scoffers⁴¹.

Perspective and Patience

Peter looks to history, first to creation and then to the flood, before looking at what the future holds. Our limited horizon does not allow us to see everything at once. Delays and disappointments at best seem like inconveniences. At worst, they destroy our hopes. It is when we find ourselves in this place that we must remember the One who has Good Things set aside for us, the One who longs to give us the certain hope of an eternal inheritance. It can be so hard when trudging through the desert of life's difficulties to see anything but sand. When Israel spent a generation in the wilderness, could any of them even imagined the inheritance that lay ahead? That whole period was one of purifying and discipline. It was teaching them how to follow God and trust Him for food, water and safety. It was also justice for those who refused to believe God the first time they went to enter the promised rest.

Sometimes, as with Israel, we see God carry out justice and yet at other times, He seems reluctant to act, such as with Nineveh when Jonah preached to them. Why does God hold back His judgement? Why on earth does He allow evil to continue, seemingly unchecked? As people who are (or ought to be) concerned with Justice, how can we be satisfied with such a delay? There is much more going on here than we can see.

Any parent knows how tricky it can be when it comes to applying discipline. We would rather see a child's behaviour change for the good, than to have apply an appropriate punishment. Yet even when we do act, it is with the hope that they will turn away from their destructive behaviour and become adults who are able to make a useful contribution to society because of it.

We also need to understand that God does not exist in the same frame of reference that we do. He sits *outside* of His creation – and that includes time. That doesn't mean that He is distant or uninvolved, far from it! The reality is that God's apparent slowness to act is not the result of indifference. It is, in fact, mercy. For we know from 1 Timothy 2:4 and Romans 11:32 that He wants all to come to Him, experience His mercy and be rescued. He holds back His judgement in order to give this rebellious, unbelieving world another chance to turn around and find salvation⁴².

Exposed

People are asleep in their complacency, carrying out their usual day to day activities with little or no thought to the future, just as they were in the days of Noah. And just as Noah declared the coming judgement while he prepared for it, we are called to do the same. 'Hastening the day' as well as keeping all our senses alert for its arrival, Peter says.

⁴⁰ Word Pictures in the New Testament, AT Robertson, 1930-1933, public domain, e-Sword edition

⁴¹ David Guzik's Enduring Word Commentary, 2014 David Guzik and Enduring Word Media, e-Sword Edition.

⁴² Barclay, William. New Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter (Kindle Locations 6624-6626). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Now, there is some debate about exactly what word is used at the end of verse 10. The King James and New American translations use 'burned up', but we also see 'laid bare' (NIV) and 'exposed' (ESV). The difference is thought to come from a copying error at some point in time. I don't think there is much to wonder about. There are a few other passages referencing fire that may help to understand what Peter was wanting to get across.

Fire purifies and exposes what is really of substance. In 1 Corinthians 3 we have Paul exposing some of the wrong attitudes that were causing problems in that fellowship. In the middle of this he mentions building. What we build for the Kingdom of God will come out of the way we think that Kingdom is supposed to look like. Our actions are a product of our way of thinking – our attitudes to Christ and what He requires of us. In the end, everything we do for Christ, His Good News and his Kingdom, will be put to the flame. Not to annihilate it, but to expose it for what it really is, to remove the decay and corruption and leave that which has eternal value because of its Purity. The first Global Judgement washed away the rubbish, but did not eliminate the problem of corrupt hearts. The final judgement burns away all impurities to leave only that which is precious.

Having been purified by fire, the corruption and decay of sin, that was causing all of creation to groan, is no more. This is the difference between the old and the new. That righteousness is able to be there confirms it.

Peter's mention of the purifying of the earth with fire and Paul's description of the testing of our works in the same way, should lead us to closely examine what we are pouring ourselves into. No matter how mundane it may be, the work we do has eternal value and contributes to the Final Restoration that has always been in the Father's Plan.⁴³ Our job is to be faithful as we wait for the fulfillment of His promise.

So we come right back to chapter one and the 'precious and magnificent promises' that have been lavishly gifted to us. These are same promises that the Father has granted to us that allow us to partner with His very nature and escape the coming destruction. Why wouldn't we want to do everything to speed that process up?

This Kind of People

How do we make that happen? I believe that for the most part it comes down to the kind of people we are. What kind of people ought we to be? Peter shows us as he sums up his thoughts.

Firstly, we are to pour our efforts into being at peace, without blemish and without blame. What does he mean by this? Yes, peace means an absence of conflict, but not just externally with others. Being 'at peace' carries with it a sense of wholeness, of order rather than confusion. This is in direct contrast to the efforts of false teachers and scoffers, which are to bring about division and disorder. But 'God's peace is independent of outside conditions and is the fruit of an objective, real salvation with God.' It is only by resting in Him that we can have the patience we need to wait for the completion of our salvation.

What about the 'without spot and blemish' part? Compare this with the description of the Bride in Revelation 19:6-8 and the Church in Ephesians 5:27. As we wait for the arrival of the Bridegroom, we are to conduct our lives in a way that brings honour to Him. Our work is to prepare for His coming, to help others prepare as well. As we go about the business of the

⁴³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/god-uses-our-work-even-cleaning-milk-off-floor>

Kingdom, we bring honour to Him, even as the Woman in Proverbs 31 brings honour to her husband by the way she conducts herself.

We are to make the most of every opportunity that we have, to declare the Good News, as we wait for the completion of God's restoration. After all, that is why He has holds off on bringing in the New Heavens and Earth. As we speak on behalf of the Father, we must be careful to 'rightly divide the Word of Truth'. Separated as we are in time and culture from the first recipients of these letters, there will always be difficulty in getting our heads around what the authors wanted to get across. We can expect disagreement, but we must be especially careful to avoid distortion of Truth. Peter has already exposed how some will try to manipulate and deceive for personal gain, so having been forewarned we can be awake to their schemes.

We have a blessing, a benediction if you will, that not only declares Peter's wish for us but also gives a key to remaining steadfast. 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ'. Knowledge in and of itself not much value, but in this context, we are to gain a deeper knowledge of a person. It is by knowing Christ's character and by understanding His desire for you that you can more clearly see when error is being introduced.

The bottom line is the most important one. Right at the very end we see what must be at the foundation of all our efforts and attitudes. 'To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity'. The kind of people that we are to be are those who are consistent and enduring in their relationship with Christ, those who hold to the truth and yet always temper it with Love. But most of all, they those who by their lives give Glory to the Lord of All.