

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Find Us Faithful

STANDING FIRM IN OUR FAITH

A STUDY OF 2 PETER

Courtney Gilmore

Robby Barrett

Dustin Slaton

Mike Green

Chris Curran



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Find Us Faithful: Standing Firm in Our Faith
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 12–13 and on the first page of each lesson.
 - Make and post a chart that indicates the date each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.gc2press.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.

- C. After you've studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Premium Commentary is now available for \$30 at www.gc2press.org. This in-depth commentary is a great resource for teachers.
- E. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available for \$20 at www.gc2press.org. under the "Teacher Helps" tab.
- F. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.
- G. You can receive the lesson preview each week by signing up for the *Baptist Standard* weekly newsletter at no cost. Sign up here: (www.baptiststandard.com/subscription/email).

Writer for This Study Guide

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Introducing

Find Us Faithful *Standing Firm in Our Faith*

A Study of 2 Peter

Background

Second Peter is the second of two letters that Peter wrote to Christians living in a pagan world, which was filled with lust and with the excesses of a still powerful Roman Empire.

Peter was among the first three disciples called by Jesus who spent over three years watching all Jesus taught and did. He was among the inner circle who were present at the Transfiguration of Jesus. That pivotal event changed his life, as he saw God's glory shining out of Jesus' body with dazzling light and splendor (Luke 9:28–36).

Ironically, some years earlier God had called Peter to become a missionary to some Romans gathered in the home of the Roman Centurion Cornelius. Peter went in to share the gospel with Cornelius and his guests (Acts 10:1–11:18). Many received Christ. Later Peter did mission work in the Roman region of Asia, before he traveled to Rome where he was imprisoned (AD 64) and martyred by the Emperor Nero in AD 67.

The recipients of the second letter lived under the culture, influence, and coercion of Nero, whose empire was filled with brazen immorality and debauchery. Prior to the Roman influence, this area had also been influenced by Greek culture and language. Peter possibly wrote this letter between AD 65 and AD 67 while imprisoned in Rome.

Peter wrote this letter to encourage the recipients to realize the potential, which God gave to each of them and to us. They were not assimilated by corruption, but instead to emulate the attributes of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were to allow God to so permeate their lives from the inside out, that His majesty, goodness, and glory would shine in and through their lives.

Ed Jordan

Standing Firm in Our Faith

Persecution was a given for first-century Christians. These early followers were often harassed, beaten, slandered, and ostracized for their faith. Peter, who was no stranger to suffering, sent two letters of encouragement. He likely wrote these letters while in a Roman prison just before he was martyred.

The apostle Peter could be energetic, daring, and courageous. But, like most of us, Peter also had plenty of rough edges. There were times before Christ's ascension that Peter was weak, impulsive, and cowardly. We are drawn to Peter because we can identify with him. He was so typically human in every way.

It is this Peter whose name is attached to two New Testament letters that have as much to say to us today as they did to their

first recipients nearly two thousand years ago. The original readers of 2 Peter had come under the influence of false and immoral teachings, and this letter was written to help them. It was also intended to help us to keep ***Standing Firm in Our Faith***.

Second Peter includes serious warnings but also a deep hope in Christ. As we lift our eyes from our present suffering to our eternal inheritance in Christ, may we find the strength to endure trials, and rejoice in Him.

May God continually ***Find Us Faithful***.

Suggested Resources for the Study of 2 Peter¹

Blackaby, Henry. *1 and 2 Peter: A Blackaby Bible Study Series (Encounters with God)*. Nashville, TN: HarperChristianResources, 2008.

Henry, Matthew. *1 & 2 Peter (Matthew Henry's Commentary)*.

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Lucado, Max. *Life Lessons From 1 & 2 Peter*. Nashville, TN: HarperChristian Resources, 2018.

McGee, J. Vernon. *The Epistles (2 Peter). Thru the Bible Vol. 55*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996.

Sproul, R.C. *1–2 Peter: Be All The More Diligent to Make Your Calling and Election Sure*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.

Spurgeon, Charles. *Commentary on 1 & 2 Peter and Jude (Spurgeon Commentary Series)*. New Zealand: Titus Books, 2014.

Swindoll, Charles R. *1 & 2 Peter (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 13)*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Alert (2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude): Beware of Religious Imposters*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook; 2nd edition, 2010.

Wright, N.T. *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: 9 Studies for Individuals and Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP; Study Guide Edition, 2012.

NOTE

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

Find Us Faithful

Standing Firm in Our Faith

A Study of 2 Peter

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lesson 1

Everything We Need

MAIN IDEA

God has given us everything we need through His wonderful promises for our future.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I claim the promises of God?

STUDY AIM

To understand that if we stand on the promises of God, we will never be disappointed

QUICK READ

God's promises are certain, and they reveal His character. There are over 7,000 promises God has made to you in the Bible. God has offered these precious promises to you, but they are worthless unless you claim them.

Introduction

Who do you turn to when you need something? It probably depends on what you need, right? If you need money, you ask someone to lend you some or give you a job. If you have an ailment, you go to a healthcare provider. If you are lonely, you seek a companion. If you need advice, you find someone with wisdom or experience. No one can meet every need or be trusted to provide all they claim. Some have no intention of keeping their promises, while others plan to, but either forget or do not follow through. Then, some just do not have the capability despite their desire. Inevitably, if you put all your faith in people, you will be disappointed.

But God will never let you down because He has everything you need and the power to provide. Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that He would lie, nor a son of man, that He would change His mind; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” God delivers on all His promises.

2 Peter 1:1–4

¹ Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³ for His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ Through these He has granted to us

His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust.

The Greeting (1:1–2)

Second Peter is a letter that begins with a greeting. Though it may seem like an insignificant formality, Peter revealed some important information here.

First, this letter was written by Simon Peter. Though his readers probably knew who that was, he continued by saying he was a bondservant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. A bondservant was a person who willingly continued serving their master after they had been offered their freedom. This person chose permanent servitude over their independence. So, as a bondservant, Peter willingly submitted to the authority of Jesus. But as Christ's ambassador, he had his own authority to bring the following message.

After Peter introduced himself, he said he was writing primarily to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience. We know this because the letter was written to "those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours" (1:1). He was contrasting the people he was speaking to with those who were like him, namely the Jews.

This was significant because Peter initially thought his faith was exclusive to Abraham's descendants. But the Lord came to him one day in a vision and revealed that anyone from any nation who feared Him, did what was right and believed in Jesus, would receive forgiveness (see Acts 10). So, by stating that their faith was "of the same kind as ours" (1:1), Peter was breaking down

the barrier that previously existed between them. He welcomed them into his faith, saying he considered them equally valuable in the eyes of God.

But there was an even deeper meaning that we could easily miss today. “The same kind as” literally meant “like precious” or “of equal value.” This phrase was often used to describe strangers or foreigners who were given equal citizenship. As Gentiles, they were foreigners to Israel, which was the nation of the Jews. So, they would have understood this to mean that they were being given equal citizenship with the Jews in God’s kingdom.

Paul explained this further in Ephesians 2:12–19 when he told the Gentiles to

“remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were previously far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the hostility, which is the Law composed of commandments expressed in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, in this way establishing peace; and that He might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers or

foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household."

The History and Teaching of the Gentiles Being Welcomed Into the Faith

- God told Peter in a vision to welcome the Gentiles into the faith (Acts 10).
- Peter told the rest of the Jews about God's new command (Acts 11:1–18).
- Paul and Barnabas would focus their ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44–52).
- An argument ensued over whether the Gentiles must be circumcised like the Jews as an outward demonstration of their faith (Acts 14:26–15:31).
- Paul confirmed there was no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles (Romans 3:21–31).
- God did not reject the Jews when he welcomed the Gentiles. He was using them to draw the Jews back to Him (Romans 11).
- Paul told the Jews and the Gentiles to accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 15:7–27).
- Explanation of salvation through faith, not lineage (Galatians 3:6–18).
- Paul explained his mission regarding the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1–11; Colossians 1:25–27).

So, Peter began by stating who he was and who he was writing to. Then, he said Jesus is righteous and called Him God, Savior,

Christ (Messiah), and Lord. They needed to know Jesus as the One chosen by God and foretold by the prophets, their Deliverer and ultimate authority, because the better they knew Him, the greater they would experience His grace and peace.

Though Peter wrote this letter specifically to the Gentiles of his day, it applies to all who read it and share his faith in Jesus. So, he is also telling us that we are equally valuable to God and have equal access to His promises, through Jesus who gives us equal citizenship in His kingdom.

Our Power Source (1:3)

God is our power source. He gives us everything we need to live a life that is pleasing to Him. We cannot please Him in our own power, and it is a great burden for us to try. But God does not ask us to do the impossible. It would be cruel for Him to require something He knows we are incapable of. So, God made a way for us to please Him through His Son, Jesus, and He enables us through His Spirit.

Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” God took the burden of living a righteous and godly life away from us and placed it on Jesus, the only one who can carry the burden of perfection. Matthew 11:28–30 says, “Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS**. For my yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.”

So, we can rest assured and rely on Him to give us everything we need to live godly lives. By remaining connected to our Power Source, we produce the fruit of His Spirit. In John 15:4–5 Jesus said, “Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” So, without Him, we have no power to do what is good or right, “and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). But He is “able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

If you have ever tried to be everything God wants you to be, you know how discouraging and useless our efforts are. Years ago, I read about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 and thought they sounded like important qualities for me to acquire. So, I wrote “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” on a piece of paper and put it on my refrigerator. I began to work diligently on being loving. I’m sure there were times when I was more loving than before, but it was hard, and I was discouraged. So, I decided to skip that one and come back to it later. I thought being joyful had to be easier than being loving all the time. But soon, I realized that was too hard for me, also.

I am not sure how far down I got on my list before I went back and read the passage. But when I did, I realized that the works of the flesh were listed above the fruit of the Spirit. Then I understood. The *works of the flesh* are what I could *do* on my own, and none of these were good. The *fruit of the Spirit* were what God *pro-*

duced in me. It was Him working through me. God was the source of any power I had to be a better person. Understanding that gave me such relief and took the focus off me and put it on Him. Then, instead of trying to be something I could not, I began to feed and nourish my relationship with the Lord.

Remaining Connected to Your Power Source

- Practice talking to Him throughout the day about anything and everything. Act like He is there with you (because He is).
- The next time you need something, ask God instead of a person. Wait and watch for His response.
- List what you know about Him. Example: What are His names? Who is He to you?
- List experiences you, those you know, or people in the Bible had with Him. Where have you seen His power at work?
- Read your lists when you need a reminder of His power.

As His Children (1:4)

When we know Jesus as Christ, Savior, and Lord, we receive all His precious promises. As we grow in our knowledge of Him, we will begin to look more like Him and less like the world. John 1:12–13 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh,

nor of the will of a man, but of God.” As His children, we share His characteristics and have escaped the world’s corruption, which is caused by our sinful nature.

Children share traits with their parents. Some are a product of nature because we are born with them. Physically we could look like them, or we may share certain personality traits. Then, other characteristics come through a growing and nurturing relationship. As we spend time with our parents, watching and listening to them, we begin walking, talking, and doing things the way they do.

As God’s children, we partake in His divine nature. But the more time we spend with Him, listening and following Him, the less we will look like the world and the more we will be like Him. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Ephesians 5:1), and receive the gifts the Father longs to give His children. First Corinthians 2:12 says, “Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” So, take hold of His precious promises.

Implications and Actions

We gave our children gift cards in their Christmas stockings this year. The girls spent their cards quickly, but the boys could not decide and ended up walking out of the store with the cards in their pockets and nothing in their hands. All four thankfully received their cards, but until they actually purchased something with them, our gift was wasted. We paid the price for nothing.

Receiving Jesus is no different. He paid for the sins of every person in the world. Your life has already been bought. So, what will you do with His purchase? Will you live for the One who died for you? Will you claim the promises He has for those who call Jesus their Savior? He is offering you everything pertaining to life and godliness. Will you take it and use it for His good pleasure?

Questions

1. How well are you trusting God to meet your needs?
2. Where have you seen God's power working in your life?
3. In what ways have you been relying on your own power instead of God's?
4. How can you be more connected to your Power Source?

lesson 2

Spiritual Health

MAIN IDEA

We must build on a strong foundation (verses 5–7) to achieve spiritual growth.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Am I a healthy Christian?

STUDY AIM

To understand that we must diligently swim against the current of our godless culture or we will drift away from God's truth

QUICK READ

The strong tide of human emotions and human frailty will try to carry us away from goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love.

Introduction

When my daughter was young, she loved to play with an old set of wooden blocks that belonged to my mom when she was a child. My daughter quickly realized that if she placed the different sizes and shapes in the proper order, she could use them all and build something tall. One big, long block always had to go on the floor to stabilize the rest. Then, she would build on that foundation using the larger blocks first and the smaller ones last. I still remember her carefully putting that last tiny block on top and looking at me as if she had just built something grand. But if she forgot to lay the big rectangular block on the floor or tried to put a heavy one toward the top, the whole thing would come tumbling down.

Faith is the foundation upon which we build our Christian life. If our faith is strong and stable, then we can add godly principles and build a life pleasing to Him. But if our faith is weak or absent, any addition will be too heavy for us to hold up, and our efforts will be unproductive and ineffective.

2 Peter 1:5–8

⁵ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶ and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, ⁷ and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We Must Participate (1:5)

Though salvation and the promise of eternal life may seem like the goal, these are just the first tastes of forever with the Lord. We have entered into a glorious new relationship, and belief in Jesus is only the beginning. When we put our faith in Him, He seals us with His Spirit and enables us to partake in His divine nature (1:4).

But we do not automatically reflect all His traits the moment we become Christians. Just as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) are characteristics that He produces within us, so are the supplemental principles of faith. But we cannot be passive just because these traits come from Him. Being a partaker of His divine nature means we must participate. We are required to give all we have to this relationship, making every effort to be spiritually healthy.

So, with a good foundation of faith, we can begin building and growing. The first trait we should add to our faith is virtue. This word is translated as “excellence” in verse three when referring to God. So, virtue is a divine attribute that we cannot attain on our own, a goodness that excels basic human goodness. The classical Greek word meant “a god-like ability to perform heroic deeds.” Goodness that comes from God stands out above all other goodness and can only be obtained with the help of the One who possesses it to begin with. So, if we want goodness that exceeds what we can attain on our own, we need to let God show us how to be morally excellent by being attentive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

But we can also understand the kind of goodness that excels the world’s by adding knowledge to our virtue. Reading His Word teaches us what He calls good and bad, right and wrong. We can only obey what we know, so this is important. But the Bible also

reveals the type of goodness the Lord possesses. Seeing it demonstrated helps us understand how to follow Him better. So, we learn His ways by listening to His teachings and paying attention to His character. Knowledge added to virtue only makes us more virtuous and faithful as we see the world through His eyes and rely more on Him.

