

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (35) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:  
#20. Waiting and Watching for the Coming of the Lord”**

**Introduction:**

This is the final message in the series that we began last July 30, “The ABC’s of the Christian Life.” We could probably come up with additional subjects that we could address, but I believe that we have covered the major themes and doctrines that touch on the basics of living the Christian life. I felt that the topic today is essential to our series, and it serves as a fitting conclusion. This matter has to do with the importance for every Christian to have a forward look, an eager anticipation, a ready preparation, to stand before the Lord either at the end of this life or at the second coming of Jesus Christ, whichever event comes first.

Let us consider the last words we have recorded that were penned by the Apostle Peter. In 2 Peter 3, the apostle exhorted the Christians to whom he was writing, that they would be mindful and be prepared for the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Here are four verses from that last chapter of 2 Peter--**2 Peter 3:10-13**.

<sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup>Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

We considered this theme of living with view to the second coming of Christ a little over a year ago when we were in our study of First and Second Thessalonians. As Paul had exhorted Christians in those two epistles, so Peter exhorted Christians here. Paul had declared that the day would take place when

“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16f).

The Holy Scriptures teach us that at the second coming of Jesus Christ there will be a general resurrection of all mankind, when the Lord will execute His judgment of the works of every human being who ever lived in history. The outcome of this general judgment of mankind according to works will be the declaration of the Lord Jesus of the eternal fate of both believers and unbelievers.

When we addressed 1 Thessalonians 5, in which Paul addressed this matter, we asserted the following points regarding of Paul’s teaching:

1. The Day of the Lord will be sudden and unexpected (1 Thess. 5:1, 2)
2. The Day of the Lord will bring sudden destruction on non-Christians (1 Thess. 5:3)
3. The Day of the Lord will not “surprise” Christians (1 Thess. 5:4, 5)
4. The Day of the Lord should be before the eyes of Christians (1 Thess. 5:6, 7)
5. Christians are to be prepared for the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:8)
6. Salvation is certain for Christians in the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:9, 10)
7. How Christians are to treat one another until the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:11)

Let us now consider the inspired words of God as penned by the Apostle Peter that we read above, but consider them in the context of the entire chapter of 2 Peter 3.

The first assertion that is set before us is that...

## I. Believers are to be mindful of the coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:1-7)

Let us read verses 1 through 7.

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), <sup>2</sup>that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, <sup>3</sup>knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, <sup>4</sup>and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” <sup>5</sup>For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, <sup>6</sup>by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. <sup>7</sup>But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

The first paragraph of this last chapter is contained in verses 1 through 7. There are three sentences in the New King James Version, which you have reflected in your notes, which we just read. This number of sentences is in accordance with the editors of the (most used) modern Greek text of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> The first sentence is in verses 1 through 4a. The second sentence is the short answer to a question, which is verse 4b. And the third sentence is verses 5 through 7. Now the newer English translations differ in their sentence structure than this NKJV translation. The newer English translations produce these 7 verses in more, shorter sentences, to ease the reading comprehension of modern English readers. For example, the New American Standard Version (NASV) sets forth these first 7 verses of 2 Peter 3 in 2 paragraphs with a total of 5 sentences. But the English Standard Version (ESV) expresses verses 1 through 7 in one paragraph in 6 sentences. The New International Version (NIV) has verses 1 through 7 expressed in 2 paragraphs of 9 sentences. The editors of the modern Greek text and the translators of The New King James Version reflect Peter’s original sentence structure and division.

Peter opened with an explanation why he was writing this epistle to his readers. In doing so, he refers to the epistle of 1 Peter. He wrote in **verse 1a**, “*Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle...*” This statement helps identify the ones to whom this epistle was originally directed. We read of them in 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 an identification of the recipients of Peter’s letters:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup>elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Peter was writing to Gentile Christians, who lived in the region of what is now western and northern Turkey, even unto the southern coast of the Black Sea. Peter referred to them as “the pilgrims of the Dispersion.” The Dispersion, or the Greek word, *διασποράς (diasporas)*, was a term that had been historically applied to the remnant of Jews that had survived the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians (8<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.) and the Babylonians (6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.). Here Peter identified Gentile Christians as the true Israel, or spiritual Israel, by virtue of the fact they were believers in the Jewish Messiah. They are described as “the pilgrims of the Dispersion”, in that they were Christians journeying in faith to their promised homeland. They were traveling to “Zion”, the same city which God had promised to Abraham (Cf. Heb. 11:9f). It was to this spiritual city of Zion that the Lord had promised the return of a remnant of Jews and Gentiles who came to faith in the promised Messiah of Israel (Cf. Isa. 49:5f). What Peter was doing through these opening words

