

While We Wait

Summary and Goal

Like Jude, 2 Peter was written to encourage believers who were living with false teachers in their midst. Part of combating false teachings is remembering the commands of the prophets and apostles—God’s words to His people. Peter also wrote to tell people that God works on His own timetable, not ours, and that what seems like slowness to us is actually God’s perfect timing. Because of this, the church is to be holy and godly as we anticipate the return of Christ, knowing that it will happen suddenly at just the right time, whether that is today, tomorrow, or one day a long time from now.

Main Passage

2 Peter 3:1-13

Session Outline

1. Remember the prophets’ words and the apostles’ commands (2 Pet. 3:1-7).
2. Recognize the Lord’s timetable differs from ours (2 Pet. 3:8-9).
3. Embrace a life of holy and godly anticipation for Jesus’ return (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Theological Theme

The Lord is patient, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

Christ Connection

When some scoffed at the early Christian hope in Jesus’ second coming, the apostle Peter explained that God’s timetable is different than ours. He is patient in giving people time to turn to Him in faith. The Day of Judgment will come, however, and Jesus will return and establish a new heavens and new earth.

Missional Application

God calls us to see His patience toward us as an opportunity to grow in holiness and to call others to repentance.

While We Wait

Session 9

Introduction Option

Prior to the group meeting, enlist a volunteer to read/ summarize this online article: "A Sweet Lesson on Patience: This Taxi Driver's Story Will Change Your Perspective on Rushing to Get Somewhere."

<http://elitedaily.com/life/culture/story-one-taxi-driver-will-change-entire-day/>

Then invite group members to note times they demonstrated patience and times when they lacked patience during the past week, along with the results.

? For Further Discussion

Why might we need constant reminders of the truth that scoffers will seek to infiltrate the church and lead it astray?

How are constant reminders of Jesus' second coming vital to our faith?

Introduction

Bring up the prevalence of fast food restaurants as an evidence of our impatience and impulsiveness and that these tendencies can carry over into our faith (leader p. 106; PSG p. 83).

- ? In what areas of your life can you struggle with impatience and impulsiveness?

Summarize this session on 2 Peter, which was written to encourage believers who were living with false teachers in their midst (leader p. 106; PSG p. 84).

1. Remember the prophets' words and the apostles' commands (2 Pet. 3:1-7).

Read 2 Peter 3:1-7. State that Peter wrote to the persecuted church to confirm and solidify the truth that Jesus was returning—a message of great hope the church needed to embrace. Peter's appeal to the prophets and apostles for this teaching reminds us that all of the Bible tells one story of God's plan to redeem people through Jesus (leader pp. 107-108; PSG pp. 84-85).

- ? How should knowing the Bible is one story shape the way we share Jesus with others?

Note the presence of scoffers in the last days, who deny Christ's return. Connect these scoffers to people in the days of Noah, ignoring the coming judgment. But it did come at last because God keeps His promises. So too, Christ will come again (leader pp. 108-109; PSG pp. 85-86).

- ? How should thinking of Christ's return change the way we live?

2. Recognize the Lord's timetable differs from ours (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

Read 2 Peter 3:8-9. Highlight the matter of God's perfect timing and how He does not work in time how we might want or expect. So we must adjust to live patiently and faithfully in His timing (leader pp. 109-110; PSG pp. 86-87).

 How have you seen God work in unexpected ways or in perfect timing in the Bible or in your own life?

Provide the reason Peter gives for God’s “slowness”: God is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (v. 9). Emphasize that every day without Jesus’ return is an opportunity to be on mission sharing the gospel with those who still have time to repent (leader pp. 110-111; PSG pp. 87-88).

 How have you seen God being patient with you, either in coming to salvation or growing as a disciple?

3. Embrace a life of holy and godly anticipation for Jesus’ return (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Ask a volunteer to read 2 Peter 3:10-13. Communicate the point behind Peter’s metaphor of a thief. Get across the unexpected yet public nature of Christ’s return—it will be known by all when it happens (leader pp. 111-112; PSG pp. 88-89).

 What are some ways we can prepare ourselves for the second coming of Christ and be ready each day as the possible day of His return?

Lay out that because Jesus’ return will be marked by the passing away of the present heavens and earth, Peter warns the church to live accordingly. Explain Peter’s “since/then” construction as motivation for living with holiness and godliness now. Add that when we remember that righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and the new earth, we can stand steadfast and immovable with patience (leader pp. 112-113; PSG pp. 89-90).

