

What Should We Do Until Christ's Return?

Series: Living Godly In A Corrupt World!

by Ron R. Ritchie

"The end of all things is at hand," the apostle Peter declared in his first letter. This is a theme that runs throughout Scripture. Our Lord himself and also the prophets and the apostles made frequent mention of his return to earth in power and glory at the end of time. In light of this truth, the Christian's responsibility is to be alert and watchful, to be found walking in faith when Christ returns.

Jesus' Olivet Discourse gives much insight on this subject of his second coming. Our Lord warned his followers to be on the lookout for the "signs of the times." Christians of all generations have joyfully anticipated the "day of the Lord." Regretfully, however, it seems every generation has taken this doctrine to extremes. Christians have been confused by misguided forecasts of the timing of Christ's return. Scripture has been misinterpreted and watered down. As a result, many believers wonder whether Jesus will ever return. In the last century, for instance, a certain teacher claimed to have calculated the very day of our Lord's return. Hundreds of his followers sold all their possessions, confessed their sins to one another, put on white robes and sat on rooftops to wait for the second coming. They waited and waited . . . then they went home. A year later they repeated this foolishness. Finally they gave up trying to calculate the day of the Lord.

In our own day a popular teacher in the Los Angeles area is saying that we are presently living in the last decade before Christ comes again. He suggests Christians should become more involved in government affairs, to pray and to live godly lives in preparation for that event. Yet another modern-day prophet is forecasting the imminent return of Jesus and advises building bomb shelters and storing food and water in anticipation of going through great tribulation. If we are taken in by these misguided forecasts we can become confused and fearful.

Scripture itself must remain the firm ground on which we stand. Let us make no mistake about it: Jesus Christ is coming again in great power and glory! The apostle Peter was so thoroughly convinced of this truth that he made frequent reference to it in his letters. Rather than making him self-centered and self-serving, however, knowledge of this revelation motivated the apostle to spend the last few weeks of his life filled with concern for his spiritual family in Asia Minor. That is why he wrote his second letter--to encourage these believers that, having been born again, they had become "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4). Thus they could remain faithful, living useful and fruitful lives until the coming of the day of the Lord. As to the false teachers among them, and the mockers who denied that Christ would return--"introducing destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them"--Peter says, not to worry: "their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

How, then, should these Christians live until the return of Jesus? Should they run and hide from Nero's legions? Should they store up food in anticipation of worse times to come? Should they don white robes and wait on their rooftops for their Savior? How should they occupy themselves while they waited? In the final verses of his letter Peter lists four commands which, by the power of the Holy Spirit working within them, they could put into practice in their lives. First, the apostle says,

1. Be diligent to be found by Him...

2 Peter 3:14:

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.

In the words "since you look for these things," the apostle is referring to the "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (verse 13). These things will come into being following his visible second coming, after Jesus institutes his righteous rule on earth, after he has judged the ungodly and Satan, after he destroys the old heaven and earth.

"In the beginning," we read in Genesis, "God created the heavens and the earth." Adam, who enjoyed close fellowship with God, was deceived by Satan, and sin entered man's experience. But through Christ God initiated reconciliation between himself and sinful man. Ever since, redeemed man has hungered for the new heavens and the new earth so often mentioned in Scripture. Genesis reveals that "God created," while in Revelation we see that God will reign with his new creation. In Genesis light was made to shine from the sun, moon and stars; in Revelation, everything will be illuminated by the very presence of God. In Genesis we find the devil cunning and victorious; in Revelation we find him defeated, powerless and destroyed. In Genesis we see man tempted, falling into sin and hiding from God; in Revelation we see man redeemed through the gospel, walking in fellowship with God. In Genesis we experience paradise lost; in Revelation paradise is regained.

The old heavens "will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up," Peter wrote earlier in this letter. All this destructor by fire is a symbol of the Lord judging evil and corruption. There will be no place for them in the new heavens and new earth, designed so that new creatures in Christ will have eternal fellowship with God in a place where righteousness dwells. As "new creatures in Christ," as "ministers of a new covenant" we have a taste of this new heaven and new earth even in this life. The peace, joy and wholeness we now feel, however, is but a taste of what is in store for us.

