

Lesson Thirteen - 1 and 2 Peter
2 Peter 3

- I. The purpose of the letter restated. 3:1-2.
 - A. In this chapter, Peter returns from criticizing the false teachers to encouraging the faithful.
 - 1. He calls them dear friends as he summons them to recall.
 - 2. The title occurs three times in significant contexts in this last chapter.
 - a) v. 2 - Dear friends, recall. . . .
 - b) v. 14 - Dear friends . . . make every effort
 - c) v. 17 - Dear friends, be on your guard
 - B. The vehemence of his attack in the last chapter and the repetition of his reminders here both spring from a heart of love for his readers.
 - 1. It is often true that men need to be reminded more frequently than they need to be informed.
 - 2. Peter compliments his readers by attributing to them pure minds, or minds uncontaminated by the lust and heresy all around them.
 - C. The affection that he showers on them, the compliment he pays them, and the confidence he expresses in them are marks of the wise spiritual leaders at work among his people.
 - D. The *second letter* most naturally suggests that 1 Peter was the first one.
 - 1. However, it can hardly be said that 1 Peter is primarily a letter of reminder, and still less a dissuasive against heresy.
 - 2. Because of this some conclude that the reference is to a lost letter written by Peter.
 - 3. 1 Cor. 5:9 almost certainly refers to a letter written by Paul that does not survive.
 - 4. Some believe that the reference is to Jude which Jude wrote as Peter's amanuensis.
 - E. What they are to remember is the words spoken by the Prophets and "the commandments of the Lord and Savior through your apostles."
 - 1. The commandments are given by the apostles, but the source is the Lord and Savior.
 - 2. Peter emphasizes the link between the prophets who foreshadowed Christian truth, Christ who exemplified it, and the apostles who proclaimed it.
 - 3. God's self-disclosure was to be seen in the written word of God through

the prophetic scriptures and the spoken message through the apostolic proclamation (See, Eph. 2:20; 3:5).

- a) It is clear that the heretics have questioned both of these attributes.
- b) In chapter 2 they were taken to task for denying the authority of the Lord who bought them and for despising his power.
- c) In chapter three they are reprovved for doubting the reality of his second coming (parousia).

II. The taunts of those who scoff at the second coming. 3:3-4.

A. First of all they must understand that the apostles were not surprised by activities of the mockers.

- 1. Acts 20:29-31 gives an example of another such apostolic warning; 1 Tim. 4:1ff another.
- 2. A skillful contrast is implied in vv. 2-4 between the readers who remember the predictions of the prophets and the command to live a holy life, and the scoffers who reject the commandment by indulging their own lusts, and flout the predictions of the apostles by mocking the hope of the second coming.

a) Christ's first coming to the world was the decisive event in human history.

(1) He came when the time had fully come. Gal. 4:4.

(2) He came in the last days. Heb. 1:2.

(3) With the advent of Jesus the last chapter in human history had opened, though it was not yet completed.

b) In between the two advents stretches the last time, the time of grace, but also the time of opposition.

B. This opposition mocked at the parousia and at the same time lived self-indulgent lives.

- 1. Cynicism and self-indulgence regularly go together.
- 2. The emphasis here on self-indulgence makes it all but certain that Peter has in mind that same people discussed in chapter 2, and not two separate groups of false teachers.
- 3. These men do not merely mock the second coming because of its delay, but jeer at the very idea of a second coming.
- 4. Intellectual arrogance, social snobbery, and the sensuality that so often accompanies such an attitude make these false teachers as opposed to the notion of judgment, inherent in the parousia, as their counterparts at Corinth were to the idea of bodily resurrection.
- 5. Anthropomorphic hedonism always mocks at the idea of ultimate

standards and a final division between saved and lost.