Building on Your Faith (1:6–7)

So, when we know what God considers good and right, we will grow in virtue. But when we know what God deems bad and wrong, we must put that knowledge into practice with self-control. Controlling our emotions and temptations is hard, and we cannot do it by ourselves. Self-control in the flesh will always be too weak to stand. But having the knowledge to understand why we are controlling ourselves gives us strength.

Then, when we add steadfastness to self-control, looking to God when we are weak and want to give in, He will help us. Only He can give us the strength to persevere when everything in us, and everyone around us, says to give in and do what we want. So, once we have decided to put our knowledge into practice, we need to ask God to give us the power and endurance to withstand our emotions and temptations. Because we are constantly being bombarded with the world's ways, we must be diligent and seek God's help to stand against them.

Then, our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance will continue to grow as we become more aware of God. By being attentive to His commands and considering His ways, we will increasingly want to follow Him. The more aware we are of His love and power, the closer and more dependent we will be on

Him. The first time we experience His love or power in our lives, we are encouraged to look to Him the next time we are in need. Then, when God meets that need, our trust in Him continues to grow, increasing the likelihood that we will keep turning to Him. Experiences with the Lord only affirm our knowledge and make our faith stronger.

By being more aware of God, we will also become more aware of people. When we see others the way God sees them, as people that He created and loves as much as He loves us, we will have greater love and compassion for them ourselves. When we are reminded that we all have flaws and weaknesses, we are more understanding, merciful, and gracious.

When put into practice, this brotherly kindness becomes charity. God's love goes beyond words and takes action. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Through His Spirit within us, we can demonstrate that same sacrificial love to others and be loving to the unlovable. Luke 6:31–36 says,

"Treat people the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*. But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Him-

self is kind to ungrateful and evil *people*. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Passages on Spiritual Growth

- **Faith**—Proverbs 3:5–8; Matthew 8:5–13, (Luke 7:1–9); Mark 9:20–27; Luke 6:47–49; John 3:16–18; Hebrews 11:1–2, 6; James 1:5–8
- **Virtue**—Proverbs 12:4; 31:10; Psalm 34:14; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 1:6, 9–11, 4:8, Titus 1:7–8
- **Knowledge**—Psalm 119:66–68; Proverbs 1:5–7; 9:9–10; 16:22; 18:15; 19:2; 24:3–5; Hosea 4:6; 6:6
- **Self-control**—Proverbs 25:28; Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 10:12–13; 2 Timothy 1:7; Titus 2:1–7, 11–14; James 4:17
- **Steadfastness**—1 Corinthians 4:11–12, 15:58; 2 Timothy 2:11–13; Hebrews 10:32–36, 12:1–3; James 1:2–4, 12–15; 1 Peter 2:19–21
- **Godliness**—Proverbs 2:1–13; Psalm 34:4–7; 116:1–2; Isaiah 30:21; John 10:1–5; 14:26; 16:13; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Timothy 4:6–8; 6:3–12
- **Brotherly Affection**—Leviticus 25:35; Isaiah 1:17; Romans 12:9–10; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 2:1–4; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 13:1–3; 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8–12
- **Love**—Proverbs 3:3–4, 10–12; Matthew 5:38–48; 1 Corinthians 13:1–8, 13; Colossians 3:12–15; 1 Peter 4:8–10
- **Fruitfulness**—Matthew 3:8–10; 13:18–23; 7:17–20, (Luke 6:43–45); Mark 4:1–20, (Matthew 13:18–23), (Luke 8:4–15); Colossians 1:9–11; Titus 3:14
- **Growing**—Romans 5:1–5; Ephesians 2:19–22; 4:11–16; 1 Corinthians 3:1–3, 6–11, 16; Hebrews 5:11–14; 1 Peter 2:1–3; Revelation 2:19

Fruitful Faith (1:8)

The foundation of faith is required for any of these supplemental principles to hold. If we do not rely on God, we cannot possess His divine goodness. Also, without faith, we would not believe what we learn about Him. Then, we are too weak to resist the ways of this world and battle our own human nature without God's strength driving us to persevere. Without faith, even when He reveals Himself, we will not be aware, and it will not affect our lives. Faith in Him as the Creator and forgiving Savior enables us to see others through His eyes and treat them the way He treats us. We only have the power to be loving when others are not, because we have tasted God's love for us. In John 13:34, Jesus said, "I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Faith enables us to grow in our relationship with Him and participate in His divine nature. Where there is growth, there is fruit and productivity. In John 15:1–2, Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." Jesus continued in verses 8–10 by saying,

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love."

So, what good is our faith if we never grow in it? James 2:14–20 (ESV) says,

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but he does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”

Then, verse 26 says, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

Checklist for Spiritual Health

- I believe in Jesus as God in the flesh and the One who has paid the price for my sins.
- I demonstrate my faith by trusting Jesus as my Lord.
- I make every effort to grow and build on my faith.
- I am an active, fruitful Christian.
- I am attentive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and prompting.
- I seek to discern God’s ways from the ways of the world.
- I rely on God’s Spirit to enable me.

Why is it good for us to know Jesus if we do not look any different than the people who do not know Him? For our knowledge of Him to be fruitful and effective, we must make every effort to actively grow in our faith. If we do not turn away from the ways of this world and toward the things of God, we will be like everyone else. The ways of this world and our sinful nature are just too strong not to pull us away.

Implications and Actions

We often think of faith as a belief. But faith is much more than that. True faith in anything requires action. We can say we believe in the pilot's ability to fly, the surgeon's ability to operate, or even the chair's ability to hold us up. But if we refuse to demonstrate that faith by getting on the plane, going into the operating room, or sitting in the chair, then we do not believe in them enough. Our faith in Jesus is no different. We can say we believe He existed, even that He was God's Son who died and rose again for our sins, but if we do not act on that belief, then what good is it?

So, do not just lay the foundation; build on it. You will not reflect His divine nature automatically or be fruitful without effort. Supplement your faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Then, you will grow and be spiritually healthy.

Questions

1. How healthy is your foundation of faith? Do you trust Him enough to act on your belief?
2. Are you building on your faith and growing in Him, or are you stagnant and unfruitful?
3. What can you do today to be more effective and fruitful in your knowledge of the Lord?
4. How can you show others that salvation is only the beginning and help them supplement their faith, too?

lesson 3

God's Calling

MAIN IDEA

God calls Christians to be useful and effective in His kingdom work.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do your daily actions display the attributes of God?

STUDY AIM

To understand that God calls Christians to be useful and productive in His kingdom by growing in faith

QUICK READ

To be most effective in your service to God, you must daily exercise His attributes in your life.

Introduction

Remember the days in grade school when our teachers would line us up on the side of the classroom for a spelling bee? Students would move in line toward the teacher's desk and spell the assigned word. If we misspelled the word, we would take the walk of shame back to our desks and be out of the running to be named spelling bee champion for that week. If we were successful, we could get in the back of the line in hopes of being the last student standing.

More than once after I spelled a word my teacher would ask, "Are you sure you spelled your word correctly?" I would reply, "Yes, I am certain." Then she would say, "Are you 100 percent sure?" I would state that I was pretty sure. Then she might ask, "Are you sure beyond any shadow of a doubt?" Then, no longer sure of my ability, I would have to confess, "I think so."

Peter wrote to enable his readers to be 100 percent sure, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that they belonged to Christ. He realized these believers could be sidetracked and swayed by nonbelievers, false teachers (even within the fellowship of the church), and the culture of that day. Peter knew that doubt and uncertainty could subdue a Christian's heart and even render one useless to God's kingdom purpose. That is no way for a person to live!

2 Peter 1:8–11

⁸ For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they do not make you from useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For the one who lacks

these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choice of you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; ¹¹ for in this way there the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

The Unfruitful Person (1:8–9)

In verse 8 Peter looked back to the qualities and godly attributes he had just mentioned in previous verses. Notice these characteristics again—faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. These are not simply self-help words that can improve our lives, these are virtues to be lived out in a dynamic relationship with Christ. They are already incorporated in the new nature we receive with God’s forgiveness and gift of salvation.

Peter presents four words in verse 8 that help us understand the importance of these attributes. On the positive side, the word *increasing* indicates that a believer is allowing these virtues to abound in his or her life. They become a part of one’s everyday walk with God. *True knowledge* is more than just knowing about God, it is experiencing and enjoying a personal relationship with Him. One Wednesday night at our church when I was a child, our pastor dismissed everyone from the sanctuary to their Sunday School rooms to share personal testimonies. As I listened to my friend, Jill, share her story, I could tell that she really knew Christ, much more than just the facts about Him. At home later

that night I became convicted and gave my life to Christ. It isn't enough to know about Him; we must know Him!

Useless describes a person who does not allow these virtues to grow in his or her life. He or she is not increasing and growing in Christ, but rather regressing and allowing their spiritual life and vitality to relapse into old behaviors and ways. You have probably heard the adage, "Either be useful or get out of the way!" Have you ever felt useless in your spiritual walk? Have you experienced a time when your life seemed desolate, void of any feeling or purpose? Your Christian walk is not stagnant. You are either growing in Christ or diminishing in your walk with Christ. Think of the many muscles in your body. If you do not regularly use them, they can begin to shrink and atrophy. Just as physical exercise is necessary to keep your muscles in shape, spiritual exercise, living out the virtues of a godly life, is vital to your faith.

Unfruitful is the result of a useless life. John reminds us that we must remain connected to the vine to bear fruit (John 15), and that apart from Christ we cannot do anything. The Psalmist advises that fruitfulness in our lives results from being firmly rooted in God (Psalm 1). Outward joy is the fruit of a rooted life. Here, Peter reminded his readers that the Christian faith must influence your life, and your life must have a godly effect, in turn, on the lives of others around you! Imagine trying to go on a trip in a car that idles but cannot actually move. The engine can sound great, the car body can appear shiny, the seats can be comfortable, but without locomotion the car is useless and unfruitful.

One quick word of warning before we move on. Some might be tempted to look at the virtues listed by Peter and reason that by living these out in their own strength they can achieve salvation.

They try to be good, act right, say nice things, all because they are working for God's favor. Their actions come from without rather than from deep within. Ephesians 2:8–10 reminds us that we do not work for our salvation, it is a gift from God. We work for God because of our salvation, not as a condition of it.

How Are We Useless and Unfruitful?

- Has there been a time recently when you felt unfruitful? Maybe even useless?
- Have you let the voices of others overwhelm your convictions?
- Which of the eight virtues presented by Peter seem to be most visible in your life?
- Have you experienced God's presence as you live out godly attributes?
- Do you have assurance of your salvation?

Verse 9 describes this useless and unfruitful person as blind (lacking insight) or short-sided (only seeing what is near), even one who has forgotten the marvelous work of Christ on his or her behalf. The term *forgotten* indicates that Peter was still thinking of believers who had experienced the forgiveness of sins. If you are a believer, can you imagine forgetting the sacrifice Christ made for you on the cross? Can you imagine your life without regard for God's gift of salvation? What could make a believer willfully close his eyes, refuse to see the truth, become unwilling to look ahead, and decline to see things as they really are? What blind man would not readily have his eyes opened? Peter would

say “live for Christ daily, allowing the attributes and gifts of His spirit to live through you.”

Chosen for Him (1:10)

Two words in this verse, *calling* and *choice*, are the subject of a great deal of discussion, debate, and even dissension among Baptists and protestants in general. That being the case, we must look at verse 10 within the original purpose of Peter's writing—to counter false teachers and to bring understanding regarding the coming of Christ. Believers in that day, as well as our day, need to verify their claim that they are indeed called and chosen.

But notice what this verse doesn't say. The early believers were not instructed to observe the people around them and try to separate them into the saved and the unsaved (sheep and goats). That could be a tempting adventure, especially considering the number of false teachers within their midst. Yet, these brothers are to be “all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you!” The verse begins in a plural sense (brothers) but quickly becomes personal (you). When she was only 4 years old, my granddaughter had a cap with the initials TCOYMYOB on the front. I could not figure out what they stood for, so she finally told me. *Take care of yourself, mind your own business!* While the Christian life is certainly not intended to be lived solo, making sure of your relationship to God is both personal and primary.

Our calling and choosing comes from God. Then we must respond, and further, walk in a manner worthy of that calling (Ephesians 4:1). A real estate transaction requires carefully prepared documents to ensure that all the particulars are correct,

and that all parties receive a fair and just settlement. Realtors, closing agents, and even attorneys read each word to verify the accuracy of the transaction before the contract is executed. The I's are dotted, and the T's are crossed with care. Peter challenged his readers to have this same kind of diligence in knowing their relationship with Christ is settled and secure. One preacher exclaimed, "Be sure you know *who* you know so you can know *that* you know!

When you fly with a commercial airline, you receive instructions from the flight attendant to put your oxygen mask on first in case of emergency. Then you are ready to help your children and loved ones with you on the plane. Likewise, once we are assured of our calling and choosing, then we are ready to support others as they endeavor to walk in a worthy manner. We must be assured of our relationship with God, that is paramount!

Notice the promise for the faithful practice of godly virtues. You will never stumble! While the useless and unfruitful block the path, your steps will be counted, measured, steady, and sure. You will not fall behind as you march with God's army. You will not be tripped up by false teachers or those who want to see you fail. The encouragement of your inward assurance leads you to the fruitful practice of blessing others!

His Eternal Kingdom (1:11)

Peter wrote to give hope to those who were still unsure about their eternal destiny. He told them this life is the training ground for the life to come. They can have joy and certainty now for the promises of Heaven to come. Peter's language indicated some-

thing bigger than just a residence, it encompassed the entire cosmic reign of God in a new Heaven and new earth.

Sometimes life seems like a grueling journey, with lots of ups and downs and ins and outs. And the road is not always smooth. But God has promised that for those who live within the godly attributes (presented in verse 8), He will lavishly prepare them for glorious life in His kingdom forever! The apostle Paul said it this way, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7–8). We must not only begin the race, but complete the race, and capture the prize.

Implications and Actions

Is the Christian life one of moral progress? Can we become more like Christ in our words and actions? Peter would say yes! It is true that we cannot do a single thing to earn our salvation. God calls and chooses, and we respond. But the Christian faith must have an ethical dimension. In our focal passage Peter referred to eight virtues (1:5–7) that seem to set apart a believer’s lifestyle from that of a false teacher. And the delightful consequence of that lifestyle, based on a sure and certain relationship with Christ, is the welcome into His eternal and glorious kingdom.

It is near impossible to read these verses without thinking of God’s grace and gift of salvation. He provides for us what we could never earn or deserve. His gift of grace makes the difference in our eternal existence. “Now to Him who is able to do far

more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20–21).

