

2 Peter 3 • A Final Message to the Beloved

Introduction

If Peter were to hold a “prophecy conference”, this would be the keynote message to convey to the attendees what is most important for Christians in the shadow of Christ’s Return. It cannot be converted to a timeline of events or a conventional chart of prophetic milestones, but is instead a primer for how the End Times believer lives and behaves. In a broad parallel to Christ’s primary teaching on the End Times in the Olivet Discourse, the same things which are most important for believers is reiterated: beware of false teachers who will inevitably come with all manner of deception, and remain faithful according to the standards of God’s Word while doing everything possible to preach the Gospel and reach the unsaved while it is still possible. Essentially, what is generally held to be important for every believer of every historic age is even more important in the Last Days, to preach and live and exemplify God’s Word.

¹This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ²that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.

[Read v.1-2]

Q: How might this sound familiar, something Peter has already addressed?

Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.

— 2 Peter 1:12

Point: *These are not things which are brand new, but supposed to already be an intrinsic part of every believer’s walk and faith.*

Q: Why might an admonition from the Apostle Peter to remember how to act and what to believe be especially powerful coming from him in particular?

A: Because of his own experience denying Christ and having to be restored by Him.

Point: *Possessing the truth alone is never enough, but must be accompanied by taking the right action on God’s Word.*

Q: What does Peter reveal about God’s Word itself? Is it limited to only what is published about Jesus in the New Testament?

A: The three things Peter describes are:

1. “...the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets...”
2. “...the commandment of the Lord and Savior...”
3. “...spoken by your apostles.”

This shows the crucial foundation played by the Old Testament, and that the Apostolic writings are actually a commentary on the teachings of Christ Himself.

Q: What is being alluded to in designating “the commandment of the Lord and Savior” and omitting “the commandment given through Moses”?

A: Christ and the accompanying New Testament teaching supersede the Old Covenant. The “new” commandment of Christ is not to be added on top of the “old”, but completely replaces it by virtue of having fulfilled it.

Application: *The whole of God’s Word in both Testaments points to Christ. A right relationship with Christ is impossible for those who do not “remember the words”.*

³Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” ⁵For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, ⁶through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. ⁷But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

[Read v.3-7]

Q: What is the primary doctrine which Peter is most concerned about here?

A: The Second Coming of Christ. [Observation: Eschatology actually matters!]

Q: How do we know this for sure? Couldn't the phrase "His coming" refer to just the Rapture?

A: The Greek term for “coming” is “*parousia*”. This is the New Testament term which embodies all the events and the entire process which culminates in the “*episunagoge*”—the Resurrection and Rapture of all the saints who will meet Him together. The “*parousia*” is not a single, isolated event.

Q: What is the core problem with those who mock Jesus' Return? Are they merely misinformed or lacking enough information?

A: They are “*following after their own lusts*”. (v.3) The issues they put on display about the truth are the result of deeper spiritual issues pertaining to sin and self. [Ask the Group for examples of this from the behavior of any prominent false teachers past or present.]

Observation: The Greek word “*epithumia*” rendered in English as “*lusts*” carries with it the meaning of not just desiring something, but actually longing for it. Whereas healthy believers long for the *Parousia*, those possessed by their lusts long for something else in its place. Each respective desire is reflected in their personal behavior.

Q: How does the problem of mockers which Peter identifies in v.5 connect to his opening admonition concerning God's Word?

A: For those driven by their lust, the Word of God “*escapes their notice*”. In other words, the allowance of personal sin renders someone incapable of rightly handling God's Word. They fail to see what was accomplished by the Word of God in the past, so they likewise fail to see what is doing presently.

Q: What is the destiny of “the present heavens and earth”?

1. They “*are being reserved for fire...*”—that which will happen to the environment physically.
2. “*...kept for the day of judgment...*”—that which will happen to the environment spiritually.
3. “*...and destruction of ungodly men.*”—that which will happen to unbelievers **both** physically and spiritually.

Point: Every false teaching prolifically working within the Church today has the common goal of luring us to care for what we can get out of this life at the expense of the next. But we must always understand what is the true destiny, both physically and spiritually, for life in this world.

Application: False teaching is essentially the misapplication or omission altogether of God's Word.

⁸But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

[Read v.8-10]

Q: Is v. 8 a “secret Bible code”? What is the basic concept Peter is trying to get across?

A: We see time from the viewpoint of mortals, but we are dealing with an eternal God; our perception of time has to conform to His.

Q: What might be telling about the grammatical way Peter phrases v.8?

A: It is completely phrased in the present tense. The viewpoint of the Godhead sees everything past, present and future fundamentally different from us.

Q: But what is the chief reason for the Lord’s patience in taking so long, from our view, to Return and bring all things to their anticipated conclusion?

A: He is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”. (v.9)
He is going to provide the maximum time allowable to save as many as will choose Him.

Observation: In Romans 11:25, Paul explains the timing of how long God will patiently hold open the door for everyone as being “the fullness of the Gentiles”. In other words, there is a point where all who will come to Christ in the Church Age will be fulfilled, at which point the removal of the Church initiates the final sequence of End Times events.

Q: Who should fear being overtaken by “the day of the Lord”? Is this actually a warning to believers?

A: This is a warning to those will not “come to repentance”. As Paul stipulates in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:4–6

Point: This affirms what Jesus said repeatedly in the Olivet Discourse that we are not to be deceived or found sleeping, but to be alert, awake and ready for His Return.

Application: All of God’s promises will be fulfilled, both for this life and the next. It is a mistake to attach them to our own calendar of expectations.

¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

[Read v.11-13]

Q: So what are the chief behaviors to be found in someone truly living like an “End Times Christian” who is longing for Christ’s Return?

