



Final Exhortations from a Faithful Apostle

Series: A Divine Antidote to Heresy

2 Peter 3:14-18

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Introduction and Review As we finish our study of Peter's epistles today, I want us to be reminded of the heart of Peter and his reason for writing this letter to the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Remember that Peter was concerned in this letter to protect the church, to shepherd and encourage their growth in grace so that He could protect these young believers and even more mature believers from spiritual disaster and shipwreck. He has been careful in this letter both to expose false prophets and their error and their character, but also to give to the church a strategy to fight doctrinal error and the moral perversions that follow it. At the heart of all of this, Peter sees, is God's truth. What is at stake is the very life of the church itself, the very core of the church's existence. His writing this letter, you remember, was born of Peter's sense of his imminent death. He says **(2Pe 1:13-15)** He wants the churches to go on living under the reign of God's truth long after he has passed from this world. So for that reason, in a fitting end to these short but powerful letter from Peter, he does not introduce any new themes really, but he does give some closing exhortations, and he begins by encouraging his readers to

1) Be diligent to pursue true holiness. (v. 14) Peter writes: **Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these** (since you are waiting for the revelation of Christ and the glories and joys of the new heavens and the new earth), **be diligent** (be urgent, be intentional, be earnest and labor) **to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. (2Pe 3:14 ESV)** This is not a new exhortation by Peter in any way but is one that is firmly rooted in his understanding of our place and privilege as the people of God.

"Be Holy as I am Holy" You remember that as far back as the first letter, Peter had exhorted us to be holy as God the Father is holy. Peter then established our identity as the people of God calling us **(1Pe 2:9 ESV)** In light of that relationship that God has forged with us, at the cost of the blood of His Son, Peter reminds us to be diligent to pursue the full expression of holiness in our living.

We must put away our old desires and being made clothed by the righteousness of Christ and having been reconciled to God through Christ, we pursue real holiness in our lives because our God is holy. It is not something that we work up within ourselves; it is the outworking of the grace of God in Christ that has saved us. It is the outworking of the Spirit of God residing in us. Since we are waiting for the revelation of Christ and the glories and joys of the new heavens and the new earth, we reject our former empty, sin-filled, self-magnifying, ignorant way of living and embrace a life that is lived for the praise of God's glory.

Pursuing Holiness is a Matter of Pursuing Christ And remember that the pursuit of holiness is a matter of pursuing Christ, just as Paul wrote in Philippians 3, his classic description of the pursuit of holiness. There he wrote: **(Php 3:8-12 ESV)** Do you see what Paul is saying there? True holiness, the expression of the life of Christ in our own lives finds its source in the justification of our souls before the throne of God by the work of Christ on the cross and the outworking of the results of that justification in our pursuit, by faith, of the Christ who has made us His own. We pursue what Christ has pursued us for – holiness and life in Him.

We are the special possession of Jesus, His Bride, that one for whom Christ purposed to lay down His life -- **(Eph 5:25-27 ESV)** Our success in the pursuit of holiness is guaranteed by the faithfulness of our Bridegroom and His purpose in us.

Holiness comes through Relationship With Christ, Not Rules and Personal Resolutions and Reformation. We must remember that the expression of true holiness in our lives comes through relationship with Christ and not personal resolutions and reformation. Holiness does not come by imposing stronger and more stringent rules meant to govern our conduct. It is not born out of guilt for not living up to the standards of God. That pursuit of holiness is a mirage and succeeds in cleaning the outside of the cup but leaving the inside unaffected. No, we must remember that true spiritual growth, true growth in Christ likeness is found in our abiding in Him. Jesus said, **“Abide in me, and I in you (Joh 15:4-5 ESV)** Jesus tell us clearly what is required if we would bear spiritual fruit – abiding in Him. In themselves believers have no life, or strength, or spiritual power. Everything comes from Christ. Joined to the Lord by faith, and united with Him by the Spirit, we live, and walk, and continue, and run the Christian race.