Ask group members to fill in the OT/NT connection for this session on Pack Item 3: Handout from the list on Pack Item 2: Hearing the Old Testament in the New (“The Day of the LORD...” with “The Day of the Lord...”).

 How does the since/then construction used in the Bible help us consider our motivations for obeying God?

Conclusion

Challenge the group by recalling that our goal is not merely to wait for God to make good on His promises to us but instead to make the most of our time as we wait for Christ to return (leader p. 113; PSG p. 90). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission” (PSG p. 91).*

Point 3 Option

Show your group the “Day of the Lord” video to help explain the biblical significance of this day referenced in 2 Peter 3:10:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEBc2gSSW04>

Then ask the group the following questions:

- What are some ways this world tries to conform us to its pattern of evil?
- How can anticipation for the coming Day of the Lord—Jesus’ second coming—help us to resist the draw of this world and even push back against it?

Christ Connection: When some scoffed at the early Christian hope in Jesus’ second coming, the apostle Peter explained that God’s timetable is different than ours. He is patient in giving people time to turn to Him in faith. The Day of Judgment will come, however, and Jesus will return and establish a new heavens and new earth.

Missional Application: God calls us to see His patience toward us as an opportunity to grow in holiness and to call others to repentance.

Expanded Session Content

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Session 9

Voices from the Church

“Unfortunately, many people think that patience is most predominately demonstrated by someone who has an easy going, laid-back attitude. But, on the contrary, patience is not some passive nuance of someone’s character; it is an active, exhibited virtue. It is a virtue of trust. To exercise trust implies that we are trusting in someone greater than ourselves. It is no wonder the world is so impatient. Those who do not know God can only trust in themselves, for there is no one greater in whom they can place their trust.”²

—Burk Parsons

Voices from the Culture

“Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness, wrote Kreider in his 2012 article for *The New York Times*, ‘The Busy Trap.’ According to Kreider, some people actively create their hectic lifestyle because they dread ‘what they might have to face in its absence.’”³

Introduction

Many of us can be rather impatient and impulsive at times, perhaps proven best by the prevalence of fast food restaurants. In 2015, Americans spent over \$200 billion at over 220,000 fast food restaurants in the United States,¹ roughly \$620 for every man, woman, and child. We eat at fast food restaurants not necessarily for the quality of the food but for its taste and convenience. We know fast food is not the best for our health and there are cheaper ways to eat, yet we return for the momentary pleasure of a quick meal.

Impatience and impulsiveness are also why we find it so difficult to diet and exercise regularly. We know how we want to look and feel, but we are too impatient to give our dieting and exercising the necessary time to see results. We don’t see a difference quickly enough, so we yield to our impulses to eat and we sleep in instead of going to the gym. While impatience and impulsiveness can significantly affect our daily lives, they can also carry over into our faith.

 In what areas of your life can you struggle with impatience and impulsiveness?

Session Summary

Like Jude, 2 Peter was written to encourage believers who were living with false teachers in their midst. These false teachers were leading some of the church away from the gospel and were confusing others, so Peter wrote to the church to encourage them to live faithfully and patiently. In this session, we will see that part of combating false teachings is remembering the commands of the prophets and apostles—God’s words to His people. We will also see that God works on His own timetable, not ours, and that what seems like slowness to us is actually God’s perfect timing. Because of this, the church is to be holy and godly as we anticipate the return of Christ, knowing that it will happen suddenly at just the right time, whether that is today, tomorrow, or one day a long time from now.

1. Remember the prophets' words and the apostles' commands (2 Pet. 3:1-7).

¹ *This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,* ² *that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,* ³ *knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.* ⁴ *They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."* ⁵ *For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,* ⁶ *and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.* ⁷ *But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

The Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy was written to restate and reinforce the law that God had already given to the children of Israel. The name of the book reveals this: *deutero* means "second" and *nomos* means "law," so this book is the second giving of the law. The letter of 2 Peter is similar, echoing what Peter wrote about the second coming of Christ in 1 Peter (see 1 Pet. 1:7,13; 4:13; 5:1).