Living Out Your Calling at Work

Peter reminded us that the Christian life is not idle, but active. God calls and chooses us for His specific purposes. We are to decisively live out our godly attributes, spiritual gifts, and talents for the blessing and benefit of others. Consider these possibilities as you work and serve outside your home:

- Do your very best in everything you do.
- Do menial tasks with excellence.
- Find ways to better the work of your profession.
- Regularly pray for your boss and co-workers.
- Share a word about Christ when you have the opportunity.
- Realize that God may have placed you in your work for His purposes. Stay in your job until He releases you.
- Your calling is to live for Christ; your vocation is the place where you have the opportunity to do so.

Questions

1. Has there been a time in your life when you forgot what God has done for you?
2. What would you need to be sure of your salvation?
3. How are you able to live out godly virtues in your life?
4. On a scale from 1 to 10, how fruitful are you for God's kingdom? Explain your answer.

lesson 4

In-Tents Living

MAIN IDEA

The fact that your body is like a temporary tent does not diminish its importance.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What is the condition of my tent?

STUDY AIM

To understand that death should not be a scary experience for Christians. It is simply leaving one tent and moving into a better place.

QUICK READ

Our bodies are susceptible to pain, weariness, and hunger. Our resurrection body will be like the body of our Lord. In Heaven there will be no pain, no sorrow, no sickness, and no death.

Introduction

My husband and I lived in a small RV with two big dogs for about nine months while we were building our house. For the first six weeks, we used an external generator for electricity, our water supply was limited, and we mostly ate outside because there was so little room indoors. Living in the RV was a drastic change from our prior home, which had adequate heat and air, abundant water, accessible electricity, multiple rooms, and a kitchen table. Despite its challenges, though, we were thankful to have that temporary home, and I actually enjoyed our time there. But we also anticipated and worked towards the day we would move from that temporary shelter to our better, forever home.

However, no home built on this earth will truly belong to any of us forever. Our real forever home awaits us in Heaven, and it is better than any place we could ever imagine. So, we do not need to worry about the day we will move from this life to the next. Instead, we should anticipate it with great excitement while also being appreciative and productive in our temporary home, knowing it serves an eternal purpose.

2 Peter 1:12–15

¹² 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*. ¹³ I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will also be diligent that at any

time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

We Need Reminders (1:12–13)

Although Peter's readers believed and trusted in God, they still needed to be reminded to live in the Spirit. Since the things of this world are visible, audible, and tangible, they often distract us from the invisible, spiritual, and immaterial things of God. As humans, we see clearer with our eyes than we perceive in our spirits. We hear louder with our ears than in our thoughts. We feel more concretely with our hands than in our hearts. We walk better with our feet than in His will.

But we are not without spiritual discernment. These bodies are just tents that house our spirits. It may take more intentionality and awareness to perceive, understand, and sense the spiritual things of God while we are living in this world, but they are the only things that will last. Second Corinthians 4:18 says, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." So, we cannot let ourselves get complacent or idle regarding spiritual things.

No matter how great our relationships and lives on this earth seem, there will never be a more important relationship than the one that will last forever. We will never have a more fulfilling or longer-lasting relationship than the one with our Creator, Father, Lord, and Savior. Mark 12:30 says, "AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR

STRENGTH.” Only God can love and care for us perfectly. So, we should feed and nurture our relationship with Him more than any other and strive to grow closer to Him every day. James 4:8a says, “Come close to God and He will come close to you.”

We can see, hear, and know Him better by doing several different things. By reading His Word, we gain knowledge and understanding of who He is and how to walk with Him. We should be like Job, who said, “I have not failed the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). Then, by praying, we learn to communicate with Him, rely on Him, and hear His voice. Colossians 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*.” But even when we are not sitting down to read the Bible or directly talking with the Lord, He is with us as we go about our day. So, by being aware of His presence, we will see what He is trying to show us and recognize Him as He works in our lives. Psalm 105:4 (ESV) says, “Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!”

But we also need other believers. Hebrews 10:24–25 says, “and let’s consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one *another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” We need preachers, teachers, and other believers to encourage us to continue growing in our relationship with God and build on our faith. Paul told the Philippians that he repeated himself as a safeguard to them (Philippians 3:1). Being reminded about the things of God keeps Him forefront in our minds and emphasizes His importance in our lives. Reminders stir us into action and keep us from complacency and stagnation.

So, surround yourself with other believers who will encourage you while you also encourage others.

Remaining in the Spirit

- Create Reminders
- Develop Routine Habits: Set aside daily, weekly, and yearly time for God.
- Bible Reading: Decide what you will read, when, and how much. It can be a verse, passage, chapter, book, or Bible study. Start Small. Commit and stick to it.
- Talk to God About Everything: feelings, struggles, what you are thankful for, what you want.
- Talk About God: Let Him be part of your everyday conversation.
- Surround Yourself With Other Believers: Church, Bible Study, everyday friendships.

Our Earthly Purpose (1:14–15)

Peter believed he would die soon, and these were his parting words. After Jesus' resurrection, He asked Peter three times if Peter loved Him. When Peter said yes, Jesus told him to feed and take care of His sheep, which were His followers (see John 21:15–17). Then He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glo-

rify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me’” (John 21:18–19, ESV).

So, for over 30 years, Peter knew he would be crucified for his faith. However, even knowing that the time was near, Peter was not focused on himself, but on Jesus’ followers. Since Jesus’ ascension, Peter had been loving and caring for other believers, teaching and guiding them in the ways of the Lord. His concern at the end of his life was not his impending death, but whether Jesus’ sheep would remember everything he taught them after he was gone. He was writing down everything he wanted them to remember so his words would always be there for them to read and reference.

Moses was also concerned whether the people would remember everything he taught them after he died. So, he wrote the book of Deuteronomy to summarize their journey so far, his teachings, and how they should behave moving forward. But Moses also told the people to create reminders for themselves. In Deuteronomy 6:6–9 he said, “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Our Heavenly Home

I used to have a hard time with change. If I was happy in my present circumstance, then I just wanted everything to stay the same.

I remember one time when something happened to interrupt the plan I had for myself. Everything was on hold as I waited for a decision from someone else. I kept telling God that I was happy with how things were, and I prayed that He would let everything work out how I wanted it to. This went on for several months until, one day, I realized that God might have a different plan for my life. If that was so, then it was even better than mine. My sadness faded for what I might be losing, and pure excitement took its place. I thought I was happy before. But if God had something better in store for me, then I would be happier with that life than I ever could be for the one I planned for myself. Within a week, the whole course of my life changed, and I never looked back.

We may be happy in this temporary home the Lord has given us, and maybe we think we do not ever want to leave. But when we realize that we will be even happier in the home He has prepared for us, we can stop being sad about what we are losing and begin to get excited about what is to come. In 2 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV), Paul explained this by saying, “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” He continued in 2 Corinthians 5:5–9 (ESV) saying, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.”

Descriptions of What John Saw in Revelation

Throne

- Man looked like jasper and sardius (4:3)
- Rainbow around (4:3)
- Twenty-four thrones around, seating twenty-four elders, clothed in white with golden crowns (4:4)
- Lighting and thunder came out from (4:5)
- Seven golden lamps before (1:12; 4:5)
- Sea of crystal glass before (4:6)
- Four living creatures praising God (4:6–8)
- Crystal-clear water of life came from it; a tree of life on either side of the river (22:1–2)

New Jerusalem

- Shone like crystal-clear jasper (21:11)
- High walls with 12 gates, guarded by 12 angels; Names of the 12 tribes of Israel written on the gates (21:12)
- Wall had 12 foundational stones with the names of the 12 apostles written on them (21:14, 19–20)
- The city is square, 1,400 miles long, wide, and high (21:16)
- Wall made of jasper; city streets were gold, like transparent glass (21:18, 21)
- Three gates on each wall made of a single pearl (21:13, 21)
- No sun, moon, or night; illuminated by God and Jesus (21:23–25)

Although God has given us a wonderful place to live, it is imperfect. In this temporary home, we have sorrows and struggles, burdens and shame, fears and worries, sickness and pain, and hunger and weariness. But in Heaven, there is no more crying, no mourning, no death, and no pain. It will be the most beautiful place we have ever seen (Revelation 21). Our new home will be absolutely perfect, and the best part is that we will no longer be separated from our Lord. Although we have a relationship with Him now, there is still a barrier between us. But when we get to Heaven, we will be in the presence of His full glory. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Implications and Actions

The thought of death, especially as we get older, has a way of clarifying the important things in life. We start thinking of everything we need to do and say. Sometimes our thoughts turn to places we want to go and things we want to see. But most of us begin to focus on the people we care about more than anything else. We hope our life has made an impact on the people we love and maybe a few others, too. We all just want to leave this world a little better place because we were in it.

The best way to ensure that we leave our loved ones with something that matters is to give them eternal things. So, let them see you walking with Jesus, hear you talking about Him, and feel your love for Him. That is a legacy that lives on and an inheritance that lasts forever. So, do not worry about the day you

will leave this place. Instead, spend whatever time you have on this earth living for Jesus. Having a relationship with Him will make you fruitful in this life and prepare you for the next.

Questions

1. Are you intentional about spiritual living?

2. Are you growing in your relationship with the Lord?

3. Are you leaving an eternal legacy?

4. Do you know enough about Heaven to be excited about moving there forever?

lesson 5



Wonders of the Word—Part 1

MAIN IDEA

Other writings may be inspiring, but the Bible is inspired—God-breathed. It's the only living book in the world.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Does the Bible change lives?

STUDY AIM

To understand that if you apply the same literary standards to the Bible that are applied to other historical literature, you find there is no other writing that can compare with the textual integrity of the Bible

QUICK READ

The thing that makes the Bible totally unique is that it was written over a period of 1500 years by 40 different people, in three different languages. And the storyline in every book is the same: The Creator of the universe has made a way for you to know Him personally.

Introduction

Your Muslim neighbor reads the Quran, and your Hindu co-worker talks about the Vedas. A couple of clean-cut young men stopped by your house a few months ago talking about the Book of Mormon, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” and a few weeks later two middle-aged ladies on a street corner offered you their church’s version of the Bible called “The New World Translation.” You looked on the Bible app on your phone and couldn’t find either of them. All of this makes you wonder if their “scriptures” are as truthful as the Bible as you know it. Today, and next week, we’ll figure out they are definitely not the same. Other writings may be inspiring, but the Bible is inspired—God-breathed. Even though other’s may claim to be on the same level, the Bible is the only living book in the world.

2 Peter 1:16–21

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s

own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Divine Inspiration

Divine inspiration is the most important doctrine regarding the Bible. Without it, nothing else matters. If the Bible is not God's Word, and only man's creation, then it has no lasting authority and no inherent power.

The Bible, however, is clear: it is God's divinely inspired Word. Paul said the same to young Timothy, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

But what is "divine inspiration?" Some think that means the Holy Spirit literally told the men every word to write. "For" (For) "God" (God) "So" (So) "Loved" (Loved). The writers were like robots, merely following the dictate of the Spirit. Yet, Peter gave a different picture. In verse 21 of today's passage he said, "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The Greek implies the co-laboring of the two parties to advance and produce fruit.

The fact that it is divine, inspired by the Spirit of God, also means it is without error. The God of *truth* will not reveal error to His chosen writers. Psalm 119:160 says, "The entirety of your word is truth" (CSB), and Jesus Himself prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

The claim to divine inspiration is not unique to the Bible. The Quran, The Book of Mormon, and The Hindu Vedas as examples

of other religious texts that claim to have been delivered through a divine revelation. Each of these claims requires the believers to exercise a step of faith. Thankfully, for Christians, it is not a step of blind faith. God has provided other evidence to bolster our faith in the Words we read.

Unique Formation

The Word of God was written by men—with their unique personalities, experiences, passions, joys, and pains—guided by the Holy Spirit. That it is consistent and without mistakes speaks to its divine inspiration, especially considering the extremely unique way in which it was formed. Consider these facts:

- It was written over a span of around 1500 years, including 40 generations.
- It was written by over 40 different authors, including kings, peasants, wealthy, poor, educated, uneducated, etc.
- It was written in times of war and peace, prosperity and decline, and ruling and occupation.
- It was written on three continents and in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
- It contains multiple types of literature, including historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, letters, and apocalyptic literature.
- It deals in an extremely wide variety of topics, many of them controversial, and on which people undeniably have, and would have had, many different opinions.

It is incredible—miraculous, really—that with all this potential for disagreement because of differing worldviews, circumstances, cultures, experiences, preferences, hopes, fears, etc., the message of the Bible is consistent from beginning to end. There are no contradictions, recantations, corrections, or superseding former teachings. Many religious texts were written down by a single person, such as the Quran and The Book of Mormon. Even if it were true that these were inspired by God, which we do not believe, it would be much less miraculous than the way in which the Bible was formed.

Josh McDowell tells a story about a man who came to his house to sell a series of *The Great Books of the Western World*. He explained to the man about the Bible, and the perfect unity of the Bible on many different controversial subjects, and of the unique way in which it was written by many very different authors. He writes in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, “I challenged the man to take just 10 of the authors, all from one walk of life, one generation, one place, one time, one mood, one continent, one language, and just one controversial subject. Then I asked him: ‘Would they agree?’ He paused and then replied, ‘No!’ ‘What would you have?’ I retorted. Immediately he replied, ‘A conglomeration.’ Why all this? Very simple! Any person sincerely seeking the truth would at least consider a book with the above unique qualifications.”

The Word of God was formed in a way and covers topics that would inevitably lead to internal integrity issues, yet ... it has

none. It has none, because it was divinely inspired. This is true because, as Peter noted, “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation” (1:20). The Holy Spirit guided them as they wrote their words. It has no integral issues because, as the Word tells us, God and His Words do not change (Isaiah 40:8; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

This is not true for some other religious texts. The Quran, for example, disagrees with itself on various points, including how mankind was made, who the first Muslim prophet was, and if Allah’s words can change.

Widespread Circulation

Both the Old and New Testaments found their way all around the world. They were shared with other people and cities, transmitted from person to person throughout generations. In doing so, those copying God’s Word and sharing it with others were personally diligent and divinely aided in creating accurate copies to preserve God’s Word. Jewish scribes, specifically, were extremely particular when copying the Hebrew Scriptures. They had specific processes they went through in order to ensure accuracy.

Copying and sending information was a much more time consuming and costly endeavor in the first century. Scribes or secretaries would have to copy letters or documents by hand on costly scrolls or parchments to be shared with other people. The cost and time involved means only those letters or writings that seemed of most importance would be copied and sent around. It was a kind of divinely orchestrated self-selection process. Those letters that clearly showed divine guidance and significance, or

which were written by apostles, were copied and sent around to other churches.

The New Testament shows the Old Testament had a far reach in the ancient world.

- The Wise Men who came to Jesus were aware of some of the OT prophecies about the Messiah; may have been from the tradition of wise men who served alongside Daniel during his Babylonian exile.
- The Ethiopian Eunuch was reading the scroll of Isaiah when Philip found him (Acts 8:26–40).
- The New Testament also shows some of the NT writings were being circulated.
 - Peter references Paul’s letters (2 Peter 3:15–16).
 - Paul circulated his own letters and told the Colossians to exchange letters with the Laodiceans (Colossians 4:16).

