

Week 12 - How then should we live? - 2Peter 3:11-16

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:32-37

Introduction

One of the hardest things about preparing a sermon is deciding what to focus on because an effective sermon has to be limited in its scope and the preacher has to decide what one thing he wants his listeners to learn from the sermon

It's simply not possible to share all of the details and nuances that one encounters while doing an in-depth study and have the resulting message be meaningful or effective

So a big part of sermon preparation is deciding what to say and what not to say and there is a lot of really good stuff that doesn't make the cut each week

I believe we see this in Peter's description of the end times

When we read Peter's description of the second coming of the Lord, we can't help but be struck by its sparseness

Peter doesn't go into detail or even concern himself with the kinds of things most people might think are important such as the timing and order of end times' events

He doesn't even mention the rapture, the millennium reign of Christ, or the various judgments to come

And that's not because those details are unimportant

It's because they are unimportant to the argument he is making

Remember, the false teachers were saying that the orderly march of time indicated that things would continue as they had always been and that Christ wasn't going to return to judge

Look again at 3:4 [**2Peter 3:4**] where we see them declare –

“Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

They were espousing what we might call the uniformitarian view that the present order describes the past and the future and the thought of the world-changing events that biblical prophecy said were coming were inconceivable

Then, based on that worldview, the false teachers were declaring that one could and should live however they please

That everyone should live for themselves and satisfy their salacious appetites because there would be no judgment

Knowing that that was the teaching Peter was countering helps us to understand why he writes as he does

Peter refuted the claim that things would continue on as they always had first by pointing out how God had judged in the past with the Noahic Flood of Genesis

And then he told his readers in verse 10 [**2Peter 3:10**] that the universe was going to be destroyed by fire

And whereas the false teachers used their belief in the permanent order of the world to justify their wanton, lawless behavior, Peter says the fact that the world is going to be burned up should inform people's behavior

Peter views the end of the world as motivation for proper Christian conduct

He is saying that a follower of Christ shouldn't be attached to or overly concerned with the world and its trappings because the world and everything in it are going to burn

All of those things that seem so important now - money, accomplishment, power, accolades, pleasure, you name it - all of those things are going up in flames one day

If you think building your house on the sand is foolish; consider building it on ashes

We see Peter's reasoning displayed in the first verse of our section of the letter

If you haven't done so already, I encourage you to open your Bible to 2Peter and follow along as I read **2Peter 3:11-16**
Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Peter begins this section of his letter with the word "since" which indicates a conclusion based on the evidence he has just presented that the universe would be "burned up and dissolved"

And he phrases it in a way that appears to be a question "what sort of people ought you to be"

But, you will notice that there is no question mark at the end and that's because the sentence has the force of a command

In a sense he is saying "Because these things are true you ought to live in a certain way"

We need to note that the word "ought" refers to an obligation - a debt owed

Paul used the same word to describe how he felt when confronted with the truth of the gospel in **Romans 1:14** saying *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.*

Paul recognized his obligation to preach once he understood the nature of and need for the gospel and Peter says we likewise should recognize our obligation when presented with the reality of the future

And the first thing he says is that:

I. Our lives should be marked by holiness and godliness

To be holy is to be set apart or consecrated and every believer is positionally holy through the imputation of Christ's holiness to us

But we should also be observably holy in their conduct

Since we are set apart *to* Christ, we ought to be set apart *from* or separate from sin and evil

Godliness means to live with a sense of God's presence and a desire to please him

The godly man seeks to do the will of God in all things and the things of God are his motivation

A good way to distinguish between holiness and godliness is to understand that holiness refers to action and godliness refers to attitude

In contrast to the immorality that the false teachers' end times skepticism leads to, a proper understanding of end times reality ought to lead to a lifestyle of devotion and duty to God

Remember, Peter stated in verse 10 [**2Peter 3:10**] that the works done on the earth will be exposed when the universe is burned up and his implication here is that the works of holiness and godliness will endure

Paul spoke of this as well in **1Corinthians 3:13** where he writes about how each person's works will be revealed by fire Jesus repeatedly taught that he and his kingdom was not of this world and his apostles taught that followers of Christ are not to love the world

Let's look at **1John 2:15-17** as an example that builds on what Peter says here

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Even sincere followers of Christ can fall into the patterns and possessions of this world and begin to focus too much attention and effort on them when we should recognize that all those things are going to be consumed by fire

We should instead be living our daily lives so as to reflect the character of God

Looking back to Peter's first letter we see this in **1Peter 1:15-16** which says:

As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Holiness and godliness are a lifestyle and we have our pattern for such a life in the example of Jesus

It's the opposite of the lives of the false teachers who live for this world according to their fleshly desires where all that they gain will one day go up in flames as Peter makes clear