Therefore, Peter says, since you hunger for these things, "since you look for these things, be diligent . . ." Be diligent for what? Since Christ is coming again, work at. be diligent "to be found by Him . . ."

In the Olivet Discourse Jesus told his disciples to watch for certain signs and moral conditions. The day of the coming of the Son of Man will find people doing the same things people were doing in the days just before the flood--marrying, eating and drinking. But you be alert, he told his disciples, just like the faithful servant who was put in charge of his master's household while his master was away. Be prudent, he warned, like the five virgins who waited for the bridegroom. Be faithful, like the servant who increased his talents while his master was away. Christ will return, yes, but when he returns will he find faith on earth? Be diligent to be found by him not only faithful, but in peace. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Romans tells us. We who were once God's enemies have, because of the mercy of God, been reconciled to him through the death of Jesus. Live in harmonious relationship with God and with everyone around you so that when he comes he will find you "in peace"--in peace with your brothers, with your sisters, with your friends and neighbors.

You know, I'm glad Jesus didn't come last week while I was jogging on the beach near my home. As I was running just before dark, I noticed four men walking along the shore and before I knew what had happened their dog attacked me. I confess that everything Jesus saved me from came back in living color! I started yelling at these men, informing them of my rights, what right did they have walking a dog without a leash, etc. Someone said, "Don't point at me like that," then one of them grabbed me. . . I thought to myself, "Isn't this just great? I can't believe I'm doing this." I could see the headlines: "Jesus Returns, But Finds Ritchie in pieces, Not in Peace!" Yes, I'm glad he didn't come last week. When he does return, I want to be found "in peace."

A passage in Paul's letter to the Philippians clearly tells us how to be "found in peace" "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6,7). God will place a guard over both our emotions and our intellect. He will keep us "in peace" in an anxious world.

Secondly, Peter encourages, be diligent to be found by Jesus "spotless." The apostle has in mind Jesus as the spotless Lamb of God who was therefore acceptable to God as a sacrificial offering for sin. In his first letter,

Peter reminded his readers to know that they were redeemed ". . . with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:19). When we truly understand the significance of the life and death of the perfect Lamb of God we are motivated to live lives acceptable to God by the power of the Holy Spirit. He died so that we may live, being made sin for us in order to redeem us. That is why Peter said in his first letter, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16). In contrast to the false teachers-- "stains and blemishes," as they were described by Peter in this second letter-- Christians are called to be "above reproach." John wrote, "And now little children, abide in Him, so when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

Thirdly, Peter says, be diligent to be found by Christ "blameless." Here again we have the idea of the sacrificial lamb. "Blameless" here does not mean perfection. God deems the Christian to be blameless because the believer's sins are forgiven in Christ. On a human level, to be "blameless" has the idea that all wrongs have been righted and settled, thus reconciliation is possible.

A young woman from our Careers group shared something with me last week that is helpful here. She found she had misinterpreted certain things which she had heard about another sister but she had already shared the information with others. She had then gone and telephoned those whom she had talked with in an effort to make things right again. She went to the woman concerned and asked her forgiveness. This young woman is now "blameless" as to this incident. There is nothing that can be held against her.

Here is how Christians should be found by God, as Paul tells us in Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:3,4). Writing to the Philippians, the apostle says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourself to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:14, 15). Christians are the light of the earth, the salt of the world.

What should we do until Christ returns? Let us be diligent to be found by him, "in peace, spotless and blameless." Then, Peter says, let us

2. Regard the Lord's patience as salvation

2 Peter 3:15,16:

. . . and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter has already said, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (8,9). As we saw last week, God is the creator of time, but he is not held captive by time. He uses time to his honor and glory, having set his clocks at daylight "saving" time, because he desires men to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. Here the apostle is saying to his spiritual flock, "Don't become impatient. Although you are living in a wicked, corrupt world, though false teachers and mockers are denying the second coming, remember that God is in charge. He is using all of these pressures, people, and philosophies to bring men and women to himself."