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<sup>1</sup> Kurt Aland, Matthew Black; Carlo Martini; Bruce Metzger; and Allen Wikgren, eds., *The Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1966, 1968, 1975), pp. 810-812.

of 1 Peter 1:1 and 2, was to set forth New Testament believers as spiritual “Israel”, to whom God gave the promises of salvation. He is setting forth here what Paul had declared in Romans 2:28f:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup>but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Paul had declared this same spiritual identity of Christians as the promised Israel to whom God gave His promise of salvation when he included along with himself the Gentile believers of the church at Philippi. He had written to them, “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). True Christians are true the Israel, the people of God.

Peter declared in 2 Peter 3:1 that he was writing this second epistle to these same Christians to whom he had written his first epistle. His readers were Christians, who were (probably) both Jews and Gentiles who had embraced Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.<sup>2</sup>

Now in 2 Peter 3:1 we have a parenthetical statement, which reads, “*(in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder)*”. The “both” to Peter was both his epistles. Both 1 and 2 Peter contain instruction that either Peter had given them in person or in that he knew they had been instructed. In his epistles Peter was reminding them of what he had taught them in person. There are many truths of the Christian faith in which we may have been previously instructed, which we need to have stirred up in our thinking, or reaffirmed and brought to the forefront of our thinking. Peter was indicating that by his rehearsal of the teaching of the future second coming of Jesus Christ, he was directing their attention and focus on a matter of great importance, a matter in which he had previously instructed them.

Specifically, Peter desired that they would keep the matter of the second coming of Jesus Christ before them even in the presence of scoffers, those who would dismiss or discredit the idea of the Lord’s return. Along with verse 1, we read verses 2 through 4 which speak of this matter:

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), <sup>2</sup>*that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, <sup>3</sup>knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, <sup>4</sup>and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”*

Peter reaffirmed to his readers the truth that the Lord Jesus would return to judge the world. This affirmation of the second coming of the Lord to execute judgment upon His enemies and to bestow full salvation on His people is denied and scoffed at by unbelievers. Peter is pressing upon his readers the authority and the veracity of all biblical history, that which was proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles that this event would occur. There were scoffers who were mocking these Christians and their belief in the second coming of Christ and their belief in the end of the world, the final judgment, eternal damnation of the unsaved and of God’s creation of a new heavens and new earth prepared for His people, who are believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter was appealing and asserting the authority of the Scriptures that uniformly teach of this event.

**D. Martyn Lloyd Jones** (1899-1981) wrote a commentary on 2 Peter. These are his words on these verses:

Here is the case to put against those who are described as scoffers, or, if you prefer it, as mockers – the people who ridicule the Gospel and its promises, and especially all that the Gospel has to teach us with

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<sup>2</sup> Liberal commentators of 2 Peter argue that 2 Peter was not written by Peter, but by an author well into the second century who had written this epistle as if he were Peter. He must have been a very clever imposter to have asserted many decades later that he was writing to the same addresses as 1 Peter. No, this verse is a good argument for the authenticity of Peter having been its author.

regard to the course of history and the final outcome of life in this world. The position today, of course, is not only similar to that which obtained at the time when the Apostle penned these words; there is a sense in which it is still more accentuated. All the appearance seem to be against what is taught here in the Bible, and all this opposition is greatly reinforced today by various so-called scientific teachings, which seem to fly flatly in the face of the teaching of the New Testament.

Now what has the Apostle to say to all this? Let me summarize his statements. His first statement is this, *that this whole matter is fundamentally and finally a matter of faith and a matter of acceptance of the teaching of Scripture*. The Gospel tells us that there is to be a definite end of the world, and Peter goes on to tell us how that end is to take place. He tells us that world history is heading up to a great climax and final judgment. That is perhaps one of the most difficult things which we are asked to believe. There are large numbers of people who are very ready to accept the Gospel in general, with regard to its doctrine of forgiveness, and with regard to its doctrine of the atonement; there are many people who are prepared to accept the doctrine of the cross; but they find this whole idea of the second coming of our Lord, or the return of our Lord in judgment, and the destruction of the world, and the new heaven and the new earth, particularly difficult. They find it strangely incredible. Everything, they say, seems to be against it. It is very difficult for the natural mind to accept such teaching.

