

**LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part eighteen**

Studies in 2 Peter - Sunday, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 - Teaching #2142

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**SPOTLESS AND BLAMELESS AT THE DAY OF THE LORD**

**2 Peter 3:14-16** - "Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. [15] 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, [16] 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."

What could be more important than the message of these closing verses? **Do you want to know how to be spotless and blameless and at peace when Jesus comes again?** That's what Peter leaves with these churches in some of his last words to them.

The same event Peter describes in this final chapter - **the Day of the Lord** - is still to come. It's coming for us just like it was coming for these early Christians. I say that to point out the obvious - **these instructions are still valid and authoritative for us today**. If you are looking for the Day of the Lord - if you want to be confident and unashamed at Jesus' Coming - here's what Peter says you must do:

1) **YOU MUST DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN THE SAME ATTITUDE THAT GOD HAS TOWARD SIN AND WICKEDNESS**

This is very hard to do in our culture of relativism and moral indifference. People who are able to sustain any Biblical concept of divine judgment are almost always slandered as judgmental. We don't want to be considered **against** anything except intolerance.

Yet the fact that this is a strong point in Peter's argument can be easily seen from the way he has repeatedly addressed it in this letter. He refuses to let anyone cherish the mistaken impression that God's mercy will somehow cancel out His hatred of sinfulness. Peter, and the Holy Spirit, lovingly pile up several examples to keep you and me from this common misconception of God's character.

Four times in one letter Peter cites specific occasions when God judged sin with a fierce intensity that left the world stunned and speechless:

- a) God **judged the angels when they lifted their hearts in pride against His will**. Peter says God "**cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness**" (2:4).
- b) God **wiped out the population of the whole earth except for eight people when He sent the flood** - "...if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when **he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...**"(2:5).
- c) God **reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their inhabitants to ashes** - "...if by **turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...**"(2 Peter 2:6).

Note, Peter says God did that with the specific intention of making a visible example of His judgment to those who think they can play His love against His wrath and cancel out any consequence to sinful actions.

This is a very different picture than the "**passive wrath**" concept being expressed by **Brian Zahn** and **Bruce Cavey** and **Greg Boyd**. They describe God's wrath as what you automatically **step into** when you turn away from God's love and grace - like **reaping what you sow**. Wrath is rooted in the nature of sin rather than in the just character of a holy God.

This is certainly more **soothing**. But it impossible to line it up with the clear data of Scripture. Let's let our Creator speak for Himself.

- d) The **fourth reminder of judgment** is found in **2 Peter 3:10**. It's actually an easy one to miss: **2 Peter 3:10** - "**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.”

**Question: Why do all the elements of this earth have to be destroyed by fire?** What is God so upset about on the Day of the Lord? What am I supposed to learn from these repeated warnings from Peter about God destroying - consuming - burning up all the things He created in the first place?

There is only one possible answer to that question. ***This whole world has been marred and infected by sin.*** Paul teaches the same thing in Romans chapter 8. The whole created world ***groans*** under the weight of human sin.

How serious is God about ridding His Creation of the presence of sin and wickedness? How far will He go in judging and purging all that is sinful? Peter says the first thing God will do on the Day of the Lord is ***destroy all traces - even in the physical, non-rational, created world - all the remains - all the evidence - that there ever was sin and wickedness in this created world.***

Just as I not only do not smoke, but don't like eating in the restaurant where everyone else is smoking, God refuses to live with the ***taint of sin.*** He refuses to share His new world with it - even its residue. Everything gets burned up. Then everything gets recreated.

Such is God's total, consuming hatred of all sin. He is committed to a completely new, fresh creation. When you think about this truth, so rarely stated in today's church, it births a different image of God. You can see why we get so familiar and chatty and casual with Almighty God, while the writers of Scripture are constantly trembling with the ***fear of the Lord*** and the ***God who is a consuming fire.***

Do you want to be pure and spotless and at peace at the coming of Jesus? Here is Peter's starting place: Share God's heartbeat on sin. All sin. Your sin. In this morally relative world, where the media works overtime, under the influence of the Prince of this world, to intimidate you into the same moral coma it is in, stay constantly troubled - horrified - pained at the tolerance in your own soul to wickedness:

**Psalm 119:136 - “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”**

Here we discover one of the calculable measures of a truly Godly heart. It's never easy to hate something everyone else loves. It puts you on the spot - singles you out for cultural condemnation. Deep, pure love is always the most ***courageous*** thing in the whole world because most people, in spite of the sappy love songs they hear, love ***moral indifference*** and ***self-centered gratification.*** This world will allow you to love anything but ***holiness.***

To love absolute holiness, you have to be brave enough to stand on your own. You and I are called to be ***intolerant*** of sin while reaching out to the sinner. You need God's Word to keep your vision clear with regard to the ugliness of sin. Adultery isn't romance. Smut isn't funny. Violence isn't the way of Christ's kingdom. Arrogance and self-expression aren't beautiful in the eyes of God. ***If we stop seeing those sins for what they really are, we're lost. We're headed for judgement, regardless of what we have underlined in our Bibles about God's love.***

So that's the first step. ***Develop and maintain God's perspective on sin and wickedness.***

## 2) **RECOGNIZE THAT SPIRITUAL GROWTH MUST BE HARD WON IN THIS PRESENT WORLD**

**2 Peter 3:14 - “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, ***be diligent*** to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”**

Immediately on hearing of the need for Christians to emphasize diligence, there are people who feel they must run to the defense of salvation by grace and not by works. Somehow, in a twisted way, they have come to think that just because salvation isn't earned by works, it doesn't even require purity and obedience and diligence.