Peter spoke in today’s passage about his eyewitness accounts of Jesus, which he had shared with his readers. Paul said, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you” (1 Corinthians 11:23). John began his first letter by saying what he had seen, heard, touched, and observed, he passed on to others (1 John 1:1–3). This writing, circulating the truth of Christ, was one of God’s divinely orchestrated ways of preserving His Word, and is one that should encourage us to believe the accuracy and authenticity of what we read today.

Honest Confirmation

Imagine some you and some friends decide to make up a story about someone. It's all fun and games, until one by one your friends start getting taken out in extremely violent ways. Each one was given an opportunity to admit they were lying and save their lives, but they didn't. They died for a lie. Now, it's your turn. As the possible final seconds of your life tick closer, you think of your family and friends who will be devastated at your execution. Is it worth it ... to hold firm for a lie? Will you give your life for what you know to be untrue?

Many people throughout history have suggested the disciples made up many of the stories about Christ and then spread the lies following His death. One theory of the resurrection is that the disciples stole Jesus' dead body, hid it away somewhere, and then spread the rumor that He had risen. The theory is the disciples were a band of organized charlatans, pulling the wool over the public's eyes.

Yet, these theories are based on the assumption that these men—all 11 of the original 12 and possibly more—were willing to be ostracized, mocked, imprisoned, beaten, stoned, and even violently executed for the sake of a message they knew to be false. Who would do such a thing? Would there be one madman among them willing to go through with it? Maybe. More than one? Less likely. But all eleven?

And let's remember, these were not brave and cavalier men who laughed in the face of danger and dared anyone to pick a fight with them. These were men who were still hiding in a room with the doors and windows locked days after Jesus' crucifixion

because they were afraid the Jews wanted to kill them too. THEY DIDN'T WANT TO DIE. Yet somehow a mere few months later, we see them boldly enduring beatings for the sake of Christ. What happened?

They met the resurrected Jesus. There's no other answer. They met Jesus and realized everything He had said about Himself, His power, and their future was true. They knew by experience there was something worth dying for, and that something was the truth about Jesus. This change is one of the greatest testaments to the authenticity of the resurrection the New Testament has to offer.

Not only that, but the fact that they included this turnaround gives credit to the authenticity of the story and other stories included in the Scripture. If you were fabricating a story for people to hear and follow, you wouldn't include stories about your flaws that showed your obvious lack of faith: hiding because you were afraid, Peter denying Jesus three times, falling asleep when they were supposed to be praying, arguing over petty issues here and there. These honest stories we see here and elsewhere, and the flawed people God used in them (David, Moses, Abraham, etc.), provide a level of internal credibility to the Bible that is foreign to other religious works.

Implications and Actions

God's Word stands above all others as the foundation of truth, yet it also stands above all others in internal and external credibility. We believe by faith, but thankfully God has given us proof to reinforce our faith foundation. We can allow these to strength-

en our reliance on the Word and our conviction to base our decisions on its authority. They should most definitely not be taken for granted.

John Piper writes, “Let’s not play with these precious words. These are the words of God. Christ died to confirm them and make it possible for sinners to understand them and embrace them. And thousands have died to preserve them for us to this day.”

Questions

1. How does the fact that God paired Spirit-led inspiration with the natural personalities of the authors to impact your understanding of Scripture?
2. How does the consistency of the Scriptures, even though they were written by numerous authors over thousands of years, bolster your faith?

3. Would you be willing to die for a story you knew was false? What does the fact that each one of the formerly terrified disciples were willing to endure extreme persecution, and even death, tell you about their belief in Jesus' resurrection.

4. We receive salvation by faith, but thankfully it's not blind faith. Which of the proofs for Scripture's validity encouraged or strengthened your faith the most today?

lesson 6



Wonders of the Word—Part 2

MAIN IDEA

When you get a firm grasp of the Bible and start applying it to your life, you'll find Jesus on every page.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Can I believe everything in the Bible?

STUDY AIM

To understand that all the other proofs and validations about the Bible fall short of the greatest wonder of the Bible: It can lead a person to salvation

QUICK READ

The main message of the Bible is that God loves you and He wants to forgive your sin so you can be a part of His family forever. The Bible is truly a love letter He has written to you.

Introduction

On July 4, 1874, just shy of the United States' centennial anniversary, the very first bridge crossing the mighty Mississippi river opened in St. Louis, Missouri. The mile long Eads Bridge was truly a miracle of engineering. The public was nervous that the bridge would not be able to withstand weight of the trains and wagons it was designed to carry. So, on its opening day, as a sort of proving gesture, the parade that crossed the bridge in celebration was led by an elephant. Science has shown elephants will not cross something unsteady. They actually test the ground with their trunks if they sense any instability and only walk where they have tested. When the elephants walked across, it symbolically gave the walkers the confidence to look ahead to the other side and the opportunities it afforded.

As we discussed last week, and continue this week, God has provided evidence along the way to show that His Word is true and dependable; it can support the weight of your life. Ultimately, these proofs are not supposed to be the things we focus on exclusively, just as the Eads Bridge was not an end to itself. They are means of providing a firm foundation so we can look ahead into the depth of the greater truths of the Bible itself, because it is in God's Word, not the proofs, that we find life.

2 Peter 1:16–21

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when

he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Enduring Preservation

Last week, we talked about the benefit of widespread circulation, which refers to copying and sending (circulating) important documents from one church to another. This circulation also led to one of the strongest arguments for the reliability and accuracy of the Bible. Archaeologists and historians use various tests to validate an ancient document's accuracy and reliability. One is how many existing copies (manuscripts), or partial copies are in existence. For example, there are 49 copies of the works of Aristotle. That gives strong credit to the reliability of what we have today. There are 193 manuscripts of Sophocles, making what we currently have incredibly valid. The highest among ancient literature is Homer's *Iliad*, of which there are 643 known copies.

However, when compared to the New Testament alone, these incredibly strong numbers pale in comparison. There are over

24,000 copies, portions, and fragments of the New Testament books, dating to within 25 years of when they were originally written, of which, 5,309 of those are in the original Greek.

The Masoretic Scribes

Original Hebrew had no vowels, only consonants. Many words shared the same three consonants. For example, the Hebrew word *db̄r* could mean Debir (a town in Judah), word of God, a word or thing, or pasture. You can see why it would be important to know what *db̄r* was intended. As the world became more Hellenized, Jewish people began speaking and reading Greek and Latin instead of Hebrew, and the proper pronunciations were disappearing. So, from A.D. 600 to 950 a group of Jewish scribes began transcribing the Hebrew Scriptures in a new way with the purpose of not only preserving the text of the Scriptures, but also the proper reading and pronunciation. These scribes became known as the Masoretes because what they produced was called "The Masorah." They created a system of vowels placed around the consonants, without which the Hebrew language would have likely been lost. (Ex: דָּבָר < דִּבֵּר) These vowels added to the consonants preserved the language well enough that Hebrew, a dead language, was actually revived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and is now a true modern language used in Israel and by many Jews worldwide.

Why is this important? The ancient Jews and the early church passed around the works they believed were the Words of God

Himself. There were numerous other writings, some that we still have and thousands more lost to time. Many of these had good content, but the church did not recognize their authority or divine inspiration, and therefore did not preserve them. The fact that these were preserved, and at such incredibly high numbers (notice, these above were only the New Testament numbers!) is evidence that God was overly emphatic that His Word be preserved. It fulfils that promise from Isaiah: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

Prophetic Validation

Can you imagine making a declaration of fact about events that haven’t happened yet? That’s exactly what the Old Testament prophets did. For doing so, many of them suffered and were rejected by their own people. Yet, they obediently declared a message from God that would only be proven years or even centuries later. In fact, the only way to know if a prophecy is true is to wait and see if it happens (Deuteronomy 18:21–22). Thankfully, the prophecies we see in the Old Testament do, in fact, come true. Why is this important? It is internal proof the Bible is true. Let’s look at two specific examples.

First, in Daniel 7, Daniel received and wrote down a prophetic vision that reveals “the most comprehensive and details prophecy of future events to be found anywhere in the Old Testament.” He described in detail the rise and fall of four great empires from around 600 B.C. to around A.D. 500: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, plus a fifth which represents the ultimately

victorious kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This vision parallels Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the giant statue from Daniel 2. Daniel 11 spoke with such specific detail about a 200-year section of this history that some secular historians claimed it was a forgery, written years after the events occurred. However, the style of writing and other internal clues prove it was written during the time of Daniel, and the incredible accuracy of the prophecies are nothing short of miraculous.

A second example of prophetic validation comes from Psalm 22. In this Messianic Psalm, David described things that were clearly present at the cross of Jesus: disjointed bones, dry mouth and tongue, pierced hands and feet, emaciated body, divided garments won by casting lots. David wrote these words nearly 600 years before crucifixion was invented! And look at the specificity with which he mentioned them dividing up and casting lots for Jesus' clothing. This is truly remarkable that these specific things happened as Jesus hung on the cross.

I point out these two prophecies for a couple of reasons. First, the things prophesied in them happened centuries later. We have existing manuscripts that contain the prophecies that are dated before the events occurred, meaning the prophecies could not have been written in hindsight. Second, these are actions that were outside the control of those who might want the prophecy to be fulfilled. The disciples could not orchestrate the events of Jesus' crucifixion to happen as they did, even if they had wanted to. It was divinely orchestrated.

These are just two examples of the 1,817 prophecies, which make up about 27 percent of the entire Bible. At least half of these have already been fulfilled in the Scripture itself and therefore

becomes a testimony to God's faithfulness to His Word. It also gives us confidence that the other half of the prophecies, most dealing with the second coming of Christ, will also be fulfilled in His timing.

In today's passage, Peter spoke about the prophetic word he had experienced and that his readers can experience as well. He encourages them to "pay attention" (1:9) and look for the day when things foretold begin to come about. He uses the prophetic nature of God's Word to encourage them to trust in it, and to recognize its validity for their lives.

We too should listen to Peter's words because there are prophecies still to be fulfilled. Some Bible readers look around and see the events happening in our world now and believe it reveals Jesus is close to making His second coming. Others see them as merely events yet to happen in the interim time, but which don't point to the end drawing near. Even so, the student of prophecy will be ready to recognize events as they potentially unfold but will also be aware that the prophecies we have are intended to point us to two things: greater obedience to God and an awareness of our need to share the gospel with others.

Personal Application

A final proof for the authenticity and truthfulness of the Word is the Christian's own experience of its power in his or her life. Scripture talks about the power of the Word for experiential transformation in numerous places. Paul said, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17), that word being the gospel. Hebrews 4:12 calls the Word

of God “living and active” and Paul’s letter to Timothy says the Word is able, profitable, and equipping (2 Timothy 3:14–17).

Over and over, the Bible speaks of its own power and ability to transform a life, and people throughout history have verified its supernatural power.

Holocaust survivor Corrie Ten Boom said, “I’ve experienced His presence in the deepest hell that man can create. ... I have tested the promises of the Bible, and believe me, you can count on them.”

Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard encouraged intimate engagement with the Bible, saying, “To read the Bible as God’s word one must read it with His heart in His mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God’s Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God.” Do you read the Bible like a textbook or a love letter? I’ve never been moved emotionally and experienced “a moment” with a textbook, but I still have a giftbag full of college letters from my wife sitting on a shelf in my closet,

When a believer in Christ engages with the Word of God, it comes alive to them because it is not purely an intellectual exercise, or even an emotional one. It is a spiritual moment, and the Holy Spirit of God makes the Word of God powerful, effective, and applicable to the needs you have in that moment. Jesus said to God the Father that the Father’s Word is truth, and then told His disciples the Spirit of God would “guide them into all truth.”

When you read the Bible, think of it like a beautiful mosaic on a wall. You may know the big picture story of the Bible: man sinned, Jesus died for their salvation, all who believe in Him are

saved, one day we'll be with Him in Heaven. That's like standing back and seeing the big picture for what it is. But, reading and living in the Bible is like getting into the beauty of each tile and seeing its unique contribution: a shape here, a subtle hue on this piece, an iridescent shimmer over there. When you get closer to the image, you begin to see there is incredible beauty hidden in the individual pieces of the story that make up the whole. It is within those minute stories, some only a verse or two long, that we often find ourselves exposed, encouraged, changed, etc.

7 Keys to Better Bible Study

1. Read large chunks of Scripture in one sitting.
2. Study smaller sections to really dig deep into the passages.
3. Cross-reference verses to discover connections to other passages and stories.
4. Take notes in the margins or in a journal.
5. Memorize Scripture and meditate on Scripture.
6. Tell someone else about what you have been studying.
7. Study with a spouse, friend, or group.

Implications and Actions

These last two weeks have taken an in-depth look at why we can believe the Bible and how the Bible impacts our lives. It is clear that God has provided for us innumerable reasons to believe in and live by His Word. Do you want internal evidence? It's every-

where. Do you want external proofs? There are thousands. Do you need to experience the Word to believe? It is waiting and ready to actively transform you.

The Word of God is like nutritious food and vitamins. It is ready and available for you to take it in and experience the goodness—the spiritual health—that it brings, but it will not force itself upon you. You, Christian, must take it and ingest it. Make it a part of your life. Create a discipline of Bible study and meditation so the Word becomes the most beautiful part of your life.

Questions

1. What does the viral spread of the New Testament documents tell you about how they resonated with the first and second century believers?
2. How important is it to trust the words of prophets whose predictions all came to pass? What reasons would you have not to trust the expectations about the future as described in the Bible?

3. What passage of Scripture has been especially meaningful in your life?

4. Which of the proof's for Scripture's validity encouraged or strengthened your faith the most today?

lesson

Find Us Faithful

MAIN IDEA

We should avoid false teachers and be alarmed at false teaching.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Are false teachers dangerous?

STUDY AIM

To understand there are many false teachers, and the best way to recognize them is to compare them with faithful teachers

QUICK READ

In the Old Testament times there were false prophets, and Peter warned there would be false teachers in the church. That was 2000 years ago, and they are still around today.

Introduction

Have you ever heard a TV preacher, or maybe even a Bible study leader, say something that sounded biblical-ish, but just didn't seem quite right? If you have some biblical background and knowledge, you may be able to spot these inconsistencies, but someone new to the faith can be easily led astray. That was the situation in the early church, where almost everyone was a new believer. Unfortunately, false teachers and false teaching did not end with the early church ... they are common now as well.

In the back of the New Testament, the letters of Peter, John, Jude, and even John's Revelation, warn the churches against false teachers, and the letters of Paul often addressed the "Judaizers," who were infiltrating the early churches with legalistic teaching. Peter specifically warned his readers about the dangers false teachers posed to the church, exposing their actions and the destruction they would bring.