Peter's reply to them is that ultimately it is not a matter of reason, it is not a matter of argument. He bases his whole case primarily upon the Scriptures themselves...<sup>3</sup>

Let us consider what the Lord has revealed to us in the words of the apostle. First, He has already helped us in a measure by revealing that we would encounter opposition to our belief in the second coming of Christ and the judgment He will execute upon the world. If opposition comes, or rather, when it comes, we may not be as unsettled as we might have been had the Lord not forewarned us these scoffers would confront us in our faith. We should not be surprised or shocked when these infidels challenge us, the Word of God has already told us that they would do so. The Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament apostolic witnesses had spoken of these mockers from a long time in the past. And actually, if we perceive the challenge of the mockers rightly, their voiced unbelief only confirms to us the truthfulness of the Holy Scriptures, for they foretold these mockers would come. "Men today by scoffing at this doctrine are simply confirming the biblical prophecy."<sup>4</sup>

Peter declared that these mockers would appear in "the last days." When most people read this expression, "the last days", they assume that it is referring to the time just before the end of the age when Jesus returns. But Peter was not speaking of far off events at the end of the age. These scoffers were already threatening the faith of these Christians as he was writing this epistle. The "last days" is reference to this entire church age. The recipients of this epistle were living at the beginning of the last days; we are living, perhaps, toward the end of the last days (we hope).

Peter described these "scoffers" as "*walking according to their own lusts*." This is the nature of all unconverted people. This is the way of unregenerate people born into this world. Due to the sin of Adam and Eve, the former headship of the mind that had conformed to the will of God was deposed. Rather than the mind, the sinful desires, or "lusts" became the dominant faculty that directs the way people think. The fallen nature of man—his lusts—governs his thinking about spiritual matters. He will shape his theology or doctrine, so as to give himself a pass on his practice. His behavior will shape the content of what he believes about God and himself. Peter declared that these mockers live according to their sinful passions. This is the reason that they reason against God and His Word.

And what is it that these scoffers say to challenge the Christian's faith in the coming of the Lord? They say, "*Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.*" These are not concerned persons who are seeking the truth. They are ones who justify their own belief and practice by discrediting you and your belief system. Your faith is a rebuke to them, and so they scoff at you in order to discredit and perhaps silence you. These people are deliberately and willfully rejecting the facts. What might be a good response? "Thank you for

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<sup>3</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 167f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

confirming the Bible is true. All who have believed on the Lord through whom the Lord has spoken to his people, foretold there would be people who will scoff at the idea of His second coming, as you have done before me.”

But these scoffers are willingly ignorant and unformed of the evidence that supports the Christian’s faith and understanding. Peter declared,

<sup>5</sup>For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, <sup>6</sup>by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. <sup>7</sup>But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Some of us struggle to remember the things of God. Most people “willfully forget” the Word of God. They forget and dismiss the judgments of God in history that portend to the final judgment of the world. There is an evidence of a world-wide flood everywhere, but they deny it is so.

In the second paragraph Peter explains to Christians why the Lord has delayed His coming. And so, in verses 8 and 9 we read of...

## II. The reason for the Lord’s delay of His Second Coming (2 Pet. 3:8-9)

Peter wrote,

<sup>8</sup>But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Peter declared that the reason for the Lord’s delay to bring about the end of the world was due to His mercy and His desire for the salvation of the lost. The Lord is much more merciful than you and I are merciful. If we could and would be patient and merciful toward another for 1,000 years, for God that would be like mercy shown for a single day. In other words, God is infinite in His mercy. Peter was using a figure of speech. 1,000 years was not to be taken literally, but figuratively. Peter used this figure in comparison to a day to show the vast degree of mercy that characterizes our God.<sup>5</sup>

Now there are many Christians who put a wrong spin on this verse. They argue that God’s time is different than time that is true to the experience of you and me. They say that one day that passes with God is equivalent to 1,000 years with us. This is wrong and irrational. Actually God is eternal, that is, He is outside of what we call time. He exists in eternity. He created time. One of the fascinating aspects of the incarnation is that the infinite God entered into history, taking upon himself a human nature (i.e. a human soul and body). Jesus Christ is now and forever within history. In his human nature, Jesus Christ is within time as you and I are within time.