Peter then goes on to say that what he is writing is not merely his own opinion: ". . . our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you . . . of these things." They would have read of the things to come in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (written while he was imprisoned in Rome), which had been circulated among the churches in Asia Minor. In that letter Paul declared that the partition that had existed between the Jews and the Gentiles has been removed in Christ. The Gentiles, according to Paul, "are fellow-heirs and

fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus through the gospel. . . " (Eph. 3:6). Peter continues, ". . . as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things," referring to the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Philippians, Thessalonians and to Timothy, all of which speak of the doctrines of salvation, the day of the Lord, the second coming, etc.

The apostle goes on to say, ". . . in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." I have to be frank, says Peter, Paul is hard to understand at times. How often have we found ourselves agreeing with Peter on this! The word "hard to understand" was used in the Greek culture of Peter's day of the pronouncements of the temple priests which were usually ambiguous and double-meaning. Paul's insights, given him by the Spirit of God, plumb a very deep well of knowledge. He was chosen by God to reveal some of the great mysteries of Scripture, the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory," the "mystery of lawlessness," the mystery of the body of Christ, and many others. The "untaught and unstable" according to Peter, however, distorted these teachings, as they do also the rest of Scripture."

We know, for instance, that Paul's doctrine of grace (in Romans 5 through 8), was distorted to say that grace was an excuse for sin; his words on the Christian's freedom in Christ (in Galatians), was said to be a license for sin; his word on the second coming of Christ (in 2 Thessalonians) was twisted to say that Jesus had already come. Some people approach the Scriptures with preconceived ideas of what the Bible says and then look for proof texts to back up what they believe. The way to avoid falling into this trap is to put yourself under the authority of the word and allow it to judge your prejudices.

G.K. Chesterton wrote in this regard, "Orthodoxy is like walking along a narrow bridge: one step to either side is a step of disaster. Jesus Christ is God and Man; God is love and holiness; Christianity is grace and morality; the Christian lives in the world and lives in the world of eternity. Overstress either side of these great two-sided truths and at once destructive heresy enters in. One of the most tragic things in life is when a man twists certain Christian truths and holy Scripture into an excuse and even a reason for doing what he wants to do, instead of taking them as guides for doing what God wants him to do."

Here is a quote from a recent sermon given by a pastor of a church on the East Coast which claims to be evangelical, but which also claims that homosexual practices fall under the umbrella of Christianity: "Homosexual love has been called the 'love that dare not speak its name.'" But if it be genuine love it must then be the dwelling place of God; and so, among Christians, at least it of course may dare to speak its name. And, indeed, our bishop, in ordaining men and women who are actively homosexual, has acted on this understanding. And in Calvary Church it has not, for a long time now, mattered a whit if one be gay or straight--what matters is whether we care lovingly for each other; that is the tie that binds, that bridges gaps that may nowhere else be bridge."

Nice-sounding words, I agree, but there is not a shred of evidence in the Bible that will support this line of teaching about practicing homosexuality. That is how "the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."

What should we do until Christ returns? Peter says Christians should be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless; we should regard the Lord's patience as salvation; and

3. Be on your guard

2 Peter 3:17:

You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness.

Peter stresses the need to be forewarned and thus forearmed against the various false teachers and their heresies. Shortly after I arrived in Morocco on a stint with the army, I heard a siren go off one day warning of an attack. I dived into a foxhole and a truck came by and I was thrown a 50mm machine gun. I had never even seen a gun like this before. To make matters worse, no ammunition was provided. The attack never did come,

but that warning encouraged us to be ready next time and we were. Christians must realize that they are likely to be attacked "by the error of unprincipled men." In his first letter Peter advises, "Guard your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:13).

Recall that on the evening before Jesus was put to death, Peter had bragged that he would gladly die for him. But our Lord responded by saying Peter would deny him three times before the cock crowed at dawn. Here the apostle advises Christians they should not be self-confident; rather that they should be on guard "lest you fall from your own steadfastness." In these last days we should ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to discern and deal with the "error of unprincipled men."