The warnings are relevant for the church today. False teaching and false doctrine are rampant in churches all around the world. Often times, the subtle teachings go unnoticed by well-meaning, but unaware, believers who trust the man or woman with the platform. Christians must be vigilant to notice and avoid false teaching, and to sound the alarm when it shows up in their churches.

2 Peter 2:1–3

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly

introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

The False Teachers' Location

The early church, growing in the shadow of the Roman Empire, was surrounded by religions and pagan worldviews that were antithetical to Christian teaching. In the previous chapter, Peter mentioned “cleverly contrived myths,” and contrasted his own teachings with those myths. At that time, professional speakers would travel from city-to-city teaching “new” and “secret” knowledge. These men would charge for their talks or take a collection to fund their travels. Think of it like a traveling self-help guru, holding her “10-Steps to Spiritual Empowerment” seminar at the local Sheraton.

These false teachers were outside the church, peddling to the common citizens of the Empire, and the church would have been aware of them, as Peter noted. The larger problem Peter was concerned with was those peddling false teaching within the church. These pseudo-Christians blend in with the congregation because they use the same “spiritual-sounding language” as everyone else. Paul warned about them in Acts 20:30, “Even from your *own number*, men will arise and distort the truth in order to *draw away disciples* after them” (emphasis added). Sadly, Christianly sound-

ing false teachers still find their way into the church today, leading people astray.

The False Teachers' Teaching

Sometimes these false teachings, called heresies, are obvious because they deny basic principles of Orthodox Christianity such as the virgin birth of Christ or salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Whole religious systems have been built upon these false teachings, many still claiming to be “Christian.”

The Heresies of Mormonism & Jehovah's Witnesses

Mormonism & Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be Christian, but they deny key Christian doctrines: A—Jesus isn't God; B—The members of the Trinity are not equally divine; C—Salvation is partially earned; D—Added to or edited Scripture. Mormons believe God is a created being.

Other false teachings in the church are more subtle, because they maintain the essential aspects of the gospel, but skew the Bible's teaching on second or third tier beliefs. These may not be salvation issues, but they are still doctrinal issues.

In Galatians, Paul warned against false teachers who taught holiness after your salvation was attained through keeping a set of rules. This false teaching of legalism leads to Christians feeling

like failures because our own effort was never meant to be our standard of holiness. Even after our salvation, our holiness is a work of God's grace and power through Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:3–4).

This legalism is a foundational problem of “The Prosperity Gospel.” This false teaching teaches God will bless you physically, relationally, and monetarily if you simply have enough faith and do the right things (often including giving financially to the false teacher's ministry). This sets up people to expect earthly blessings that the Bible never promises. And, when someone doesn't receive the blessing they expect, the fault falls to them for not having enough faith or performing well enough. It's first century legalism wrapped in modern day packaging.

Like the false teachers Peter was writing about, these false teachers are subtle, “secretly introduc(ing) destructive heresies.” In fact, the Greek word (*pareisagō*) translated “bring-in” means “smuggle.” It clearly shows an intentional secretive undermining of the body. Therefore, Christians today must be diligent to study the Scriptures so they can know the truth and recognize the lies. Truth is our greatest weapon, as Paul wrote in Titus 1:9: “[We] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that [we] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

The False Teachers' Damage

The most damaging effect of false teaching is that it leads people away from the truth of God in His Word. There are places in the Bible that are hard to understand. There is truth that push-

es against our sin nature and calls Christians to pursue holiness rather than our own desires. The Word of God is like a fire, refining us and making us holy, but it takes faith, denial of self, and cooperation with the Spirit.

Baptists & the Recovery of Teaching Truth

Baptists were born out of a pursuit of truth. As the reformation progressed from Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses on the church door in 1517, a wave of Bible-based reforms took place in various groups across Europe. In 1525, a group of reformed Christians led by Conrad Grebel realized the Bible did not teach infant baptism, but rather only baptism of believers following their salvation. They became known as “Anabaptists” because they baptized themselves again (ana-) once they came to this conclusion. These early Baptists influenced others who would build upon this truth and continue to make reforms based on the Bible. Another key reform initiated by English Baptists was to limit church membership to only those who had made professions of faith, and to reject an episcopal system of governance (in which there was a governmental hierarchy over many churches) in favor of local church governance.

False teaching often reverses that process. Heresies usually take the mystery or challenges of the Bible and find ways around them. It bypasses truth with lies, and promises easier outcomes attained by human effort. Paul warned Timothy, the young pastor, about these false teachers and teachings when he wrote in

1 Timothy 4:2–4, that the time would come when people would choose easy teachings that cater to their base desires rather than pursuing the holiness that comes through obedience to God’s Word.

False teaching not only leads people away from God’s truth, but it also leads them into devastating consequences. Peter was so concerned that his readers, including you, understand the devastating nature of these false teachings he used the word “destruction” three times in these three verses. Repetition is the biblical writers’ way of highlighting or emphasizing a word. Clearly, Peter wanted his readers to understand false teaching isn’t benign. It is an aggressive cancer within the church that destroys the body from the inside, along with the false teacher himself.

Peter specifically listed three categories of consequences. The first is self-destruction. False teachings are typically self-centered, which removes Jesus from the centrality of our lives, and puts ourselves in His place. The problem is, we are unable to bear the weight of responsibility living out the Word of God. We cave in under that weight. Plus, when we begin to step outside God’s truth, the weight becomes even greater until we lose ourselves in the pursuit of something false.

Second, Peter said we bring disrepute on the truth of God. This, perhaps, is the most devastating consequence of all. When we follow lies, even if we follow them unaware, we tarnish the name of God. In Romans 2:24, Paul denounced the Jewish people for not following the laws of God, saying their disobedience tarnished the name of God. It’s the same today. When Christians and churches say they believe the Word of God, yet follow doctrines that clearly contradict its teachings, the world takes note.

If we, who claim to love God, don't heed His instruction, why should they?

Finally, the third consequence of following false teaching is that we ourselves are taken advantage of by those peddling lies. We become their followers and the promoters of their lies. Their reputation is built upon our ability to be manipulated into becoming followers. Paul warned the Galatians about being so foolishly taken advantage of in Galatians 4:16–18.

The False Teachers' Demise

False teachers will ultimately fall. Peter says their time is coming. It's not a matter of if, but when. All of those who raise themselves up against God will eventually be brought low. The Old Testament has many examples such as King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar. Dagon, the Philistine false god was destroyed by God simply because the Philistines placed the Ark of the Covenant in front of their idol to him. Even God's own priests, such as Eli's sons Hophni and Phineas, were held to account, and were brought down by God. False teachers may prosper for a time, but their end will come.

Paul warned the Galatians in 1:6–9 that anyone who teaches a false Gospel is cursed. He even said if he himself were to teach something different than the true Gospel then he should be cursed!

Peter said these false teacher's destruction is already determined. Although it may not come immediately, it doesn't mean God has forgotten to remove them. Peter used language that connects back to Psalm 121:4, which says, "Indeed, he who watches

over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” God is jealous for His name and His glory, and will not allow those who oppose him to escape judgment (Philippians 3:18–19).

The Endurance of Truth

Peter’s language, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is intentional. He speaks thrice of the condemnation and destruction that awaits false teachers. The implication is that going against God’s truth is a tragically losing endeavor.

Peter also spoke of how the false teacher’s teaching impacts the truth. Consider the words Peter used. The false teaching “blasphemes” the truth. Alternative similar words include “revile, slander, insult, malign, or defame.” Notice, then, the false teaching can damage the reputation of the truth, but it can never damage the truth itself. It certainly cannot destroy the truth. Second Corinthians 13:8 says, “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth,” and Isaiah 40:8 demonstrates the endurance of God’s Word, saying, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

The application here is that we must be zealous for the purity of the Word. We must stand for truth and speak the truth, but never fear that the truth will be defeated, because God fights His own battle. As Peter said a few verses below, “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment” (2:9).

Implications & Actions

False teachers, both outside and inside the church, are nothing new. They have been distorting the gospel since the early church and will continue to do so until the return of Christ. Christians must be diligent to keep the church's teaching pure. But how? The best way to spot a fake is to be familiar with what is real. It is up to believers to be faithful in knowing the Word so they can identify and correct, or remove, what is false.

Church, we must stop choosing what church to attend, what books to read, or what podcasts to listen to based on which preachers and authors make us feel the best or make us feel the most encouragement. The preachers who focus on you rather than exalting the Word of God are the definition of the modern false teacher. Biblical teaching encourages our faith but also addresses our hidden sin. It challenges us to seek God's will not our own. True teachers of the Word will teach God's truth on sensitive topics and not shy away from unbiblical cultural issues. Seek for yourself teachers of the Word, and let the Word do what it will in your life.

Questions

Note: Some of these questions could lead to people using specific pastors' or teachers' names. Decide beforehand if that's okay and how you will handle specific names being mentioned.

1. What criteria should we use to determine if someone's teaching is true or false? What are the implications for us to be prepared to make those judgments?

2. Where have you seen false teachers in the wider church world?

3. What damage have you seen as a result of false teaching?

4. How should we address situations where we can identify false teaching in the wider church, in our own denomination, or even in our own church? What is a good process?

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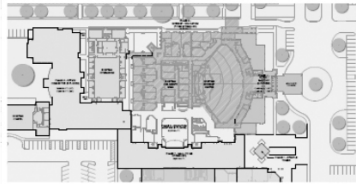
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lesson 8



Search & Rescue

MAIN IDEA

None of us are good all the time. That's why we need a Savior to rescue us.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I need to be rescued?

STUDY AIM

To understand that the only source of forgiveness is Jesus

QUICK READ

The greatest search and rescue mission of all time was when God the Father sent the Son to seek us when we were lost in our sinful condition. He found us and rescued us from sin.

Introduction

At 9:02 in the morning on Wednesday, April 19, 1995, our nation was shaken. A truck with a homemade bomb was parked outside of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and detonated killing 187 men, women, and children. I was living in Arlington, Texas at that time serving in my first church and many in my family were living just a few miles north of the bomb detonated. When I heard on the news what had happened, I began calling my family first and then friends I went to college with to make sure everyone was okay. Two days after the bombing, I drove up to Edmond, Oklahoma to see my parents and the next day my mom and I drove down to the bombing site.

We had to park 10 blocks away and then walk in, as we got about 5 blocks out, we saw broken windows on buildings, and as we got within a block from the site, we saw that buildings in the area had been severely damaged. When we walked up to the site, what we saw was beyond anything we ever thought we would see in this great country of ours. The building looked like something from a third world, war torn country and rescuers were swarming over the rubble desperately looking for anyone that might have survived the explosion and then live through the last 72 hours under the rubble of the building. These men and women worked around the clock to save as many people as they could and when they knew there was no one left alive, they refused to leave until they had recovered every last victim so their families could have some closure.

The rescuers knew nothing about the victims, they didn't know if they were good or bad people, they had no idea if they de-

served the effort of being saved. All these men and women knew was there were people who need to be saved, and they did everything they could to save them. God feels the same way about us, except He knows everything about us. He knows we are not good people. He knows we sin, often. He knows how we treat others. He knows we are selfish and self-serving and still He sees us worthy of being saved. He moved heaven and earth to provide a way to save us. He sent His one and only Son to die in our place so we could have an eternal relationship with Him.

2 Peter 2:4–9 NIV

⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

A Vengeful God—A Merciful God (2:4–5)

God has rules and when those rules are broken there are consequences and, in these verses, we can see the consequences of

actions. The angels knew God's rules and they rebelled against God, they sinned, and they were sent to hell. This seems harsh, but they knew what would happen when they turned their back on a loving God. If you look at the passage here, they were not just sent to hell, they were bound in the chains of darkness to be held for God's judgment. This kind of gives me second thoughts when it comes to rebelling against God, what is waiting behind "Door Number 2" is not going to be pretty.

You may think God would only do this to rebelling angels, well, not so fast. In the time of Noah, the world had become so wicked that God felt they were beyond saving, except a few people. God instructed Noah to build an ark and to take two of every animal and his family, himself and seven others into the ark. When they were safely in the ark, God's judgment came upon that wicked generation of mankind and they were destroyed by a great flood, not some of the people on the earth, but all of them, all but eight people. God saved eight people who would start mankind all over again. God showed His great mercy in saving just a few people.

A God of Judgment—A God Who Spares (2:6–8)

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were known far and wide for their evil and wickedness and God passed judgment on these cities, sparing only one family. Out of all the people who lived there, only Lot and his daughters were spared. God sent Lot messengers warning his family of God's judgment and the destruction that was to come, along with instructions to flee and not look back. As they were running from the cities, Lot's wife looked back, her desire was still for the wickedness of what lay behind her and God judged her,

turning her into a pillar of salt. Only Lot and his two daughters were spared, they were seen by God as worthy of being saved. Verse 8 is interesting and applicable to Christians living today, “for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.”

Light in the Darkness

Have you ever been in a place completely devoid of light, not just dark, but a place where no light can get in? When I was in South Dakota we did a cave tour, which was not a lot of fun for me since I am claustrophobic. We walked down into the cave for 30 minutes with headlamps on and came to the end of where we were going. The tour guide had us gather around and explained about the total darkness of the cave and wanted the group to experience it. He asked us all to turn off our headlamps, which we did. We were enveloped by a darkness I had never seen before, it was oppressive and as we stood in the darkness for about 30 seconds, I began to feel anxious, and I felt a little despair begin to creep in. When the guide turned on his head lamp, it was as if hope itself returned to the room, every eye was drawn to the source of the light and the light from that small lamp began to penetrate the darkness of that little room.

Our world is lost in darkness, people are walking around oppressed, in despair and without any hope. God has called all Christians to bring hope to a world that is lost. If God saved us, then we should let our light shine brightly and lead others to Christ. In Matthew 5:14 Jesus said: “You are the light of the world.” We should be living like the people Jesus said we are.

Are you as a Christian tormented by the evil that surrounds you in society today? Do you see the lawless deeds of those around you, and is your righteous soul moved in any way? As believers we are called to make a difference in this world, not to sit by and let evil take over. We are called to be a light in the darkness, to shine brightly for God in a world that desperately needs hope.

A Saving God—A Just God (2:9)

This verse should bring all believers great comfort, because it shows us what kind of wonderful, compassionate, and loving God we serve. When you became a Christian, God did not promise that your life would be roses and fairy sprinkles. Life is hard at times, salvation or not, the difference is that as a believer you have God on your side. Yes, you are going to go through trials and tribulations, but you don't have to go through them alone, you have God to help you through the difficult times. All we have to do is go to God and He will help. The Bible is full of His promises to help you.

The wicked are not as blessed as the righteous. God is going to hold the wicked accountable for all of their evil deeds, there will be no one to stand in the gap for them. They will have to account for everything they have done and then they will have to pay for the evil deeds on the day of judgment. God is a just God; we will all get what we deserve in the end. If we have Christ in our life, we receive salvation, not because of who we are, but because of who Jesus is, the Son of God. If someone stands before God without Christ, they will be judged on their own and will have no hope of salvation. God is a just God.