6. For men who live in the world of the relative, the claim that the relative will be ended by the absolute is nothing short of ludicrous.
 7. For men who nourish a belief in human self-determination and perfectibility, the very idea that we are accountable and dependent is a bitter pill to swallow.
 8. No wonder they mocked!
- C. They make two arguments to support their positions.
1. Where is the promise of his coming -- it has been so long delayed that it is safe to assume that it will never be fulfilled.
 2. Years have passed and it has not happened -- everything goes on as it has from the beginning.
- D. Peter's response is also twofold.
1. He deals with the second argument first. vv. 5-7.
 - a) His argument is that, in fact, this is not a stable universe, that once it was destroyed by water in the time of the flood, and that a second destruction, this time by fire, is on the way.
 - b) Their premise (that this is a stable, unchanging world) is false; thus their conclusion (that it will remain so and there will be no parousia) is false also.
 - c) They willfully neglected the flood when God intervened in judgment.
 - d) This type of argument is strong because it ignores a good deal.
 - (1) The crushing answer to all such arguments and thus to this one as well is to point out what they omit or ignore.
 - (2) Certainly it is a fact that all things have gone on in their accustomed fashion since Jesus lived on earth, now for almost 2,000 years.
 - (3) Peter points out, however, that these "wise men" ignore two things, one past and one future.
 - (a) In the beginning the word of God put the world in such a condition that all living things on its surface perished by water.
 - (b) That same word is keeping the present heavens and earth for fire in order to send the ungodly to perdition, these mockers being among them.
 - (4) We have already noted in 2:5ff. that the flood is a type of the last judgment to which Peter now turns with "but" or "on the other hand."
 - (a) He refers to the present heavens for Christ at his second coming

will descend from them. [Contrary to the teaching of some, he will not descend to the earth to reign on the earth 1,000 years or any other period of time. Those who are alive at His coming will be caught up together with the Lord *in the air* and thus shall they ever be with the Lord. 1 Thess. 4:17.]

(b) This present world is preserved for fire by which it will be destroyed.

i) Do not ask me what kind of fire this is.

ii) God has many different types of fire -- fire to burn wood, the electric fire of the lightning bolt that strikes in an instant from the sky, the fire that burns in the sun, the fire to change the heavens and the earth at the last day, and another most terrible unquenchable fire for the devil, his angels, and those who are lost in hell.

iii) This will be a day when Christ judges and sends all the ungodly to perdition.

E. This passage poses problems for modern sophisticates.

1. We find difficulty in the creation of the world from water, the destruction of the world by water, and the further destruction of the world by fiery conflagration.

2. But the imagery is as relevant today and powerful today as it was then.

a) Mankind cannot presume on the stability of the world (witness the recent tsunami).

b) We cannot take for granted that our environment will continue to make possible human life.

c) The forces of nature retain their primeval destructive power: nuclear weaponry makes the literal fulfillment of Peter's apocalyptic picture of cosmic conflagration not only possible but the daily background of our lives.

d) And Peter's assurance that these things are not governed by rationalistic presumption or chance, but by divine control is the ultimate justification for retaining hope in the midst of a crazy world.

e) God is in control.

III. The mercy of God's delay. 3:8-9.

A. Peter now turns his attention to the faithful.

B. Although the heretics may remain willfully ignorant, at least let his beloved readers not miss the important truth that time is not the same to God as it is to man.

C. In providing his readers with ammunition to meet the scoffers' scorn at the parousia's delay, Peter emphasizes first the relativity of time, and secondly, the loving forbearance of God.

1. The relativity of time.

a) Time is not the same to God as it is to man.

(1) When we think of the world's history it is easy to feel dwarfed into insignificance.

(2) When we think of the slowness of human progress, it is easy to become discouraged into pessimism.

(3) There is comfort in the thought of a God who has all eternity to work in.

(4) It is only against the background of eternity that things appear in their true proportions and assume their real value.

b) This verse plays a significant role in the doctrine that there will be a thousand years rule by Christ in an earthly Jerusalem when the Day of the Lord dawned at the Second Coming.

(1) The apostles respected Jesus' command not to speculate about the time of the end (Mark 13:32-37), but that reserve did not last into the second century.

(2) This verse was taken by Barnabas (not the one we know from the New Testament) and Irenaeus to support the belief that the world would last for as many thousand years as there were days in creation, since a day equalled a thousand years.

(3) The intertestamental books *Jubilee* and *2 Enoch* take a similar line.

(4) Once again one is struck by the reserve of Peter.

(5) He is guided by the Old Testament and its corollaries, and has no truck with speculative time-charts.

c) Finally, there is another echo of a truth that so often lies in the background of New Testament thought -- God does not wish any to perish. 1 Tim. 2:4; Ezekiel 18:23.

2. We can also see from the passage that time is always to be regarded as an opportunity. Eph. 5:15-16.

a) The years God gave the world were a further opportunity for men to repent and turn to God.

b) Every day that comes to us is a gift of mercy.

c) It is an opportunity to develop ourselves; to render some service to our fellow-men; to take one step nearer to God.