Because the church was undergoing persecution for their faith in Jesus, Peter wanted to write to them again to confirm and solidify further the truth that Jesus was returning—a message of great hope the church needed to embrace. Peter had heard Jesus say, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3). Perhaps with these words reverberating through the corridors of his mind, Peter wrote to the church to etch this vital doctrine of Christ's return on the marble of their minds as well.

In both letters, Peter had written about Christ's return to "stir up your sincere mind by way of reminder." He wrote once more to tell the church what they already knew for their own good. Peter saw himself as yet another link in a chain that had begun long ago. What he was reminding the church of was previously spoken by the holy prophets and was the command of Jesus passed on to them through the apostles.

Through Peter's reminder appealing to the prophets and apostles, we too are reminded that all of the Bible tells one story of God's plan to redeem people through Jesus. Each voice in the Old Testament and New Testament is a member of one choir singing the same beautiful chorus of the gospel.

Further Commentary

"The teaching of which Peter spoke included accepting Christ's return, which had been rejected by the false teachers. The apostles expected the presence of scoffers and their activities, and Peter warned his readers that 'scoffers will come in the last days.' They were on the scene in Peter's day; they would also be present in the future. The 'last days' refers to the period of time between Christ's incarnation and his return. The scoffers mocked Christ's return because many years had passed and it had not yet occurred... 'Our ancestors' probably refers to the OT patriarchs given the mention of 'the beginning of creation.' Because the false teachers distorted the OT Scriptures, Peter countered by alluding to the OT."⁴

—Terry L. Wilder

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

95. *Second Coming*

The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in bodily form (Matt. 24–25). The imminent return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made new. While many have speculated as to when Christ's return will take place, Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur, only assuring that it will be unexpected (Matt. 25:8-10) and glorious (Matt. 24:30).

Further Commentary

“This section [3:5-7] points out that although these false teachers knew the Old Testament Scriptures, they chose to ignore them. They chose to deny God’s intervention in past history. They denied, for example, his positive intervention in the creation of the world (v. 5) and his negative intervention in judgment at the time of Noah and the Flood (v. 6). Despite their scoffing and unbelief, the divine Word that created the heavens and the earth and then called forth the deluge to destroy them will again call forth destruction at the Second Coming (v. 7). The Old Testament consistently teaches that the cosmos is a moral universe created by God and that God will not let sin go unpunished forever. God is not only the creator of the universe; he is also the judge. The God who created the beginning of all things has the power to end them.”⁵

—David Walls and Max Anders

Voices from the Church

“Faith comes alive when the Word read from the page becomes the Word heard in our heart.”⁶

—Rex Rouis

Though the church was still in its infancy, it already had a history of apostles and prophets whose words boldly and faithfully presented the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unlike the false prophets in their midst, Peter was not teaching the church something new; he was not appealing to novelty but to divine authority—authority that rested in Jesus.

In this way Peter was following the direction of the Lord who, in the Great Commission, told the disciples to teach others to “observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). That is our calling as well. We, like Peter, are links in this same chain, proclaiming not our own message to the world but the words of Christ we strive to remember and proclaim faithfully.



How should knowing the Bible is one story shape the way we share Jesus with others?

Peter shared why it is so important to remember the words and commands of Christ in verses 3-4, when he reminded the church that scoffers would come in the last days. Scoffers mock and belittle others, and in this case, they were giving the church grief about Christ’s return.

The church was suffering for their faith. They had been displaced from their homes and had their possessions confiscated. The scoffers circled in these waters like sharks that smelled blood: “Where is Jesus? Didn’t He promise to return? Look at what you are going through for Him! Nothing is different now than how things have been since the beginning. Sure seems like this Jesus didn’t make much of a difference!”

The scoffers considered the apparent delay of the return of Jesus as evidence that He was not coming. Their rationale is this: “The Lord has promised He will return since the time our ancestors died. For example, Job was sure He would return when he stated, ‘I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth’ (Job 19:25). The church is just another voice in a long line of others who said the Lord was returning—yet it hasn’t happened.”

The scoffers went a step further by arguing that not only had Jesus not returned, but nothing else had changed either. Society was no better. The people who followed Jesus were suffering. What argument could possibly be made for following this Jesus?

These scoffers were like the people in the days of Noah who did not really believe a flood was coming to destroy every living creature on the earth. They lived with no urgency about the coming judgment; they married, produced children, and socialized like normal. They ate, drank, and were merry because they did not expect the flood to come.