Scripture Passages to Go To

- Psalm 46:1–2—If you are afraid
- Isaiah 40:31—If you are tired and need renewed strength
- John 16:33—If you need peace
- Isaiah 54:17—If you feel attacked
- Joshua 1:9—For strength and courage
- 1 Peter 5:8—If you need help to stand up against the devil
- Jeremiah 29:11—For hope and encouragement

The list goes on and on, all you have to do is go to the Bible and know that you are not alone in this world. God is always there with you. He will give you the strength you need in troubled times.

Implications and Actions

As Christians we need to remember that we are all sinful, but we have been saved. Part of the Christian walk is to become more like Christ through daily exposure to Him. We become like Christ when we pray, read our Bible, fellowship with other believers, and are accountable to people we trust. Salvation is not a one-time event, it is a lifelong, life-altering process. When we are becoming like Christ, our lives will shine in this dark world that is desperate for light, and we will lead others to Christ where they too can be saved.

Questions

1. Can I look back on my life and really know when I was saved?
2. Since my salvation, what have I been doing to become more like Christ?
3. What am I doing in my daily walk with God that is causing me to grow in my faith?
4. How can I be a better light to my unsaved family and friends?

6. Who is someone that I could pray for that needs to be saved?

lesson 9



All That Glitters Isn't Gold

MAIN IDEA

Our faith is more precious than gold, but fake Christians possess a false faith—it's like fool's gold.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is my faith genuine?

STUDY AIM

To understand that the faith of fake Christians appears to be real on the surface, but when it is put to the test it is found to be counterfeit

QUICK READ

In the first century the Apostle Peter recognized fake Christians were a real problem in the church. And worse, some of them were teachers.

Introduction

When I was in college, like most college students I had many different jobs. I was a lifeguard, taught swimming lessons, sold sporting goods, strung tennis racquets, and drove a school bus. One of the more interesting jobs I had was selling jewelry. I had never sold jewelry before; I never even owned any jewelry. I was a poor college student and a Baptist preacher's kid, so having expensive things were not in the budget. I was well spoken, confident, and I learned quickly, so the manager took a chance on me, and it worked out well for him. I quickly became one of the top salespeople in the Houston region, placing in the top 10 almost every month while I was working 20 hours a week and competing with full-time salespeople. I have always been inquisitive and wanted to learn everything I could about whatever I was doing, and jewelry was no different. Diamonds really fascinated me. I found out quickly that people paid a lot of money for these little rocks, and some of the diamonds were worth a lot more than others. At this store, we had a full-time repairman that worked in the back of the store, and we quickly became friends when he found out I spoke Spanish. Miguel taught me more about diamonds than anyone else in the store did and I would spend every break talking with him learning everything I could about those precious stones. One day I walked back, and he handed me a plastic bag with a diamond in it and asked me to evaluate it. I pulled out my loupe and looked at the stone. I saw no feathers, no inclusions, and no imperfections in the stone; it was the cleanest diamond I had ever seen, and I told him so. He asked me if I wanted to buy it, and I told him that I could never afford it. He laughed

and told me it was a fake. The diamond was a cubic zirconia. It was a manmade diamond and not worth much money. That clear, perfect, beautiful diamond was a fake. It looked like a diamond, it was cut like a diamond, and it even had a shine like a diamond, but when it was put up to the loupe of a master jeweler it had little or no value.

We are among people in church who look like Christians, act like Christians, and talk like Christians, but when they are judged in the light of Jesus Christ, we will see they are the cubic zirconia version of Christianity, fake as fake can be. Fake Christians are leading our church astray from the pulpits, leadership positions, and from the pews sitting next to us. As believers we need to have a keen eye, and we also need to be alert to anyone who is going to lead us away from the truth that is found in God's Word. Can you spot the real thing?

2 Peter 2:10–16

¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; ¹¹ yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. ¹² But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. ¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with

you. ¹⁴With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! ¹⁵They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

The Fall of the Arrogant and the Proud (2:10–12)

Peter warned of the terrible judgment that is waiting for those who sit and listen to God's Word and still despise His authority. These false Christians are in our small groups Sunday morning, singing in our choirs, some may even be preaching on Sunday morning. When these fake Christians leave the church, they do not believe what the Bible says, and they hold everything we believe in with contempt. When these fake Christians are behind closed doors, they live their lives according to the desires of the flesh and are not afraid of God's certain wrath. Even the angels, who are far more powerful than these fake Christians, would never turn their backs on God in this way, because they know the horrible judgment their actions would bring from God. Fake Christians do not and cannot understand what waits for them in the end. They choose temporary pleasures and exchange them for eternal glory, never knowing until it is too late for them to turn back. Their focus is self-pleasure, doing whatever feels best at any given moment with no thought for the future or eternity. This is a self-destructive lifestyle with temporary, fleeting rewards, but understand that God's wrath is not far behind.

In Psychology they have found that humans respond to two types of reward systems, Variable Reward and Fixed Reward. The Fixed Reward system is awarding a prize after certain behavior or after a number of responses are performed. Every time this happens an award or a prize is given. For example, if a chicken is presented with a button and they peck that button 5 times, then grain comes out of a hole next to the button. Over time the chicken learns that when they are hungry, all they have to do is peck that button 5 times and they will be fed.

The other reward is the Varied Reward system and there is no rhyme or reason to the reward. You put the same chicken in the in box with a button and they peck the button 5 times and grain comes out. Later they peck 5 times and nothing comes out, they continue pecking and at a random interval grain comes out. This random reward continues, the chicken has no idea when they will be fed so unlike before, they will continually peck the button because they do not know when or if they will get grain again.

Humans are the same, we live for fleshly pleasures and Satan knows this, he wants us to live for one pleasure after another fearing that we will never be “filled” again. So, we make bad choices, we live recklessly, we drink too much, take drugs, have sex, gamble, and do everything we can to fill that void inside of us. He tells us that if we press that button one more time that something great is going to happen. This is how addictions are developed. Drug addictions, pornography addictions, even gambling addictions,

all come about because we want the next reward, the next high.

God does not operate on this principle; all He asks us to do is to abide in Him and He will supply all of our needs according to His riches (Philippians 4:19). No worries, no mania, just assurance that He is going to take care of us.

Worldly Pleasure Is Not Free (2:13–14)

These verses are a stern warning to all fake Christians; their behavior and lifestyle will not go unpunished. They are living their lives without shame; their deeds are carried out in daylight. This means they are not worried about hiding their sins under a blanket of darkness, instead they chose to flaunt their sinful lives in front of everyone they meet. They will cheat and rob others to build their own wealth; and they do it in Jesus' name, but they do not know Jesus. These fake Christians end up on the evening news as the fallen church leaders who stole from the church, had affairs outside of their marriage, or ended up with a drug problem. Be careful and keep a vigilant watch for these fake Christians, because they will take you down with them, seek to destroy everything you have, and feel no guilt while they do it. This verse calls them what they are, blots and blemishes in our church body. But remember that all the harm they bring about will be brought back on them by God Himself.

I was part of a church where a staff member stole money from the church, they would come in early Monday morning and take cash from the offering the day before, they also had access to

church credit card and stole money from the credit cards. When we discovered the problem, they had stolen close to \$100,000 from the credit cards and there was no way to know how much cash they had taken. They ended up in jail, the temporary pleasures gained by taking this money were short lived, but the shame and pain of being in jail, I am sure, were horrible. Sin will catch up to you, it may be sooner, or it may be later, but when it does, there will be a high price to pay.

The Secret of Life

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12–13).

Life isn't about being happy, life is about contentment regardless of your life's situation. Paul had been beaten, been in jail many times, and yet he was content with his life. Why? Because everything he did, he did through the power of the One who gave him strength every minute of every day. That is the secret of life, nothing else matters.

The Path of the Wicked (2:15–16)

There is only one way to God. People may try to tell you that many roads lead to God; the roads may all come from different directions and different religions, but in the end, all the roads will end

at the same God. They are wrong. This verse refers to the straight path, the right path and once you stray from that path you have moved away from where God has directed you to go. Fake Christians have no idea where God's path leads, they have no direction, they have no roadmap to follow. As children of God, we have several things to show us God's direction along the path—the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and fellow believers, they all serve a way to help keep us on the straight path. Not so for the fake Christians.

When I was in seminary, I had a professor tell a story of an unsaved person who had read the Bible cover to cover. This person told the professor that although he had read the Bible cover to cover that it made no sense, so it must not be true. The professor's response was that the Bible is a love letter from God to His children, so that's what you get for reading other people's mail. If you are not a Christian, you will never understand God's direction in the Bible, it just won't make sense to you. To understand God, you need to belong to God, and you need the Holy Spirit to teach you. Only then will you be able to stay on that straight road He has set before you.

Implications and Actions

As believers we need to be aware of people who are fake Christians. At times they may not be easy to spot, but we need to be vigilant. Don't put your faith in people; they are imperfect beings, and they will let you down. Place your faith in God, build a solid relationship with Him and over time, He will show you the fake Christians around you. When those fake Christians fall, and

they will fall, your faith will remain strong because you will be firmly planted in Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Am I a true Christian or a fake Christian?
2. What evidence is in my life of an authentic Christian?
3. What are some things I can do that will help make me a stronger Christian?
4. How can I better lead my family, my circle of friends, and my church with my faith?

lesson 10



Sick Dogs and Slimy Hogs

MAIN IDEA

You can clean up a person on the outside, but unless their inner nature is changed, they will always return to sin.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can I know for certain that I am saved?

STUDY AIM

To understand that a real Christian is sickened by sin and wants to stay holy and clean

QUICK READ

The Apostle Peter is describing false teachers who are fake Christians. He is using several graphic word pictures to describe them. Note: The Bible is not sanitized Scripture that was written using only pleasant words. It is a real book about real people with real issues.

Introduction

Our family loves pets, especially big dogs. If she could, my wife would adopt every dog and cat she came across, but our house is not big enough and our budget cannot afford it. Dogs are great, they are loving, caring, and intuitive. They seem to know when you are going through a rough patch and stick with you through the hard times. Dogs are goofy—you can leave the house, come back 20 minutes later, and they act like you have been gone for weeks. If you have a dog, you will know two things about dogs that most people will never know. One of the worst sounds in the world, which always seems to come in the middle of the night while you are deep in sleep, is the sound of your dog getting ready to throw up. The sound they make will make a dog owner sit straight up in bed and start running with the dog toward the nearest exit to get them outside. Even worse than this is when your dog gets sick while you are gone, and they decide to help out and clean up after themselves. Hang with me, this is going along with the lesson. The other thing that dogs do is once you have taken the time to give them a bath, dried them off and the dog stink is finally off of them, they run out into the backyard, find the smelliest spot in the yard and then proceed to roll around in the wretched smell.

I'm sure God feels the same way about us sometimes. Through Jesus, He has cleansed us and sanctified us and the first chance we get we run out and roll around in the same dirty, nasty, disgusting sins He had just cleansed us from. We go back and eat from the same vile disgusting sins that He took away from us,

because we are no different than dogs at times. But God loves us and always wants the best for us and won't give up on us.

2 Peter 2:17–22

¹⁷ These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” ²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²² Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”

The Deceivers (2:17–18)

Peter's focus in these verses stays with the fake Christians but is mainly pointing out the fake leaders in the Christian church. These fake Christian leaders are like springs without water, or wells without water as some translations say. Back in that time, most people traveled on foot and in the heat of the day they would

look for wells or springs where they could stop and get water. Dry springs or wells were disheartening. They would lead people in only to show they had no substance to give back. The promises they gave for healing and refreshment were always broken, for no water was available for the weary traveler.

Alpha Leaders

How do good leaders act? Nature gives us a great example of great leadership, and you can see it in a wolf pack. The Alpha wolf is the leader of the pack. He is the strongest and the protector of the pack. His job is multi-dimensional, and he has to know where he is needed the most within the pack. Sometimes he is called to be at the front of the pack and take the lead; he needs to show the others the way when uncertainty is present or there is danger ahead. The alpha is the one to take that danger on and inspire those behind him and give certain direction. Sometimes the alpha will be in the back of the pack, this gives him a point of view he doesn't have from the front. He can see everyone in the group, he can see if one in the pack is lagging or hurt and this gives him time to plan for the pack. There are other times that the alpha will lead from the middle of the pack, he will come along beside another wolf and offer encouragement, walk side-by-side as a comrade, not a superior.

False leaders are no different than dry wells. They make empty promises to people, they pull earnest Christians in who believe what they are saying is true, but when those promises are

examined up close, they are as empty as a dry well. What they are doing will not go unnoticed by God. He will not let their sin of leading His own astray go without punishment. The last part of verse 17 speaks to their end, “blackest darkness is reserved for them.” There is a special place in Hell that God has reserved for those who willingly lead His children astray; God will not spare them for their sin.

The way they lead people astray is not much different today than it was in Peter’s time. These fake leaders are smooth talkers, and they know exactly what to say to make people want to follow them. They promise fame, wealth, sex, and almost anything they need to promise in order to get people to follow them. Once they bring people in, they realize too late they will never get anything they were promised.

Leaders in churches today can learn from wolves, they need to know when and where they can best serve the church body. Service is never self-service like a fake leader would do; it is always service to the benefit of the body. There will be times that a good leader leads the church from the front, giving direction and showing a clear vision. There will be times the leader leads from the back, looking over the church, identifying those who need help, and also those who could be potential leaders. Then there are those times when the leader will come up and lead from the middle, encouraging the church, and lifting them up when spirits are low. Good leaders lead from every direction, not for themselves, but for the benefit of the church body.

The Corruption of Leadership (2:19–21)

Empty promises, this is all these fake leaders have. They promise freedom, riches, glory, and whatever they need to promise to get people to follow them, while they themselves are slaves to the very depravity where they will lead unknowing Christians. Over time they will become transparent as to what their true master really is. Are they slaves to money, slaves to sex, slaves to drugs, or some other depravity? They have no interest in helping others. Their only interest is in pulling as many people down with them as they can before their own sins are exposed.

Set Your Mind

How do we keep from being deceived by these corrupt and fake leaders? We do it through the training of our mind. In the book of Philippians, we find instruction on the things we are to set our mind on. When we do this, it is hard for the enemy to deceive us.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

If at one time these corrupt leaders had known Christ as Lord and Savior and then fallen back into the ways of sin, verse 20 says they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. Those who fall away from Christ and willingly mislead God’s children will be held to higher standard of accountability by God.

They may think there are no consequences for their behaviors, but their temporary gains here on earth will pale in comparison to the eternal glory that will be waiting for those who are of Christ.