Still, fear tends to paralyze more than motivate so, while Peter takes pains to show the folly of the false teachers and their scoffing, his focus is on the new that is coming rather than on what will be lost to the flames of God's judgment

As he points out next that:

II. Our lives should be marked by watchful anticipation

Look with me again at verses 12 and 13 [**2Peter 3:12-13**] Peter says that we should live lives of holiness and godliness while:

Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The attitude of Christ-followers concerning the day of the Lord should be markedly different from that of the false teachers who have denied its reality and the judgment that accompanies it

And even though Peter again mentions the destruction that the day will bring, he also reveals the coming of a new heaven and a new earth and the inauguration of a truly just society where righteousness makes its permanent dwelling

The "waiting" Peter mentions is the kind of waiting we did as kids when we waited for Christmas Day to arrive

It's not a passive, drumming one's fingers sort of waiting we do at a traffic light or the kind of waiting we do the dentist's office

It's a looking forward to something with expectancy and eagerness - anticipating with watchfulness

It's what the Jewish people were experiencing when they wondered whether John the Baptist was the Messiah in **Luke 3:15** and when John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one they were expecting in **Luke 7:19**

And Peter underscores his meaning by adding the word "hastening" which implies eagerly desiring something and doing whatever one can to bring it about

When our daughter, Jess, was really small we took a camping vacation in Michigan's Upper Peninsula which meant a very long drive for a small girl

So we prepared her for spending the day in the car by telling her we would leave early in the morning and get to our campsite at supper time

After being in the car for a couple of hours at maybe 10am or so, we heard Jess speak up from the back seat to ask if we could have supper now - she was hastening our arrival

I'm not fully convinced that we can actually hasten the day of the Lord's return in an absolute sense because we read in **Acts 1:7** that Jesus says the Father has fixed the time by his own authority leading me to believe that God has determined in advance when his Son will return

Jesus also taught in **Mark 13:32** that the Father knows the day and hour of the Son's return

So, it would appear that the time of the Son's return has been established at some fixed point in the future

However, we can hasten the day in a sense - at least from a human perspective - by working to fulfill the pre-conditions of the Son's return through evangelism and fulfilling the Great Commission

After all, **Mark 13:10** says that the gospel must first be preached to all nations and **Romans 11:25** says that there is a full number of Gentiles that must come into the kingdom before the Lord returns and Peter has just said in verse 9 [**2Peter 3:9**] that the Lord is waiting because of his desire for sinners to repent

So there is an aspect of our activity that will bring about the day that the Father has set and, in that sense, as we are faithful, we hasten the coming of that day

Still, Peter's main point is that the coming of the day of the Lord should be something a Christ-follower eagerly and watchfully anticipates and looks forward to continually

And Peter next says that because we are looking forward with eager anticipation of the new heavens and new earth:

III. Our lives should be marked by purity and peace

These end-times matters aren't a topic of mere speculation for Peter

Nor are they an excuse to escape from responsibility

They are a motivation to persevere in a life of morality as he says that prophecy should promote purity

It's a reality that what you believe and what you expect and are looking for will have a profound effect on how you live

I think that reality is one of the reasons for behavior in our world today as people are responding to what they expect

Paul writes about the preferred focus of a Christ-follower in **2Corinthians 4:18** saying:

We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Christ-followers are the only people who truly know how to live in this world because we are looking beyond this world to what will exist when this world is passed away

Every person is going to be examined and nothing will be hidden from the inquiry of the Lord - all will be brought to light

Human deeds will be judged by God and not everyone will be permitted to enter the new order God will establish

Because of that, Peter says that his readers should be diligent to be found without spot or blemish

To act with diligence it to do a thing straight away, without delay, and with energy and effort

"Without spot" means to be without moral defect

Paul refers to that quality when he says in **1Timothy 6:14** that Christ-followers should:

Keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ

And James says that religion that is pure and undefiled before the Father is, in part, keeping oneself unstained from the world [**James 1:27**]

To be found without "blemish" means to be found blameless or morally irreproachable

While we can't stop anyone from accusing us of wrongdoing, those charges shouldn't stick

What Peter is saying is that the conduct of a Christ-follower should stand in direct contrast to that of the false teachers who he revealed in 2:13 [**2Peter 2:13**] were "*blots and blemishes*"

They should instead imitate the Lord who we read in **1Peter 1:19** was like "*a lamb without blemish or spot*"

What Peter means by saying that his readers should be diligent to be "at peace" can be interpreted in different ways

Peter could mean the peace that can only come from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ

Peter could be referring to those in the church who only profess to be believers and encouraging them to find true peace with God

Or he could be adding peace to the list of behaviors and commanding that his readers strive to have their behavior within the community result in peace with the community

What I believe Peter means, though, is that Christ-followers should be diligent to live in such a way that they have peace of mind through Christ that is unsullied by sin