Peter asserted that the Lord’s delay in His coming was not due to a weakness or failure of Him to keep His promise, as some might consider this as a legitimate explanation for His delay. No, the reason for His delay is due to His purpose to save lost people from their sin through Jesus Christ. Peter wrote that the Lord ***“is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”***

Now this verse 9 is a center of argument between those who are reformed, who believe in the purpose of God to save His elect through Jesus Christ, and those who are Arminian, who believe that God loves all people everywhere in the same way to the same degree and that God is trying to save everyone in the world. Arminians argue from this verse, “See, the Lord is not willing that anyone perishes. He wants all people to

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<sup>5</sup> Similarly, those of us who are amillennial argue that the 1,000 years of the “millennium” in Revelation 20 is to be understood as a figure, an apocalyptic term, to describe the present kingdom of our Lord Jesus as a long period of time, which is undetermined in exact duration by us, for He does not want us to know the time of His return.

be saved.” Now aside from that teaching stripping God of His sovereign rule over His creation, the argument of the Arminian is faulty and cannot be legitimately based on this verse.

First, understand that there is a textual variant in this verse. **The New King James Version** (NKJV) (and KJV) renders verse 9,

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward *us*, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Notice I emboldened the pronoun “us.” Actually the pronoun in the Greek text should be translated “you”, not “us.” This translation is reflected in all of the newer English translations, like the **English Standard Version** (ESV), which reads,

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward *you*, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

This second reading is certainly the original that Peter had penned. Peter was asserting that the Lord was longsuffering toward the ones he was addressing his epistle, which we have already shown to have been identified in 1 Peter 1:2. Peter was assuring that God was longsuffering toward the elect. The Lord was delaying His return at the end of the age, because He was not willing that any of His elect would perish, but that He would see to it that *all* of the elect would be saved.<sup>6</sup>

However, even as we argue for the biblical (reformed) doctrine of election and for God’s special mercy and love toward His people, we do not dismiss the idea of God’s general benevolence for the non-elect. God is a good and gracious God. He desires the well-being of even the reprobate, those that He has purposed that He will judge and damn for their sins. This can be demonstrated in many ways. But consider the words of our Lord Jesus when He pronounced God’s (His) judgment on Jerusalem, on those who had refused to believe on Him as their Messiah.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate (Matt. 23:37 NKJ)

The Lord compared His concern for the well-being of these Christ-rejecters as a hen cares for her chicks. He did so even as He pronounced judgment upon them: “Your house is left to you desolate.”

The Old Testament also reveals that God had desires of good for people who were the objects of His wrath. We read of this appeal of God on behalf of those He had pronounced judgment. God declared to His prophet Ezekiel to give a message to the people of Jerusalem who were about to be destroyed by Babylon.

“Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: ‘Thus you say, “If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?”’<sup>11</sup> Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezek. 33:10f)

Although we should say with conviction, that God has a special love for His people, that He has them on His heart, He knew them intimately and affectionately from eternity, because He chose them in Christ, nevertheless, God, because of who He is, is loving to all that He has made. He is loving to all human beings. He has been loving even to those who have disregarded Him and rebelled against Him all their lives. Of course the greatest act of love for humanity is that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever, anyone, anywhere, that believes on Him, will not perish, but have everlasting life. Ignoring or disregarding His loving action, however, aggravates the condemnation of all of those outside Jesus Christ. Every act of God’s

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<sup>6</sup> By the way, the NIV translators used the word, “everyone”, instead of “all” in verse 9. This is a poor translation of the Greek word. It should read “all.”

mercy and common grace for the unrepentant sinner will aggravate his guilt and weigh down his soul in great depths of torment in eternity.

We saw from Acts 17 last Lord's Day that God commands all men (people) everywhere to repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord. Here in 2 Peter 3:8 and 9 we read that God is longsuffering toward His elect, not causing the end of the world to occur at the second coming of Jesus Christ, until all of His elect come to "repentance." Then the end will come.

Peter next set forth...

### III. What the Day of the Lord will be like. (2 Pet. 3:10-13)

<sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup>Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Our dispensational friends argue that there will be a future rapture of the church that is to be distinguished from the revelation of Jesus Christ. They claim that these two events, the rapture and the revelation, are separated from one another by a seven year tribulation. But they also claim that these two separate events are two stages of one second coming of Jesus Christ. They say that the "first" second coming of rapture of the church is quiet and secret, like a thief secretly comes into a house at night snatches his goods, and then leaves suddenly. But the "second" second coming will be the visible return of the Lord in which every eye shall see Him.<sup>7</sup> And so, they teach that when He comes as a thief, the Lord will slip in and snatch His people from the earth and return to heaven with them, to leave the people on the earth wondering what happened why so many people are suddenly missing. They say that when the rapture occurs, airlines at high altitude will suddenly have their Christian pilots vanish, while unbelievers will be left to crash in their planes. Husbands and wives will be together in bed, when the one that is a Christian suddenly vanishes. Mothers have their babies suddenly disappear from their arms. "A Christian doctor who had just made the incision for major surgery, suddenly disappeared through the ceiling of the operating room!"<sup>8</sup> Members of churches, who missed being taken in the rapture, will then realize that they must now face the tribulation, so they meet to make plans and appoint new leadership. All of these scenarios will take place in the future after Jesus Christ comes as a thief in His secret rapture, or so they say.