A: “Holy conduct”—our behavior should be distinctively set apart for Christ alone, the visible result of putting His Word into practice, and we should achieve “godliness”—exhibiting in our outward behavior and practices the proof of our exclusive devotion to Christ alone.

Point: Christians authentically ready for Christ’s Return are proven by the quality of their behavior and commitment to both Christ and others.

[Continued on the next page.]

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Q: Weren't we just told in the previous verses to be patient while we wait for Christ's Return? How is it we are now told that "hastening the coming of the day of God" is possible? Isn't this a contradiction?

A: In v.9, Peter specifies that the reason for God allowing for things to go on for so long from our point of view is that He is "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance". By fervently preaching the Gospel and discipling as many as possible, we are contributing to God's goal of reconciling as many as possible to Him in the quickest time possible. We are the agents through which He works to accomplish these things. We are actually part of the process.

Point: Christians are not supposed to be waiting around for Jesus' Return, but actively participating in it by preaching the Gospel and bringing as many as possible to repentance.

Q: This is a bit technical, but what is telling about the particular time and place which Peter says believers are looking toward? What might this be telling us about the overall timeline of the End Times?

A: Peter points directly to "new heavens and a new earth" which replaces their present counterparts' when completely destroyed. In other words, Peter does not point to the Millennial Kingdom as the goal, which is really just a final thousand year period taking place prior to our ultimate final destination in eternity.

Point: The Millennial Reign is not to be confused with heaven, but rather God's demonstration of what He had originally intended for this life absent the Fall of Man through Adam and Eve. The perfect, eternal destination we are to be fixed upon is actually what comes after as explained in Revelation 21.

Application: The fulfillment of God's End Times promises is supposed to motivate an even greater commitment to putting the rest of His Word into practice.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[Read v.14-18a]

Q: What is the term of personal endearment which Peter has repeatedly used in this last section of his Epistle?

A: He has used "beloved" to directly address the letter's recipients four times in v.1, 8, 14 and 17.

Observation: If we were to study the New Testament usage of "agapetos"—that is, "beloved", we would find it is only used to refer to Christians who are united with God or with each other in the bonds of holy love. It is a description of the ultimate result of God's truth when applied to our life.

Q: What are the primary behaviors associated with those who "look for these things"—that is, the conclusion of everything pertaining to the End Times leading up to eternity?

1. "...be diligent..." (v.14) This carries with it the meaning not to neglect even the smallest detail when it comes to putting God's Word and ways into practice, but to follow through consistently in everything.
2. "...be found in Him in peace..." (v.14) Living in faith in the belief that all things are under His control both where we are personally concerned and the state of the world as well; not shaken by the world.
3. "...spotless..." (v.14) This may be best understood as being "unpolluted by sin".

4. "...blameless..." (v.14) This may be best understood as the world being incapable of rightfully indicting us of sinful and unethical behavior, wrongs we have actually committed.
5. "...regard the patience of our Lord as salvation..." (v.15) Putting the Last Days into the proper perspective, that what is most important is not being rescued, but by preaching the Gospel, in the end others are rescued as well. While we wait for His Return, His patience is our opportunity.

Q: How might Peter's endorsement of Paul actually be an extension of his opening remarks to this final section of his letter?

A: He is assuring us that Paul's writings have an equal footing with "the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles". (v.1)

Q: How do we know for sure that Peter elevates Paul's writings to the same status and authority as everything else contained in the Bible?

A: Because Peter says false teachers "distort" Paul's teachings "as they do also the rest of the Scriptures". (v.16) Paul's writings are said by Peter to be on the same level as "the rest of the Scriptures".

Point: There are those who attempt to restrict some parts of Scripture just for Jewish believers and the rest just for Gentile believers, particularly when it comes to Paul's writings, but Peter affirms that no such distinction exists.

Q: What is the problem Peter assigns to those who not only "distort" Paul's writings, but "also the rest of the Scriptures"?

A: They are first described as "untaught" and "unstable" (v.16), and further qualified as "unprincipled men". (v.17)

Q: What is our responsibility where false teachers are concerned?

A: We are to be aware beforehand and "on your guard". We are not supposed to anticipate that false teachers **MAY** come against us, but rather be prepared that they will most assuredly come.

Q: What is the primary danger of not being prepared for false teachers? How does this fit with the overall teaching of Peter's teaching to this point?

A: The primary danger to believers is to "fall from your own steadfastness". (v.17) Consistently being faithful to apply God's Word and ways has been the recurrent theme throughout Peter's final words to the Beloved.

Application: The primary goal of false teachers is to undermine the very thing which is most important for believers, their commitment to the whole Word of God.

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

[Read v.18b]

Q: When will we experience "the day of eternity"?

A: Although Peter describes this in v.13 as the new heaven and new earth after the total destruction of this present one, for us personally it comes when we personally meet Jesus, either by death and Resurrection or the one-time Rapture of the Church. In either case, both circumstances immediately set us on a direct path toward joining Christ in "the day of eternity".

Application: The fulfillment of God's Word is not just in the Rapture, nor just the Parousia, or even the Millennial Reign, but in the promise of eternity to come.

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Overall Application

- *Do we regard different parts of God's Word as separate or belonging to exclusive categories? When people do this, do we recognize that they are not applying Christ as the fulfillment of **ALL** Scripture, but actually excluding Him in some way?*
- *How well do we recognize false teachings as not just attempting to misapply God's given Word, but to also omit all that it has to teach on a given subject? How might this contribute to failing to apply it **ALL** to our walk and life in Christ?*
- *Are we operating according to our own perceived calendar rather than God's where His Return is concerned? Are we more concerned for our place in the Parousia than working to include as many others as possible with us?*
- *What is your hope fixed on? Does it end at the Rapture or the Millennial Reign? Where do you place eternity in your vision of what is to come?*

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