IV. The dreadful day. 3:10

- A.** Having settled the question of the Lord's delay, Peter now tells his readers how the Day of the Lord will come.
 - 1.** The delay may be one of a thousand years, or several thousand for that matter; all are as a single day with the Lord.
 - 2.** But when the time of longsuffering is at an end, the Parousia and the tremendous things that accompany it will come with suddenness; the Lord will need no time at all.
 - 3.** The parousia will be as sudden, as unexpected, as disastrous to the unprepared, as a nocturnal burglary.
 - 4.** This should curb the apocalyptic excesses of those who always desire to set a date for the Lord's return.
- B.** Peter purposefully describes what will occur on that Day.
 - 1.** There will be a sudden conflagration of the universe.
 - 2.** Peter's uses apocalyptic language to describe the indescribable.
 - 3.** His main purpose is to lift up the eyes of his readers to the end of history; he makes three points.
 - a)** The heavens will disappear with a roar.
 - b)** The physical elements will be destroyed by fire.
 - c)** Peter anticipates the disappearance, the burning up, or the disclosure, the laying bare of the earth and all its works.
 - 4.** The solar system and the great galaxies, even space-time relationships, will be abolished; all elements that make up the physical world will be dissolved by heat and utterly melt away.
- V.** The ethical implications of the second coming. 3:11-14.
 - A.** As always in the New Testament, the moral imperative follows the eschatological indicative. (v. 11).
 - 1.** The expectation of the Lord's return always inspires Christians to a holy life (*cf.* 1 John 2:28).
 - 2.** Disbelief in the Lord's return all too often produces indifference in behavior, as it had with these false teachers.
 - 3.** There is an indissoluble link between conduct and conviction, behavior and belief.
 - a)** Unbelief leads to hedonism -- "I was nothing; I am nothing; so thou who art still alive, eat, drink, and be merry," read a heathen's tombstone.
 - b)** Unbelief leads to apathy -- "Once I had no existence; now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not concern me," read another.

- c) Unbelief leads to despair -- "Charidas, what is below?" "Deep darkness." "But what of the paths upward?" All a lie . . ." "Then we are lost."
- 4. Without the truth, embodied in the second coming doctrine, that life is going somewhere, there is nothing left to live for.
- 5. In the midst of a precarious existence in a precarious world, it is important to remember, as these verses remind us, that people matter more than things.
 - a) This we tend to forget; we slip into the habit of thinking of the world as more enduring than its inhabitants.
 - b) Peter denies this; people are more important and more enduring than things.
 - c) In an unstable and perishable universe the one stable and imperishable factor is human personality.
 - (1) It is with this that God is primarily concerned; a man's character is the only thing that we can take out of this life with us.
 - (2) The lives that we lead in the light of this coming dissolution is of supreme importance.
- B.** Christians are expected to look for the coming of the Lord. (v. 12).
 - 1. Peter uses two participles -- "expecting and being eager" for the Lord's return.
 - a) One may expect and yet not be eager about what he expects. Rev. 22:20; 1 John 3:2-3.
 - b) This does not mean pious inactivity. 2 Thess. 3:10.
 - 2. In v. 10 Peter writes "in which"; in verse 12 he writes "by reason of" or "because of which."
 - a) The second coming is the cause of the conflagration by which this universe shall be destroyed.
 - b) It takes place because God's day has arrived.
 - c) Peter repeats the description of the fire in order to prepare for v. 13.
- C.** Sin, which has marred God's world, will not have the final word. (v. 13).
 - 1. *Kainos* is old over against the new; heaven and earth are to be new in this sense, and not in the sense of *neos*, just called into existence.
 - a) The old universe was spoiled by the fall; sin permeated it with all of its effects.
 - b) On that day fire makes all new so that in them dwelleth righteousness, every trace of unrighteousness being removed forever.

2. In a renewed universe the ravages of the fall will be repaired by the glory of the restoration.
3. Paradise Lost will become Paradise regained, and God's will shall be done alike in earth and heaven.