Of Dogs and Pigs (2:22)

The apostle Peter does not have a very high opinion of these corrupt leaders, and you can see it in verse 22, “A dog returns to his vomit.” Dogs will throw up because they are sick, but many times they will go back and eat the very thing they threw up that made them sick in the first place. Corrupt leaders are the same, especially those who were saved. These leaders, by all outward appearances, had a salvation experience. They were cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. But like the dogs, they returned to their sin. Don’t get me wrong, sin can be very enticing and unless Christians depend on God for strength to overcome sin each and every day of their life, they too will return to sin like a dog returns to his own vomit.

The second example is “a sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.” This is the nature of a pig—pigs love mud. Modern science has discovered that pigs love mud to protect themselves from sunburn and control their body temperature. Nevertheless, in ancient times, the pig was perceived as a dirty animal. The pig was associated with waste, dirt, and disorder. We know it is included in the list of unclean animals because it has a divided hoof and does not chew the cud (Leviticus 11:7). The picture of a pig wallowing in the mud illustrates the apostle’s opinion regarding these corrupt leaders.

When they accept Christ and their sins are washed away, they have become a new creation. Second Corinthians 5:17 says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” We have a choice, we no longer have to be who we were before Christ, we have a new identity, we are a new creation through Christ, we can live anew through Him.

Implications and Actions

We need to take accountability when it comes to leadership in our churches today. If pastors and other leaders are not teaching biblically sound principles and are leading God’s people astray, we need to stand up and say something. These corrupt leaders are tearing our churches apart from the inside out and Christians are standing idly by with their hands in the pockets doing little to nothing. We can no longer tolerate leaders who do not preach the Word of God from the pulpit and use their position as a way to feed their own immoral lusts. When you stand for what is right, you won’t stand alone.

Questions

1. Is my church a healthy church?

2. What are some indicators of a healthy church?

3. What are some things I can do to make sure I am not fooled by a corrupt leader?

4. How can this church do a better job of connecting with our leadership in order to hold them accountable?

lesson 11



The Return of Christ

MAIN IDEA

The second coming of Christ is not just an obscure minor doctrine of Scripture. It is the final and convincing proof of God's absolute sovereignty over His creation.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Why is Jesus going to return?

STUDY AIM

To understand that these mockers ridicule the return of Christ because they don't want to consider the possibility that someone is going to come and hold them accountable for their sin

QUICK READ

The early church lived every day expecting Jesus to return. As a result, there were many sarcastic skeptics who ridiculed the idea of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

When my daughter was four years old, her mother traveled on a mission trip with our church. The trip lasted ten days. Each night, I filled in for the nighttime routine that my wife had perfected with our daughter. I read from her children's book. I sang the right songs. I prayed our prayers. I promised that Mom was coming home soon. On day three or four, my daughter had enough of the waiting. "Dad, I want mom to return right now, tonight." I assured her that it would not be long and that if she were patient, Mom would come home when she least expected it.

In much the same way, the people of God gather each Sunday to read from the Bible, sing songs of our faith, and pray to our Heavenly Father. On more than one Sunday, I have heard those words: "I want the Lord to return right now." Today's text assures us that our Lord will return and take us home when we least expect it.

2 Peter 3:1–7

¹ Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ² I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

³ Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵ But they deliberately forget that

long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Parousia

Parousia is the Greek word that refers to Jesus Christ's second coming. The early church lived in a way where they fully expected Jesus to return soon (the *Parousia* to be imminent.) When Jesus did return, it would signal the time when God would make all things right and new. As the early church leaders died, the critics argued that since Christ had not returned, God was not actively involved in creation. Peter would oppose these false teachers (see lesson 12) and teach the church of God's patience in the hope all would repent and come to know Him.

A Reminder (3:1–2)

I knew of a father who would send an annual letter to his family. The letter was meant to encourage, teach, and spur the family to good and right living in the upcoming year. On more than one occasion, this father would begin his letter by reminding his children and grandchildren of some truth he had written in the previous year. In the same way, Peter reminded his audience of his teachings in his previous letter.

As 2 Peter begins its last chapter, our author set aside condemning the false teachers in favor of encouraging the faithful followers of Christ. Peter requested that his readers remember the commands of their Lord and Savior. Two observations from the text are worth noting. First, what command does he want them to remember? A close reading of 1 Peter will bring back into the memory that Christ's command is to live out his or her faith in holiness, as Christ is holy (1 Peter 1:15–16). Calling oneself a Christian implies a certain lifestyle, which gives proof to such a claim. Second, Peter used the full title of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Most likely, Peter desired to remind his audience that Jesus is not just the Savior of the past or even the present, but also Jesus is the Lord of the future as well. By inferring that Jesus controls all things past, present, and future, Peter set the stage to address the teaching of the second coming.

Many Western Christians cannot imagine a world better than we have it right now; therefore, the teaching and doctrine of Christ's second coming are ignored and often forgotten. Our background texts in this lesson remind us that the second coming is a teaching highlighted throughout the New Testament. The truth that Christ not only came once but promises to come again must be at the forefront of all Christian discipleship.

I set reminders on my phone every week to make sure I do not forget to make that phone call, pick up that item from the store, or wish my friend a happy birthday. One of the ways we remain faithful in our discipleship is through memory. Whether it is regular Scripture reading or an intentional Bible study or worship service, we must remind ourselves of the great Christian truths, which the second coming of Christ, where our Lord will

make all things right and new, should be at the top of the list on our reminders.

The Last Days

More than one person has attended a church service where the preacher proclaimed that we live in the “last days.” Often, a man or woman is left wondering exactly what to make of such a proclamation.

The “last days” refer to the era in history that separates the first coming of Jesus and His second coming. In between these two advents (Christmas and the second coming) are the “last days.” These days will have two major characteristics. First, it is a time of grace. God’s patience and kindness are revealed to the world as God waits and hopes for all to find eternal life in the work of Christ on the cross. Second, it will be a time of opposition. In the “last days,” there will always be men and women who will oppose Christ and His Church. Therefore, we live in the “last days.” We have lived in these days for the past two thousand years and will live in these “last days” until Christ comes again.

The Scoffers Folly (3:3–4)

Peter reminded the church (in the same manner as 1:20) that some oppose the teaching of the second coming. This opposition did not surprise the apostles, and it should not surprise the Church. The opposition will argue since Christ has not returned,

a person should not believe that God acts or moves in the world on a daily basis. Moreover, if a person believes God does not act in the world, this person has the license to do as he or she desires without ever worrying about any accountability.

Rather than believe in a God who is moving and acting in His created world, these scoffers indulge in any and every evil desire. The folly of the scoffers is that they are both cynics and hedonists. They neither believe correctly nor behave appropriately. Fast-forward a couple of millennia, and the church should heed Peter's warning. In the twenty-first century, we should never be surprised that those who oppose the teachings of Christ will seek out self-pleasure and will discard any teaching or evidence of the supernatural ways of God revealed in Jesus. Intellectual skeptics and those who only believe in natural laws will always live among us, yet the truth of Scripture makes clear their folly.

"Our fathers" could refer to the Old Testament patriarchs (Abraham, Moses, David, etc.), or the opposition could describe the first generation of Christians (apostle James, deacon Stephen, etc.). In either sense, the argument is that since those of the faith have died, their words are no longer true. I have observed the same misguided argument in modern times. A child might claim that their grandfather or childhood Sunday School teacher has died; therefore, the words they taught are not true. Once again, the flaw in this reasoning is the belief that "just because it has not happened" does not mean "it will not happen."

An Argument From History (3:5–7)

In college, I took a class in logic where we studied syllogisms. The class taught deductive reasoning, where general principles were used to form a logical conclusion. The scoffers in 2 Peter would have benefited from such a class. Our author reminds the church that God created the heavens and the earth when the Spirit of God hovered over the waters (Genesis 1:1–2). In doing so, He separated the dry land from the sea (Genesis 1:9–10.) However, the same world God created when separating land and water, God also destroyed with water in the days of Noah. My logic class continues to come to the forefront in my thinking when reading 2 Peter, chapter 3. God acts in and out of history to fulfill His purposes, and it only makes sense that God will do it in the future.

God has done it in the past through creation and the flood ... and many were eating and drinking and going on with their daily business without giving it any thought (Matthew 24:38–39.)

God worked in history when He chose to put on flesh and blood in the person of Jesus. Prophet after prophet spoke of the day the Messiah would arrive, and almost all in Bethlehem missed it that night. God defeated death in the act of death when Christ died on the cross, and it was a Centurian guard who declared that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark 15:39).

One day in the future, God will act again. Our present world will give way for God to create a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). By closely examining history and how God has worked in His world in the past, the only logical conclusion for any human being is to prepare oneself for Christ's second coming. As Noah and his family prepared for the flood years before

it took place, the church must be preparing for Christ's return. As Mary was ready to respond when the angel Gabriel arrived in Nazareth, a Christian never asks, "Will Christ come again?" The question is always, "Will you be prepared and ready when Christ does come again?"

Jesus Is Coming

The body of Christ must improve and tell the story of Jesus' second Advent (coming) each year. Here are some of my suggestions for the church.

- Each year, the church should have at least one Sunday where the doctrine of the second coming is preached and highlighted in worship.
- Sunday School classes and small group Bible studies should have a systematic approach in teaching the truth of Jesus' second coming.
- Read the New Testament and write down every verse that refers to the second coming of Christ.
- Create and Display art by church members where the second coming of Christ is the primary subject matter.
- Make sure the teaching of the second coming of Christ is highlighted in our children and youth ministries of the church.

Implications and Actions

The church intentionally remembers the first Advent (coming) of Jesus Christ every year. We put an Advent wreath at the altar, light candles, decorate the worship center, and place a manger in the church foyer. Our nativity sets are placed in the front yards of Christians. Our church choirs and Christian thespians practice for months to proclaim in song and theater that God arrived on earth 2000 years ago. We purposely remind ourselves that God came to earth as a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. We set aside an entire month to re-tell the same story, so we do not forget this wonderful truth about God, our Lord and Savior.

Questions

1. Have you ever felt the same urgency in longing for Christ's return? How does this shape your daily faith?
2. What evidence do you see in today's world that we are in the "last days" as described? How does knowing this period is a time of both grace and opposition impact your approach to living as a Christian?

3. How have you encountered modern-day scoffers who doubt God's work in the world? How can you respond to skepticism with both truth and grace?

4. How does reflecting on God's past actions strengthen your confidence in His future promises?

5. What does it mean for you personally to "prepare" for Christ's second coming? What areas of your life reflect readiness, and where might God be calling you to greater faithfulness?

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lesson 12



The Attributes of God

MAIN IDEA

If you want to know God and love God, then you should be interested in learning what He is like. God is infinite, patient, loving, and just.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Does God have a personality?

STUDY AIM

To understand the Bible teaches that God has many personal characteristics, and these are often called the attributes of God

QUICK READ

In these two short powerful verses, Peter helps us discover four things about God's personality.

Introduction

Myers-Briggs, DISC, and the Enneagram tests. Do those words mean anything to you? Each is a personality test given to me at some time or another. A person's personality refers to the enduring characteristics and behavior that comprise a person's unique approach to life. After defining a person's personality, specific attributes can be assigned to a human being:

- She is intense.
- He is easy-going
- He is logical.
- She is creative.

A few months ago, I attended a staff retreat at my church. Each staff member filled out an assessment and spent an hour with a church consultant. The goal of the activity was for each staff member to have a better understanding of who he or she is. The church consultant then met with the staff together. For an entire day, each of us came to a better understanding of our colleagues, how they viewed the world, and why they made certain decisions in their specific ministry. It was a very fruitful day for our staff.

Much exploration and examination have been given to understand how humans behave and what makes them tick. Today's lesson will explore four of God's specific attributes and personality characteristics. We will come to a better knowledge of who God is, how God views His prized creation, and why God behaves as He does. We will come to understand God's personality.

2 Peter 3:8–9

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God's Immutability

God's immutability is an important theological concept for Christians. To claim that God is immutable is to profess that God does not change. As we examine these four attributes of God's personality, we must remember that these attributes do not change. If it is said that God is patient, God never becomes impatient. If we claim that God is loving, there are no times when God becomes unloving. God is immutable, and He is a God who does not change. In the book of Hebrews, the same claim is made of Jesus Christ when the author writes, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Unlike human beings who can act a certain way one day and then the total opposite on a different day, there should be great comfort for the Christ follower knowing that the God he or she comes to know will always be the same and never act outside of who He is. His character and attributes are trustworthy and stay constant.

God's Timing (3:8)

Every time I agree to officiate a wedding, I ask the couple to fill out an assessment and to meet with me a couple of times. The assessment asks both the potential bride and groom about their family history, their expectations, and the way each of them envisions this upcoming marriage relationship. Together, the three of us spend time looking at the unique characteristics about each of them. Every time I meet with a couple, I tell them, "Don't forget these things about each other, for this is who God made you to be." As Peter continued his letter, he urged the church not to forget specific attributes of their God.

In 3:8 Peter continued to argue against the scoffers, who claim that God is not active in the world since Christ has not returned. However, Peter asserted that time is not the same for God as it is for a human. God is eternal. Peter's words about a day being like a thousand years are a reference from Psalm 90:4. Some have interpreted this verse to mean there will be a literal 1000-year reign of God at the end of time. However, there are two reasons why this is not the best way to interpret this text. First, Peter did not say that one day equals a thousand years, but it is like a thousand years. Secondly, it ignores the context of Peter's entire message in the chapter. Peter was not giving a human timeline of events at the end of time but is telling us something about God's character, God's personality.

God is INFINITE. Time is not the same for God as it is for humans. What man and woman consider a very long time is a mere breath for God, the Creator, who stands outside of time and is sovereign over time. Therefore, those Peter addresses should

realize that Christ's coming is not being delayed; God just does not have the same perspective of time as we do.

Applying the Parable

To apply this verse in your daily walk:

- Realize that your waiting for the new job, spouse, or life transition you believe you have been waiting for—ever for, might have a different timeline through the eyes of God.
- Keep a journal of prayer requests and write the date next to the request when the prayer is answered. By doing so, be reminded that God's timing is always "right on time."
- Be intentional in praying for "God's time," not "My time."
- Look for practical ways to remind yourself that God's time is different than human time. Observe a sunrise or sunset. Ponder on a red oak tree that has been living for hundreds of years.

Moreover, God not only views time with a different perspective than a human, but God also sees time with a different potency. If one day with the Lord is like a thousand years, men and women ought to live their lives like any day might be the day Christ returns. For Christ, Himself, told His disciples, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mark 13:32–33).

God's Character Continued (3:9)

God is PATIENT. When reading Psalm 30:5, the emphasis is that human time is trivial compared to God's ways. However, Peter emphasized the importance of time to God in the benefits it gives His prized creation, each and every human being. A delay in Christ's coming is not because God's personality is to be slow to fulfill His promises but because God's nature is to be patient. God desires every human being to find salvation in the work of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore, the next time a prayer request seems to be delayed, or injustice is not made right, the reason might be God's patience for individuals to see His goodness and grace is being revealed.