Here are a few statements of those who hold this view:

"His appearance in the clouds will be veiled to the human eye and NO ONE WILL SEE HIM. He will slip in, slip out; move in to get His jewels and slip out under the cover of night."<sup>9</sup>

"Quickly and INVISIBLY, unperceived by the world, the Lord will come as a thief in the night and catch away His waiting saints."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Granted, they speak of two stages of the second coming, but actually they are advocating two separate second comings, a first second coming and a second second coming. This teaching has only existed since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was popularized among evangelicals through the teachings of the Scofield Reference Bible.

<sup>8</sup> Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible*, p.p. 1, 2.

<sup>9</sup> All of these quotes were taken from Ralph Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible* (Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1989), pp. 2f. However, for reference purposes I have included his footnotes for these quotes. This first of the five is from M. R. DeHaan, *Thirty-Five Simple Studies on the Major Themes in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, Oswald J., *Tribulation or Rapture--Which?* (London: The Sovereign Grace Advent testimony), pp. 3, 10.

“[The rapture] will be a SECRET appearing, and only the believers will know about it.”<sup>11</sup>

“In the Rapture, only the Christians see Him--it’s a mystery, a SECRET.”<sup>12</sup>

“It will be a SECRET rapture--QUIET, NOISELESS, suddenly as the step of the thief in the night. All that the world will know will be that multitudes at once have gone.”<sup>13</sup>

But the belief that the coming of Jesus Christ is secret because He is coming as a thief, is to misunderstand and misapply the meaning that our Lord intended by the metaphor of the “thief.” God’s Word does not intend to convey by the metaphor of a thief that His coming will be *quiet* and *unnoticed*. But rather, the idea is that as a thief comes *unexpectedly*, so *He would return at His second coming unexpected by those who were not prepared and looking for His coming*.

Our passage clearly dispels this idea that the Lord will come *secretly* and *quietly* like a thief.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then *the heavens will pass away with a roar*, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

He is coming like a thief comes, not in the sense that He will be quiet or unnoticed, but that He will come when His enemies do not *expect* Him.

Now, the second coming of Christ “as a thief” describes how unbelievers will be unprepared and caught unaware at His coming. In contrast, the Lord’s coming will not overtake His people as a thief surprises his prey. We read in **1 Thessalonians 5:1ff** these words:

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>*For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* <sup>3</sup>While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” *then sudden destruction will come upon them* as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup>*But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.* <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:1-11)

Here we see that when the Lord comes as a “thief”, it is not in a secret rapture to snatch away His people. Rather, His coming as a thief will result in “sudden destruction” that will come upon them. It is wrong to say that when the Lord comes as a thief it is referring to a secret rapture apart from the second coming when He will judge the world.

Now after affirming the second coming of the Lord Jesus at the end of the age, Peter then gave instruction on how Christians are to act and react in the light of this coming event. **Verses 11 through 12** read,

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

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<sup>11</sup> Dake, Finis Jennings, **Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible** (Atlanta: Dake Bible Sales, Inc., 1963), p. 227.

<sup>12</sup> Fletcher, George B., **Will the Second Coming of Christ be in Two Stages?** p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ford, Herschel W., **Seven Simple Sermons on the Second Coming** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), p. 44.

With view to the second coming of Jesus Christ, we are to be characterized by “holy conduct and godliness.” We are to live holy lives and we are to live God-centered lives. We are to live according to His Word. We are to seek the Lord fervently. We are to seek to know Him deeply. We are to grow up in Him more completely. This is to characterize us even as we look toward the judgment that each of us will face when Jesus returns. Paul has expressed it this way:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. <sup>11</sup>Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. (2 Cor. 5:9-11)

And in another place he wrote,

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup>And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. <sup>26</sup>Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. <sup>27</sup>But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

Our Lord Jesus warned His disciples to live circumspectly with view to His coming.