What should we do until Christ returns? Peter says, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless, blameless; regard the Lord's patience as salvation; be on your guard; and finally,

4. Grow in our Lord Jesus Christ

2 Peter 3:18:

... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

In these words the apostle has come full circle. In 1:2 he wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Faith without knowledge keeps one immature and emotional. That is why the apostle wants believers to "grow in knowledge." As he said in I Peter 2:2, ". . . like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

Peter wants them to "grow in grace." Grace is God's undeserved favor expressed toward sinful man who deserves nothing but death. Through his grace we have become "partakers of the divine nature," the power of sin has been broken in our lives, we are set free from the demands of the law, set free to live a Christ--centered life. The more I grow in the grace of God, the more I find myself aware that he is extending to me his undeserved favor. That knowledge does not encourage me to take his grace lightly, or to sin; rather I am challenged to live fruitfully for him.

It is by God's grace that I am allowed to run for exercise. A friend with whom I used to run is now so sick he can no longer do so. I think of him when I jog, and know that a day is coming when my body will no longer be able to function as my spirit would wish. But I also know that God is extending grace to my friend as he prepares his spirit to enter into the kingdom of heaven. How kind God is toward us! Let us grow in his grace. All of life is blessed by it. By his grace we can see, hear and eat. By his grace we have a spiritual family with whom we can worship freely without interruption by police or military. All of these things are a manifestation of God's grace.

Peter encourages Christians to grow in the "knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We are to investigate truth about Jesus As Paul says in Philipppians, ". . . that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. "

The second chapter of the Philipppian letter lists four areas where believers can "grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Christians should grow in the knowledge of

Jesus in his humanity:

". . . who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself. . . "

Christians should grow in the knowledge of

Jesus as Messiah:

". . . taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, . . . "

Christians should grow in the knowledge of

Jesus as Savior:

". . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross . . . "

Christians should grow in the knowledge of

Jesus as Lord:

". . . Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. . . "

Isn't it wonderful to realize that this Lord, this Savior, this Messiah, this Jesus is our personal Lord and Savior!

Yes, God wants us to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. When I came to Christ at 221 was anxious to know what Jesus could do for me, so I looked up all the passages that had to do with me. When I read John 3:16, I changed it to read, "For God so loved me . . . " What's in it for me? That's what I wanted to know. As I grew a little older in Christ I discovered there was more than just me. Then I began to grow in the knowledge of the body of Christ. There was you too, and I began to pray for you and have fellowship with you. As I grew older still I began to grow in the knowledge of what God was doing in all the generations since Adam; about the doctrine of universal sin, about God's plan of redemption through the ages, the doctrine of the end times, etc.

But now that I'm even older still, all I want to know about is Jesus, period. "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection." What is that all about? That is what I want to know. Yes, we must" grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." As Hebrews 5 says, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."

Peter's last words are, "To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." Once more the apostle turns his eyes away from himself toward Jesus, and prays that his Lord may be glorified. One commentator has written, "The end of time is coming. It will be ushered in by the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the kingdom will be set up on earth, the new earth under a new heaven, the day of eternity. Let Christ be glorified in and among us now, continually and until the day when he returns in power and glory, our wonderful Lord and Savior Christ Jesus."

What should we be doing now that we know Jesus is coming again? Building bomb shelters? Buying white robes? Stockpiling food? Peter is not interested in our activity, but in our attitude. Here are his wise words to us in our generation. Let us align our thinking with the word of truth about Jesus as we find it in his Scripture. Let us work diligently to be found in peace. Let us be above reproach and blameless in this corrupt society. Let us realize that the Lord's patience with mankind is so that others may enter into a relationship with him. Let us be on guard against false teachers and mockers who distort the truth, to their own destruction. Finally, let us grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you, but this series in Second Peter has had a profound effect on my life. I feel I've gotten a perspective on what it means to live in this world with all it has to offer but yet understand that this isn't all there is. I've seen God's mind and heart set forth in a clearer way than before. My evangelism has intensified. I want more than ever to chatter about Jesus. My boldness is sometimes embarrassing even to me! Some people want to talk about football, I want to talk about Jesus. Some want to talk about materialism, I want to talk about eternity. I want to die talking about Jesus, not about myself or anything else. I've learned not to attack false teachers who come to my door any more. I used to win a lot of battles with them but lose a lot of opportunities. But now I want to "grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." I pray that his " I pray that his Holy Spirit will enable you and me both to do that.

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[Back to Index Page](#)

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