God is LOVING. The main theme of 3:9 is the central theme of Scripture. "God is not slow" does not mean "God is late." The exact opposite is true. To fully understand this verse, it is good to remember that story in the Old Testament book of Exodus. When God revealed Himself to Moses, God redefined the idea of "slowness." God is slow to anger because God is committed to being a God abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6-7). The prophets are constantly reminding God's people that God's main personality characteristic is that He is loving. Jeremiah proclaimed that God has always been a God who pursued His creation with an "everlasting love ... unfailing kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3). God's love should motivate our living. Too often, Christians are overly concerned about the timetable of Christ's return. Many people have developed a timeline or graph predicting the second coming. However, this thinking is futile (not only because they have been wrong time after time). God's loving nature should

motivate us to spend our days sharing the good news that God so loved the world He sent His Son into this world to save the world. Furthermore, God's love and patience with us to repent should impel us to be more loving and patient with others.

God is JUST. While God desires all to repent and come to know Him, there will be a day of punishment. Yes, God desires that nobody perishes. However, this does not entail that nobody will perish. There will be a date when it will be too late. God's delay should not discard the church preaching the imminence of His return. Peter exhorted his readers to live as if Christ is coming soon (see lesson 13) and should never become numb to this truth. God's love and lengthy delay (according to our human view of time) of His return can easily numb a person to believe it will never occur. This thinking leads many to live in ways that are contrary to the commands of Scripture. However, it would behoove each person to remember that much like Christ's first Advent, where most of the world missed God's coming, those who are not ready for His second Advent by coming to Him in repentance will be held accountable. Nobody will escape God's judgment (Romans 2:3). While God refrains from immediately bringing judgment at the time of our sinful deed, God will not hold back forever. Moreover, we should always remember that the kindness of God should result in a person repenting from sins (Romans 2:4), not believing God does not care about their actions or that they have a license to do as they wish.

Implications and Actions

There is greater intimacy in a relationship when you understand who the person is. Ask any couple whose marriage has celebrated a fifty-year anniversary, and you will hear a story of two people who came to a greater and greater understanding of each other... and their love and appreciation for each other only made their relationship grow to a deeper depth.

As a man or woman comes to know the attributes of God it only allows a person's relationship with God to grow to greater depths. Knowing the attributes of God also transforms a Christ follower's behavior. God's infinite, timeless nature allows a person to surrender one's chaotic situation and trust in the sovereignty of God. Knowing God's patience can bring a parent great comfort when their child is living in rebellion toward the ways of Christ. God's love should motivate a Christian to love one's neighbor and go the extra mile to lavish grace and goodness to family members, coworkers, and even enemies. God's justness should keep Christians from despair when experiencing unfairness and wrongdoing.

Questions

1. How have you experienced God's perfect timing in your life, particularly when you felt things were delayed or uncertain? How did that shape your trust in Him?

2. How can you reflect God's patience, love, and justice in your relationships with others—especially when faced with challenging situations or difficult people?
3. Who in your life is God calling you to show more patience and love toward, and what practical steps can you take to demonstrate that this week?
4. What changes could you make in your daily routine to live with a greater sense of readiness and purpose in light of God's eternal perspective?
5. Why is it important for you to personally repent, and how can you ensure that you are not overlooking your need for reconciliation with God, regardless of what others may do?

6. What daily habits can you create so you can know God's personality and attributes better?

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lesson 13

More Like Jesus

MAIN IDEA

We should be looking forward to the future, living differently in the present, and learning more and more about Jesus.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can I be more like Jesus?

STUDY AIM

To understand that once you make peace with God, then you maintain peace with God through your living, loving relationship with Him

QUICK READ

As the apostle Peter completed his second and last letter, he was writing to address the widespread ignorance existing in the churches of his time.

Introduction

Christmas Day and the myth of Santa Claus are quite powerful for small children. When my two daughters were young, they would start asking the question the day after Thanksgiving: “How many more days until Christmas? How much longer do I have to wait until I can open my presents?” Sometimes, the question was asked multiple times in one day. Thirty days seems like an eternity for a four-year-old.

Moreover, the Western myth of Santa Claus bringing presents to all good little boys and girls has stood the test of time. I imagine many parents have quoted the famous Christmas Carol saying, “Santa Claus is comin’ to town. He’s making a list. And checking it twice, Gonna find out Who’s naughty and nice” to influence their child’s behavior.

Then, children grow up to be adults. We learn the truth of a God who came to earth to sacrifice Himself for our sins. We experience His grace and forgiveness. We know He promises to come again to make all things right and have each person give an account of how grace and forgiveness changed their life. Somehow, the anticipation and expectation of Jesus returning can fade into the background of our daily lives. We forget that one day Jesus will come again, and we quit asking, “When is Jesus Coming? When is Jesus coming?” We also can ignore the truth that eternal life is more than just making a reservation for life with God after this earthly life. Eternal life begins the moment a person receives salvation... and the gift of salvation should change us today. In our last lesson, Peter reminded the church of these truths.

2 Peter 3:10–18

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

The Day of the Lord

The “Day of the Lord” is an expression that God’s people have always used to refer to the time when God intervenes in history for judgment. The expression is found in the prophets’ writings as far back as Amos (eighth century BC). Amos 5:8–27 warns the people that the day will be dreadful for the unjust. God will come and act justly. However, even in Amos (9:11), there is an expectation that the “Day of the Lord” will usher in a new age, a day of hope. As Old Testament prophecy continues, this expression is found in multiple prophets. The prophets spoke of the day being a time of judgment but also the day of hope when God finally arrives on the scene. The phrase was then used to look forward to the day the Messiah would arrive. When used in the Old Testament, the prophets usually emphasize its imminence and the need for men and women to be prepared. New Testament authors like Peter used the phrase to describe the return of Christ where they remind the church of its imminence and the need always to be prepared.

God’s Patience Has A Limit (3:10)

I played basketball in high school and had a teammate named Johnny. Johnny had great athletic talent but lived in the coach’s doghouse. He was late to practice. He was not eligible to play for several weeks due to poor grades. Every time Johnny found trouble; his teammates would warn him that the coach would even-

tually kick him off the team. Johnny just smiled as he showed off his basketball skills to the rest of us. One day, we arrived at practice and did not see Johnny. Coach walked in and informed us that Johnny was no longer on our team. One of my teammates said, “I wish he would have listened to us.”

Even though Christ’s return might be delayed due to God’s love, patience, and hope that every person will repent and come to have a saving relationship through Christ, God’s patience will not last forever. Jesus Christ will return as a thief in the night, suddenly and without warning. There will be a day when it will be too late to come to Christ, a day where the only comment one might make is, “I wish he / she would have listened to God when the Spirit of the Lord was knocking at the door of his / her soul.”

The Future Makes a Difference in the Present (3:11–14)

On more than one occasion, I have told the congregation that we can trust God with our present because we can see God in our past. Peter proclaims that the opposite is true, too. We trust God with our present (no matter the questions, no matter the hurt, no matter the pain) because we know what is true for our future. Knowing and expecting Christ’s return stimulates Christ’s followers to live holy lives.

There ought to be a connection between belief and behavior. The great truth of Christ’s return gives the church its purpose and passion. People who believe there is nothing after this life or that God is distant and not active in His creation can live with no sense of mission. There are three likely conclusions for a life lived

in this manner. A person can seek pleasure, be indifferent, or live in depression. However, the good news of Christianity is history is moving in a certain direction. God, Creator of all, has not only come into His world once but promises to come again, and this changes everything. There will be a new heaven, a new earth, and a new home for those in Christ.

Applying This Text

When my children were in high school, each of them expressed a desire to attend college. My wife and I would take our daughters to college campuses during the summers for tours. Even though our college experiences were decades earlier, we would share our experiences and have our daughters dream about their future experiences. We picked up school brochures. We wanted our children to imagine their future reality to motivate their present-day high school study behavior.

To apply this text, the church must make a habit of thinking about its future reality. Here are some ideas:

- Each year, make sure at least one sermon centers on the second coming of Christ.
- Have a systematic plan for teaching the truth of Christ's second coming in small group discipleship classes.
- During the Advent season, have a devotional guide that stresses Christ's second coming, not just His first coming.
- Memorize Scriptures about Christ's second coming.

Life is lived differently. There is a great expectation and hope for not only the day Christ will return but for today. Our daily mindset and actions are forever altered. People matter more than possessions. Our worship of God only magnifies when we realize we have been blessed to live in the era of time between the two advents of Christ. We are motivated to conduct ourselves in a way that bears the image of who God is. We act in ways that mirror the very actions of Christ. Our future reality transforms any daily trouble. We aim to mirror that new heaven and home today because God's future determines our present.

A Guest Appearance From an Old Friend (3:15–16)

As Peter doubled down on the idea that God's patience allows salvation to occur, he appealed to the apostle Paul for support. Most likely, many of Paul's writings have been circulated to churches and have been read on any given Sunday. Peter reminded the church that he and Paul were preaching the same truth. Maybe the most similar teaching of Paul can be found in the letter addressed to the church in Rome when Paul reminded the church that God's "kindness is intended to lead you to repentance" (Romans 2:4). Both Paul and Peter stressed that God's patience is our gain. Moreover, God's patience not only gives us a chance to respond to His grace and receive salvation but also allows us the opportunity to join in His work in this world. We have the chance to spread the good news of Christ. We have the possibility and probability to practice this patience with others. By living out God's kindness, others might desire to repent and come to know

God's salvation. Peter preached this. Paul preached this. This is what we preach.

Tell Them What I Told Them (3:17–18)

Peter finished his letter in the same manner he started. He was writing to “dear friends” (3:14, 17), not to the false teachers and scoffers who were leading the church astray. As the preacher who follows the sermon outline:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them.
- Tell them.
- Tell them what you told them.

Once again, Peter urged them to be on their guard, which is a constant theme throughout the letter. Moreover, Peter stressed that the way to stand secure is to “grow in knowledge.” Knowing God's Word, studying God's Word, and memorizing God's Word are the ways to avoid falling prey to false teachers.

Growing also implies it is a lifelong process. As a tree never stops growing, neither does the Christian. A Christ follower is always maturing and developing a deeper and more intimate relationship with the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To quote the apostle Paul one more time, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

There is one final thought I need to share. Verse 18 reminds the church to “grow in grace and knowledge.” This entire life is possible because of the grace God has granted us. Jesus Christ

appears to a life, woos a person to salvation, produces Christian character through the fruit of the Spirit, and keeps us secure until the day the Lord returns. When a man or woman realizes such a gift, the only final response is the last words of 3:18, “To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

Implications and Actions

I mentioned earlier that I played basketball in high school. I played when the greatest player of all time, the G.O.A.T., was in his prime, Michael Jordan. At the height of his career, there was a commercial featuring Michael Jordan titled “Be Like Mike.” The advertisement’s message was to practice like Mike, drink the beverages Mike drinks, model everything Mike does in life, and be obsessed with being just like Mike.

Peter wrote to the church, “Be like Jesus.” Learn about Jesus. Model the way of Jesus. Stand against those who portray an inaccurate picture of Jesus. Ponder and meditate on the future life a person has with Jesus. Be like Jesus. Peter started this letter (1:1–4) with this theme. Peter ended his letter (3:17–18) with this theme.

Questions

1. How does understanding that God’s patience is for our benefit change the way you view delays or unanswered prayers in your life?

2. How can you cultivate a deeper awareness of the reality of Christ's return in your daily mindset and decisions?

3. Peter emphasized the importance of growing in grace and knowledge. In what areas of your spiritual life do you feel growth is needed most right now?

4. Peter warned about false teachers and the need to know God's Word. What steps can you take this week to better study, memorize, or apply Scripture?

5. The lesson highlights the importance of mirroring Jesus in our actions. What specific behavior or attitude can you intentionally change to reflect Jesus better in your interactions with others?

6. Since Peter encouraged believers to live with purpose and hope, what is one tangible way you can share that hope with someone in your community this month?

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Power of God's Word

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, ESV).

Father,

I humbly come into Your mighty presence giving You glory, honor, and praise for You are from everlasting to everlasting. You have no beginning, and You have no end. By Your mighty Word, You spoke the world into existence. Your Word stands forever and never changes and it is always relevant and timely. Your Holy Word says, “Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” (Psalm 119:89, ESV). I am grateful that I can know You through Your Word and build my life on Your truth, which is an anchor and refuge for my life amidst the storms, trials, and chaos this world has to offer.

Lord, I am thankful You breathed out Your Holy Word through Your Spirit, making it known to the Old and New Testament writers, revealing it to humanity. Thank You that I can rely on Your Word because it is absolute truth, and it is trustworthy. Your Word, Oh God, is of immense value and gives me understanding and wisdom. Lord, it is with great humility and reverence that when I approach You and read Your living and active Word, I know I am walking on Holy Ground and hearing Your voice, the Holy, almighty, all knowing, all sovereign God of the universe, speak to me. May I never squander or disregard the power, privilege, and responsibility I have in reading,

studying, and applying Your Word imparted to me. I pray You will open my heart to the truth and weight of Your Word and that it will transform my thoughts, desires, and what I esteem in this world. Your Holy Word says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV). I pray that Your Word will sanctify me, making me more like Jesus each day. Lord, search my heart and convict me of any offensive ways as You teach me and instruct me to walk in paths of righteousness, equipping me to serve You in obedience and bringing glory to Your Name.

Lord, thank You that the Bible reveals Your gracious and merciful plan of salvation through the atoning work of Your only Son, Jesus. Your Word says, “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10b, ESV). Your Word tells me that Jesus left His home in glory, came to earth and lived a perfect life, and took my place on a cruel cross to redeem me from my sin, declaring me righteous before You a Holy and just God. Your Word says, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, ESV).

I am thankful for the authority of Your Holy Word, for it is a powerful weapon when the evil one tempts me. Thank you for the example Jesus set before me in the gospel of Matthew 4:1–11. Your Word says the Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness where Satan tempted Him. I read how Satan tried to make

Jesus doubt Your love and provision for Him, by tempting Him to turn the stones into bread and to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. Jesus demonstrated complete trust in You, as He quoted Scripture to combat the enemy's lies and temptations, and the enemy fled. Lord, just like Satan returned to tempt Jesus again, promising to give Him the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him, he often returns to tempt me in other areas of my life. Help me to be ready and armed with the Sword of the Spirit, ready to combat Satan's lies, deceptions, and temptations thrown my way. May I arm myself with Your Word ready to go into battle, praying Your Word and believing in Your promises.

Lord, I am grateful and thankful for the blessing You have given me to live in a nation where I can freely and openly read my Bible. I pray I will passionately devote myself to reading and hiding Your Word in my heart each day. Thank you that Your Word stands forever! "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8, ESV).

In the strong name of Jesus,

Amen

DLB

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