VI. Look for these things and be ready. 3:14-16.

- A.** Because it is only righteousness that will survive in the new heaven and new earth, it is imperative that Christians live righteously. (v. 14.)
1. Once more we have the loving address, beloved, in connection with Peter's final admonition.
 2. The look of hope must produce the life of holiness.
 - a) "Being found by him" probably refers to the judicial finding of Christ, the Judge, at his Second Coming.
 - b) The false teachers were "spots and blemishes"; Christians are to be found "spotless and unblemished."
 - c) To be found "in peace" means in the peace that Christ has established, the condition when all is well between him and us.
 3. The most important thing about the second coming is that Jesus himself will return.
 - a) It is the man Christ Jesus who will confront us.
 - b) It is the man Christ Jesus who is the standard of human life by which we shall be judged.
 - c) "How will he find me?" is a very searching question for the Christian to ask himself, whether death or the Second Coming be uppermost in view.
 4. Just as confrontation with Christ will be the test, conformity with Christ will be the Christian's standard.
 - a) We are to make every effort to reflect Christ's own character.
 - b) Thus, when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at this coming. 1 John 2:28.
- B.** The false teachers were perverters of scripture as Paul also attests. vv. 15-16.
1. The false teachers reappear in Peter's sights for a moment.
 - a) The false teachers impatiently attribute Christ's delay in coming to slackness and the failure of the promise; Peter reiterates that it is due to patience and is conducive to salvation.
 - b) The false teachers denied the Lord and thus were anxious to discredit his promise; the faithful sought to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord because of which they eagerly anticipated his return.

2. The patience of the Lord displayed in the merciful delay of the parousia is designed to lead men through repentance and obedient faith to salvation.
 - a) Rom. 2:4.
 - b) When the Day of God dawns, the day of opportunity will be closed. Matt. 25:1-10.
3. Peter calls Paul as Witness "A."
 - a) It is not clear whether Peter is referring to Paul's writings about the certainty of Christ's coming or the obligation for holy living that it imposes, or both.
 - b) The main point is that these false teachers, ignorant and unsteadfast (unstable, uninstructed) that they were, wrested the scriptures to their own destruction. [Note that Peter classifies Paul's writings as being "scripture."]
 - c) Certainly Paul's writing in Romans, the end of chapter five and the beginning of chapter six, comes to mind.
 - d) G.K. Chesterton defined "orthodoxy," which he said ". . . was like walking along a narrow ridge, almost like a knife-edge. One step to either side was a step to disaster. Jesus is God and man; God is love and holiness; Christianity is grace and morality; the Christian lives in this world and in the world of eternity. Over-stress either side of these great truths, and at once destructive heresy emerges."
 - e) Such was the case here.
 - (1) The false teachers no longer submitted their actions to the scrutiny of Scripture.
 - (2) They made Scripture the justification for what they wanted to do.
 - f) Peter is very firm; the action of the false teachers in twisting Scripture to justify the libertinism and rejection of the Second Coming is so serious as to disqualify them from salvation.
 - (1) God will not have his grace turned into licence nor his moral authority mocked.
 - (2) "Their own" is emphatic; such action amounts to their destroying themselves.

VII. Conclusion. 3:17-18.

- A. Peter reminds them again that he is reminding them again. v. 17.
 1. They know that false teachers are to be expected; to be forewarned is to be forearmed.
 2. Plain speaking is essential on the part of elders, preachers, and Bible school teachers who want to lead their hearers in the way of truth.

3. That is why Peter has reminded them again and again of the wrong and the right paths, and their respective destinations.
 4. The responsibility now lies with them to watch, to guard themselves against the specious arguments of the wicked.
 5. Peter implies that if the faithful spend too much time in the presence and company of false teachers that they risk being carried away and falling from their own steadfastness.
 - a) Once again Peter stresses the relationship between knowledge and behavior (they have been warned and thus should avoid).
 - b) The fact is that faith without knowledge degenerates into pietism; purely emotional religion leads often enough to seeking excitement and emotional highs, which militates against stability as almost nothing else does.
 - c) The word for "steadfastness" is used only here in the New Testament, but it is from the same root as the verb Jesus used in Luke 22:32, "When you have turned back, *strengthen* your brethren."
 - d) This is a command that Peter has been seeking to obey throughout this epistle.
- B.** Peter's own steadfastness is seen in that he ends his letter as he began it, on the subject of growth (1:5). v. 18.
1. No true Christian thinks, as the false teachers seem to have done, that he has arrived.
 2. Peter and Paul (Phil. 3:13ff) both urge others to press on as they themselves do.
 3. The Christian life is a developing life, for it consists in getting to know at ever greater depth an inexhaustible Lord and Savior.
 4. It is only on a firm foundation that a great building can tower into the air; it is only because it has a deep root that a great tree can reach out to the sky with its branches.
 5. The Christian life is at once a life with a firm foundation and with an ever outward and upward growth.
 6. And so the letter closes by giving glory to Christ, both now and for ever.