When we have sinned against God peace flees from us

Salvation brings us peace *with* God and then living as we should results in the peace *of* God

Paul spoke of this when he wrote to the Philippian believers in **Philippians 4:6-7**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God wants every believer to be a peace-filled believer we should be diligent to have the peace that can be ours by eliminating sin that disturbs peace from our lives

Lastly, Peter says:

IV. Our lives should be marked by proper understanding

Let's look at verses 15-16 again [**2Peter 3:15-16**]:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Peter introduces the apostle Paul and his teachings to his argument as he indicates that he and Paul are saying the same thing by saying "just as"

From this we can deduce that Paul's letters were known to Peter's original readers and the false teachers

And the reason Peter feels the need to mention Paul's letters is because the false teachers had distorted the message of those letters and used them to support their false teachings

Paul is commonly called the apostle of liberty because he wrote that the Christ-follower was not under obligation to the Old Testament Law because Christ had fulfilled the Law

Paul was also accused of being an antinomian meaning that he was against the Law and believed there is no moral law that God expects Christ-followers to obey

Of course, this is nonsense and Paul took pains to say just the opposite

For instance, let's look at **Romans 6:1-2** where Paul writes:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Still, the false teachers had appealed to Paul to support their worldview so Peter seeks to show that he and Paul were in complete harmony - not only in respect to this teaching but also in their personal relationship

We see this in his description of Paul not only as a brother but a "beloved brother"

Peter also mentions the wisdom given to Paul and includes Paul's letters with "the other Scriptures" showing that he knew Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit in his writing

However, Peter also says that some of the things Paul wrote are "hard to understand"

The truth is, some Scripture is hard to understand

After all, Scripture contains God's thoughts and God's mind is so much greater than ours We see God declare this in **Isaiah 55:8-9** where he states:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God's written Word is just as infinite and inexhaustible as God's mind and any truly thoughtful reading of the Bible will cause us to have questions

We should expect that we will not always be able to easily understand what we find in the pages of the Bible

We should accept that we might well have to work to understand parts of it and remain humble where things remain unclear accepting that, while God wants us to know his mind, he has the right to withhold knowledge from us

The larger problem Peter has with the false teachers is not that they don't understand - he admits understanding can be difficult - but that they willfully distort Scripture to support and justify their immorality

Peter refers to those people as "ignorant and unstable"

Ignorance is not a sin - every person has many things that they are ignorant of and ignorance can be cured by education

To be "unstable" pertains to the tendency to change and waver in one's views and attitudes

Together the two words form the picture of a people who may be highly intelligent and well educated, but when it comes to knowing the Bible and its major concepts they are uninstructed and therefore unstable

And they twist the Scriptures to produce a false meaning in order to justify their lifestyle - they are engaged in active abuse of the text for their own purposes

Remember, twisted behavior leads to twisted interpretation and twisted teaching in order to justify it

However, while they believe they are rationalizing their behaviors, Peter says they distort the Scriptures to their own destruction

How we interpret God's Word is no frivolous thing - it's a matter of life and death

That's why we read in **James 3:1** that not everyone should become a teacher because teaching comes with a harsher judgment

Remember, Jesus also taught that one who leads another astray would be better off having a millstone tied around their neck as they are cast into the sea [**Luke 17:2**]

Torturing the Bible to make it say what it never said in order to justify one's behavior is a popular pastime and it's tempting to interpret the Bible to make it suit our preferences

But, as sincere followers of Christ, we need to be careful to seek to understand and allow the Bible to confront us and correct us and one of the best tests for whether we are doing that is how we handle the texts we don't prefer

Conclusion

Back when I began my career in manufacturing, I worked for a small fabrication company and an OSHA inspector was scheduled to come in for an inspection

Because he had made an appointment for his visit the owner of the company was able to put forth an all-hands effort to bring things up to code

We cleaned the shop thoroughly and made sure all our safety devices were dug out of storage and in their proper place

Had the inspector shown up unannounced, the outcome of the inspection would have been completely different

God's Day of Judgment is coming - we just don't know when it will arrive

Like Jesus taught in **Luke 12:39** - if we knew the time of Jesus' coming we would surely be ready

However, since we don't know when he is returning, our response shouldn't be to live as we want but to live as we ought in order to be ready for his return at any time

Since we have a proper understanding concerning Christ's return, we ought to always strive to maintain lives of holiness and godliness, purity and peace, in watchful anticipation while remembering that God's patience is out of his concern for the lost counting the patience of the Lord as their salvation

Because the Day of God marks the end of the day of man and when it comes, the chance for salvation will be over

We don't know how much time we have to proclaim the gospel but we need to use the Lord's delay to its full advantage and so hasten the day of his coming

Let's pray

Mark 13:32-37 (page 850)

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”