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; <sup>36</sup>and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. <sup>37</sup>Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup>And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. <sup>39</sup>But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>40</sup>Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

<sup>41</sup>Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”

<sup>42</sup>And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? <sup>43</sup>Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. <sup>44</sup>Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. <sup>45</sup>But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, <sup>46</sup>the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. <sup>47</sup>And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. <sup>48</sup>But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:35-48)

The exhortation is that we persevere in living as Christians with view to the second coming of Jesus Christ. We are not to set aside our profession and live as unbelievers, as though there was no judgment before us.

Our knowledge of the second coming of Christ, the end of the world and the judgment of all mankind that then follows, should instruct us and motivate us to live holy lives as ones who will one day be examined on that last day. Since everything in the physical creation is going to be dissolved, because it is all temporary and will most certainly cease to exist, we are to live with God’s promise of our salvation and eternal life foremost in view. We are to be “looking for” His coming. But we are not only to be looking for the second

coming of Christ, we are to be “hastening” His coming. Again, we read in verse 13 that we are to be “looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.” This carries the idea of speeding His return. Now obviously we are not actually able to speed up the arrival of the Lord Jesus. But we are to desire His soon coming. We can also pray for Him to return a second time.

Now with this emphasis on living holy lives with view to the coming of Christ and our judgment of works, the believer is not to view this as a dreadful, or fearful, daunting prospect. For we are not looking for damnation as a possible outcome of that judgment. We are Christians. We look forward to the coming of Christ with our anticipation of having the *promise* of God of our salvation realized by us. This is what Peter wrote,

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup>***Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.***

We are not to be fearful of standing before our Lord. Our judgment will not result in our possible damnation, but in our certain salvation. In spite of the climatic world ending event and the grand spectacle and experience of the final judgment, nevertheless, we are looking past that to what God has promised us, even “***new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.***”

Peter concluded this section and his epistle by emphasizing our responsibility to be

#### **IV. Preparing ourselves for the Day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:14-18)**

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; <sup>15</sup>and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, <sup>16</sup>as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

<sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; <sup>18</sup>but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

How may we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord? By, first, being “diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (v. 14). What did Peter mean by being diligent to be found by Him “***in peace***”? We are to live before God in a state of “peace”, that is, we are to be close with the Lord in fellowship, knowing that there is nothing that is in us that disregards or defies Him. It probably also speaks of making every effort to be at peace with others before the Lord. Paul wrote, “Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11).

We are also to be diligent to be “***without spot.***” This speaks of a blemish; therefore, spiritually speaking, it refers to the presence of unacknowledged, unrepentant sin. To be spotless is to be as a clean, unsoiled garment. Or to be without spot may be compared to a sacrificial lamb or sheep to be offered to God. This was how our Lord Jesus was described:

For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, <sup>14</sup>how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself ***without spot*** to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13f)

Now we will never be without sin in this life. John wrote, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). But we are to strive to live without sin, to the degree that is possible for Christians with the means that the Lord has provided for us.

And thirdly, we are to be diligent to be “*blameless*.” This perhaps speaks of being obedient to the Lord, obeying His Word. We are to strive to be blameless in our obedience. This quality is to be required in potential elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:2, 10). They must be “blameless.” This is not to say they are to be perfect, for that would not be possible. But there should be a general quality of life in which there is no actual scandal. Paul urged this matter upon Timothy, when he wrote:

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup>that you keep this commandment without spot, *blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing*, <sup>15</sup>which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup>who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:13-16)

We see this is the same instruction that Peter gave to his readers here in 2 Peter 3:14.

And then with view to the coming of Christ we are to “*consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation*.” In other words, even as we desire that the Lord return soon, we are to realize that the Lord has a legitimate and God-glorifying reason for what we might think to be a delay in His coming again. Peter indicated that the Apostle Paul had taught the same things in all of his epistles, just as it is also set forth in all of the other Holy Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

Peter then gives a final warning and exhortation with view to the second coming of Jesus Christ. In **verses 17 and 18** we read,

<sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; <sup>18</sup>but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are to be watchful not only for the return of the Lord, but we are to be watchful over our own souls. There are spiritual dangers about us, which may cause us to stumble from our former steadfastness. “Being led away with error of the wicked” is to be deceived and enticed into sin by evil people who may have influence with us. The way to prevent this falling on our part is to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior.” As Christians, we should always be growing, even until the time of our Lord’s return. This we will do, if the Lord enables us.

May the Lord glorify Himself in us as we seek to live unto Him and before Him until His return for us.

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“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”  
(Heb. 10:23).

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<sup>14</sup> From this we see that Peter had regarded Paul’s epistles as Holy Scripture.