But Peter exposes the fallacy of the scoffers' taunts in verses 5-7. God eventually released the waters of judgment, and every living creature outside the ark perished. What God spoke through Noah, His righteous spokesman, was fulfilled, but not before giving one hundred years for the people to repent of their scoffing. They refused to repent, however, and deliberately ignored the Creator who had separated the waters with a spoken command. And then it was too late. God released those waters in an act of uncreation, and judgment came.

Peter's admonition is clear—God keeps His promises. He will keep His promise to preserve and protect His own, and He will also keep His promise to bring judgment on those who rebel against Him. In Noah's day, it was judgment through water, but one day—today, tomorrow, or distant future—His judgment will come through fire. Believers can be sure the Day of the Lord will come as promised. And on that day, Jesus will return for His own, and He will bring judgment against all the ungodly, including the scoffers and false teachers. Christ's words will be proven true, and their words will be proven to be lies. The Day of the Lord *will* come.

 How should thinking of Christ's return change the way we live?

2. Recognize the Lord's timetable differs from ours (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

⁸ *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* ⁹ *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

Having reminded the church of the reality of the coming Day of the Lord, Peter anticipates a question from the suffering church: "But when? Why is it taking Him so long? We are hurting! Doesn't He care?"

Peter's response is God's math is not our math. God multiplies by dividing, as demonstrated when Jesus took two fish and five loaves of bread and fed five thousand men, plus women and children, with twelve baskets of leftovers (Matt. 14:15-21). God also adds by subtracting, as seen in His command for Gideon to reduce the number of men in his army to win the victory (Judg. 7).

In the same way, God does not work in time as we might want or expect. God's promises are not governed by us and cannot be determined by a calendar. God is not rushed; He always works in His perfect timing.

Voices from Church History

"If any one will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life...For the sermon itself is brought to a close in such a way, that it is clear there are in it all the precepts which go to mould the life...He has sufficiently indicated, as I think, that these sayings which He uttered on the mount so perfectly guide the life of those who may be willing to live according to them, that they may justly be compared to one building upon a rock."⁷

—Augustine (354-430)

Further Commentary

"Peter passionately reminds his readers of God's view of time and his faithfulness to his promise. To one who is eternal, a day is like a thousand years, and vice versa (3:8; Ps. 90:4). Moreover, if God seems to be slow from a human perspective, it is for our benefit (3:9). He is not slow but long-suffering, not impotent but patient, keeping the door of repentance open to all. However, the fact that God does not want anyone to perish does not mean that everyone will be saved, for Peter has just said that the ungodly will be destroyed (3:7). Christ has opened the way to salvation for all, but only the repentant benefit."⁸

—Tokunboh Adeyemo

Further Commentary

“The first part of v. 9 draws an implication from v. 8. If God does not reckon or indeed experience time as we do, then it follows that he is not slow about keeping his promise (cf. Hab. 2:3). The promise...of course, hearkens back to v. 4 and refers to the promise of the Lord’s coming. God, that is, the Father, is not dilatory in fulfilling the promise uttered about his Son’s coming again. The Son will come as promised, but the apparent slowness should not be misunderstood. The phrase ‘as some understand slowness’ could possibly refer to those in the churches wavering under the influence of the false teachers. More likely the reference is to the false teachers themselves, referring to them negatively as ‘some’ who lack an understanding of God’s ways. The verse may be highly ironic. The false teachers use God’s patience as an argument against God, when it should lead them to repentance.”⁹

—Thomas R. Schreiner

Voices from the Church

“People who don’t believe in God consider time an adversary. For them, the ticking of the second hand sounds like the stalking of an enemy. Each minute moves them toward death. And everyone, whether rich or poor, tries to grab the hour hand to shove it backward.”¹⁰

—Joni Eareckson Tada

God tells us, “[I declare] the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isa. 46:10). Our God knows the epilogue before the prologue is written. He is not writing the story a chapter at a time, waiting to see how each one turns out before beginning the next. His story is not held captive to the whims of time; rather, time is held captive by His story. God will do *what* He wishes *when* He wishes. God is always on time. And that includes Jesus’ return.

This is what Peter wants the church to remember. There is no reason to panic or despair. Yes, they were suffering. Yes, the hardships were real. But no, God has not forgotten or failed in His promise that the Day of the Lord will come. It just isn’t time yet.