Please notice where Peter's emphasis lies. The diligence required is diligence in a very specific area. It takes little diligence to want forgiveness. It takes very little moral fortitude to want to go to heaven rather than hell. For that matter, it takes very little diligence to sing songs of praise and worship to the Lord. In spite of what many may think today, it doesn't require huge sacrifice to go to church and get God's Word into the mind and heart.

Now, all of those things are very important. I'm not knocking any of them. But I'll tell you what requires diligence.

**Staying spotless and blameless takes diligence.** It takes diligence because that's where all the pressure to conform to this world pushes against us. It takes diligence because that's when we confront directly the loves and interests of the fallen side of our own natures. It takes diligence because that's where Satan makes his inroads so persistently into our best intentions.

For all those reasons, Peter says, if we want to be spotless and blameless and at peace when Jesus comes, we will have to be constantly diligent.

Look at the people of our world. **They fight for everything but purity.** We march for **our** rights, not **God's** rights over His creation. That's the world you and I have to live in. That's the world in which we have to prepare for Jesus' Coming - when He will come and burn up everything that is dirty, sinful and unclean. Without any doubt, the highest form of courage needed in the church today is **spiritual courage to remain holy.** That's a grace God gives to those who seek for it with diligence.

Let me give you some very old, time proven principles for keeping your diligence in being unspotted by this dirty world:

- a) **Spend enough time in God's Word to soak your mind adequately with God's standards so that you can shape your actions by them rather than the values of your peers and friends.**

If the mind is uninformed by God's Word, it will not stay morally neutral in this kind of world. You will simply adopt and digest the values of other students, partners at work, or whoever happens to be the latest idol set up by the producers and directors of this world.

- b) **When you read God's Word, or good Christian teaching books, always have a pen in hand to list commandments to obey, sins to avoid, examples to follow, warnings to remember.**

Truth has incredible power in the mind, but that power is usually short-lived. The simple discipline of noting something of importance increases its influence over behavior and duration in the mind ten-fold.

- c) **If you want to be diligent about staying spotless, look closely to the character of your friends.** I'm not talking now about people whom you are trying to reach for Christ. Those people, while objects of your outreach and concern, must never be your closest friends.

I'm talking about the people with whom you share your life on a deep level. And I want to tell you that the Bible calls all of us to be **Christ honoring in our relationships with others to the point of being sacrificial of relationships with people who don't share our passion for holiness.**

If you're going to follow Jesus in a way that goes beyond mere words, He will, sooner or later, call you out of relationships that run contrary to his will. And how you respond at that point will determine how diligent you are about being spotless and blameless at His return.

- d) **If you want to be spotless and blameless at the coming of Jesus, spend enough time in corporate worship and private prayer that you give yourself a chance to develop a love for the holiness of God in and of itself.**

This may be the greatest need of all. Every command is a burden until you love the God whom you obey. Every discipline is a chore until you taste and see the beauty of the holiness of God Himself.

Many Christians dabble at prayer only enough to discover that they aren't good at it. They quit the discipline before they develop a **taste for it.** They do it just enough because they know, as Christians, that's what they're supposed to do, but never persevere until they **love to please God more than they love to do anything else.**

Never forget this enormous truth. **No one can instruct you into loving God.** You must climb that mountain by yourself with persistent diligence. **And until you truly love God more than life itself, you will never bother making the sacrifices required to keep spotless until the day of Christ.**

### 3) A FINAL REMINDER ABOUT HEARING GOD'S WORD WITH AN HONEST HEART

2 Peter 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, [16] 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.**

These words actually go back to a thought Peter began developing in verse 9 - **“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.”**

Peter wants to show that this idea is consistent with the teaching of other Apostles as well. Specifically, he says that the Apostle Paul taught the same thing about recognizing the kindness of God in giving time for people to come to full and fruitful repentance. Paul put the same idea in these words: Romans 2:4 - **“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”**

Peter labors this point because he knows how easily we can interpret God's inactivity in the face of disobedience - **even our own disobedience** - as though somehow there really isn't a consequence to spiritual laziness or compromise.

Peter (and Paul) both teach that only repentance will bring escape from judgment. And the only reason God gives time to sinful people is to lead them into repentance. If there are areas of your life today that you know aren't pleasing to your Lord, don't think that just because you haven't faced His wrath up to this point that there is any indifference on God's part. He is simply giving you time - another chance to repent before He finally comes in horrifying judgment.

That leads Peter to talk about people who will be left in their own ignorance and instability and final destruction because they would not hear the truth with honesty and humility, but actually argued against the truth when it stared them in the face: 2 Peter 3:16 - **“....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.”**

The important words are **“twist to their own destruction....”** That tells us a lot. People have different views on baptism, the Lord's Supper, Calvinists and Arminians, pre-millennialism and post. But Peter isn't thinking about those kinds of ideas when he warns about twisting Scriptures to our **destruction**. He means specifically blotting out the doctrine of God's wrath against sin. Once you do that, you destroy yourself.

I have actually seen people do that. I've seen people take certain verses in the New Testament about God's mercy and grace, and use them to justify a bold, straight on refusal to turn from sin and rebellion. I've seen people who can quote verses about the present power and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in such a way to eliminate any need to exercise even the most basic effort to go to church regularly or study the Scriptures with diligence.

It seems, when our minds are darkened, we can actually get to the place where we begin to mentally turn the Bible inside out to avoid its most basic truths. Peter says we can argue ourselves into destruction.

Let me encourage you in a totally different direction - away from destruction. Let me urge everyone today to so love the holy presence of God, to so expect and long for the appearing of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and to so refuse any hint of compromise with sin, that we will be **spotless, and blameless and at peace when the Day of the Lord comes.**