When Jesus says, “abide in me” He is saying, “Cling to Me, stick fast to Me, live the life of close and intimate communion with Me, get nearer and nearer to Me, roll every burden on Me, cast your whole weight on Me, never let go of Me for a moment.” To abide in Christ is to continue in the joyful recognition of the eternal power of His perfect sacrifice. There can be no fellowship with the Lord Jesus, in the full sense of the word, while we harbor doubts of our personal salvation and acceptance with God. Abiding in Christ is a product of grace received from Christ. To abide in Christ is to draw from His fullness. It is not enough that I turn from myself in disgust; I must turn to Christ with delight. I must seek His presence; I must commune with Him. To abide in Christ is to have a continual sense of needing Him, to have an ever-increasing understanding and amazement at His all-sufficiency and wonder, a growing love for Him, an awe of His radiant glory and undeserved grace, to trust in Him not only for salvation but for the grace to live every moment of every day in a manner pleasing to the Father, to pursue Him in His Word, in Worship, in prayer, in meditation. As we abide in Him, His life abides in us and we will bring forth much fruit. Next Peter exhorts us to

2) Understand the purpose of God’s patience. (v. 15-16a) Here Peter references some letters written by Paul to the very same people to whom Peter is writing. There is no way to know which of the letters that Peter is referring to. It could be the any one or all of the letters written to the Galatians, Colossians, or Ephesians – all of which are in Asia Minor. Whatever the case, Peter wants them to make sure they remember and are motivated by God’s patience toward them in delaying Christ’s return.

God’s Patience is for the Purpose of Our Repentance First, as we saw a few weeks ago, God’s delay is to be seen as an opportunity for their repentance and for them to make their calling and election sure as they grow spiritually. It is an opportunity for his readers to examine themselves and their beliefs to make sure that they are in line with the revealed Word of God and not driven by their own emotions or religious ideas and reasoning. But even more, I believe that Peter means to stir them onto the pursuit of the lost for the sake of their souls and for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

God’s Patience is for the Purpose of Pursuing Souls Peter was quite familiar with the call of Christ to pursue the lost. He would not have forgotten the time when Jesus and the disciples had come to a well in Samaria, and because they were hungry, they went into the city to buy food. Jesus meanwhile had His meeting with the Samaritan woman that was ordained for her salvation before the foundation of the world. You can read about it in John 4:1-26. Coming

back from the city, the disciples saw the end of the conversation and the woman leaving. The disciples asked why Jesus had been talking to her but Jesus didn't answer them.

Then, starting in verse 31, we read: **(Joh 4:31-38 ESV)** Do you see what Jesus was saying? Jesus doesn't mean that He doesn't need to eat. That is not the point. What Jesus is saying is that it was more important for Him to accomplish the Father's will in His life and to do His work than anything else in His life. Jesus wants his disciples to understand the importance and the urgency of the time in which they live. Christ is pointing out what really matters. Lift your eyes, look around you. This is the day of salvation. This is the day of harvest. Don't miss it. Peter was gripped with the urgency of the days as well, and he wants us to be. We must make the most of the time that we have until Christ returns. If we really believe that Christ is going to return and that we cannot know the day or the hour then we must be urgently about proclaiming the gospel faithfully to the lost. And as we are pursuing holiness and pursuing lost souls, Peter tells us that we must be sure to

3) Remain rightly rooted in the truth of God's Word. (v. 16b-17) Don't miss the fact that Peter makes:

A Statement about the Inspiration of the Apostles' Writings What Peter does here is to equate the letters of Paul with Scripture. The word that is translated as Scripture is the Greek word "graphe." Back in chapter 1, Peter taught that prophetic Scriptures were inspired by God as men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. So, when he puts Paul's letters in this same category, he is claiming the same inspiration and authority for Paul. So he claims inspiration for Paul's writing and as he does, he gives

A Command to Rightly Understand and Be Submissive to the Word of God Peter readily admits that there are some things in Scripture that are difficult to understand, things that involve Spirit-empowered effort to rightly understand and apply, but that does not remove our responsibility in the words of **(2Ti 2:15 ESV)** Unlike those who twist the Scriptures and distort their teaching to their own destruction, we are those who are to pursue a right understanding of what God has said and to be submissive to it. We can't just wing it. Some people, it seems, are satisfied to pick up the Bible, read it, and get some nice devotional thought for the day and move on. Some are satisfied to hear a preacher get up, read some verses, tell a few stories,

entertain them for a few moments and then sit down. But that falls far short of the call to rightly handle the word of truth. What are the ways that we can be guilty of twisting the Scriptures?

(1) We twist the Scripture when we insist the revelation of God's truth to submit to our own reason.

(2) We twist the Scriptures when we try to force Scripture to agree with secular "truth."

(3) We twist the Scriptures when we "strain at gnats and swallow camels."

(4) We twist the Scriptures when we take them farther than they were intended to be interpreted or applied.

(5) We twist the Scriptures when we try to accommodate our own culture in the attempt to contextualize God's Word.

(6) We twist the Scriptures when we isolate the teaching of one part of the Bible from the teaching of the rest of the Bible.

(7) We twist the Scriptures when we fail to hold Scriptural truths in proper tension.

(8) We twist the Scriptures by privately interpreting them.

(9) We twist the Scriptures when we selectively ignore biblical teachings or commands.

We must guard ourselves that we are not guilty of twisting the Scripture but instead are knowing and rightly dividing and loving the Word of God, staking our lives upon it, submitting to it and applying it to our lives faithfully. We must remain rooted in the Word of God so that we are not carried away and lose our stability in Christ. Then last, Peter tells us.

4) The final exhortation – Protect your souls by pursuing your Savior together. (v.18)

Literally Peter tells us to grow and keep on growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter's final words are meant to drive us back and keep us close to the truths of the apostolic gospel – fully resting in the grace of God to redeem rebels and make them His people and lavish on them the enjoyment and blessing of His eternal and steadfast love. Remember that the true gospel once and for all delivered to the saints by the apostles is a gospel that is centered in the righteousness of Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.

It is this gospel of grace which we are called to grow in and take our stand in.

We must grow in our knowledge of the inexhaustible riches and glories of Christ; grow in our knowledge of and love for the truth and promise of His saving and sustaining grace; grow in faithfulness to His will as revealed in His Word; grow in abiding in Christ and conforming to His character; grow in confidence in the promises of God in Christ; grow in our fellowship with Christ; grow in gratitude for and dependence upon His all-sufficient grace; grow in anticipation of His glorious return; and grow in our personal knowledge of Christ. We must grow in the understanding of the deep and glorious truth and implications of the gospel and in doing so, protect our souls from falling away from the life that is found alone in Christ, remember the words of Jesus -- **And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (Joh 17:3 ESV)** It is why Peter closes the letter by saying: **To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.**

That is what these two great letters from Peter that we read have been – letters inspired by the Holy Spirit and written from the heart and mind of a man who was consumed with the supremacy of Christ’s glory over all of life – now and through all of eternity. So these are the questions we must rightly consider today:

Are you diligent to pursue true holiness, holiness that is rooted in the saving grace of Jesus Christ? Holiness that flows forth from the extreme love of Christ to take your sin upon Himself on the tree and give to you His righteousness through faith in His death and resurrection, remembering that true holiness flows from abiding in Christ and not from external rules and personal reformation?

Are you understanding the times, recognizing that God’s patience is given to us for the purpose of our own repentance before Him and for the purpose of pursuing souls with His gospel of grace?

Are you remaining rightly rooted in the truth of God’s Word, recognizing its glorious inspiration and rightly dividing and handling the Word of God and joyfully submitting to it?

Last, are you protecting your soul by pursuing your Savior in the company of the redeemed?

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