It has been about two thousand years since the Lord promised His return. He has not come back to earth yet, but He will. God is faithful. Every promise He has made, He *has* fulfilled or *will* fulfill. Titus 1:2 says God cannot lie. We can trust Him completely, even when we cannot see what He is doing and when we struggle with His timing.

We need to take to heart the same message Peter shared with the church in his day. We also need to remember that God’s math is not our math as we trust Him with the resources He has given to us and live patiently and faithfully in His timing, not our own.



How have you seen God work in unexpected ways or in perfect timing in the Bible or in your own life?

While Peter could have ended his explanation of God’s timing being perfect in verse 8, he continues in verse 9 by explaining *why* the Day of the Lord has not happened yet. There is a reason for this “slowness,” and Peter wants the church to know it, appreciate it, and live differently because of it.

God fulfills His promises not based on what we do but on who He is. The return of Jesus is not hanging in the balance waiting to be determined by our actions. Just as God promised the coming of our Lord during the first advent and fulfilled it, so He promises the coming of our Lord during the second advent and He will fulfill it too. Great is His faithfulness! God’s promises are secured by His character. We know He will keep His promises because He is true, but we also know that His character drives how and when He fulfills His promises as well.

The reason Peter offers for God’s “slowness” in the return of Jesus is the deliverance of others. While the church may feel as if God is letting them down, God has the benefit of someone else in mind as He patiently waits for the right time for Jesus to return.

God is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” Peter wants the church to see God’s love and grace speaking into His timing to send Jesus back to earth. What the church might see as a delay is God’s gift of grace giving others time to repent of their sins and turn to Christ for saving faith.

God delayed during the days of Joshua in the attack of Jericho to give Rahab and her family time to be saved (Josh. 6:22-23). God delayed in sending the waters of judgment in Noah’s day to give the people time to repent (1 Pet. 3:20). In the same way, God is delaying the return of Jesus, not wanting any to perish.

Like the church in Peter’s day, it is easy for us to look at our world and wonder why Jesus hasn’t returned. We see a world growing increasingly hostile to the gospel and turning God’s good gifts of grace upside down. “Where is Jesus? Why won’t He return and put an end to this madness?”

Peter’s response rings just as true today. God is not slow about His promises, but He desires for all people to be saved. It is only because of God’s kindness that Jesus’ return was delayed for *us* to respond to the gospel. As recipients of such love and grace, we should look at each day we wake up without Jesus’ return not as a failing by God but as an opportunity from Him—an opportunity to be on mission sharing the gospel with those who still have time to repent.



How have you seen God being patient with you, either in coming to salvation or growing as a disciple?

3. Embrace a life of holy and godly anticipation for Jesus’ return (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Peter uses the metaphor of a thief to illustrate the timing of Christ’s return. No thief notifies the homeowner of a house he intends to rob when he is coming. This is why we lock our doors, because we never know when a thief might show up. We always need to be ready.



Further Commentary

“The fact that God is patient should not be used as an excuse to become relaxed and irresponsible. God always keeps his promises. He will come in judgement when we least expect it, ‘like a thief’ comes in the night (3:10; Matt. 24:42-44; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). At that time, ‘the heavens will disappear with a roar’ and all ‘the elements’ that make up the universe ‘will be destroyed by fire.’ The final phrase in 3:10 is not a repetition of the judgement by fire but an assurance that on that day ‘the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.’ All evil ways will be exposed and the present evil world will be destroyed.”¹¹

—Chris Gnanakan

Further Commentary

“‘Hastening’ (...‘hurry [by extra effort]’) ‘the coming of the day of God’ suggests that, by living holy lives, Christians can actually affect the time of the Lord’s return. That does not mean, of course, that the Lord has not foreknown and foreordained when Jesus will return (cf. Matt. 24:36; Acts 17:31). But when God set that day, he also ordained that it would happen after all of his purposes for saving believers and building his kingdom in this present age had been accomplished, and those purposes are accomplished when he works through his human agents to bring them about. Therefore, from a human perspective, when Christians share the gospel with others, and pray (cf. Matt. 6:10), and advance the kingdom of God in other ways, they do ‘hasten’ the fulfillment of God’s purposes, including Christ’s return.”¹³

—Doug Oss and Thomas R. Schreiner

Voices from Church History

“Wherever the Holy Spirit is present, He makes men of gold out of men of clay.”¹⁴

—John Chrysostom (circa 347-407)

In a similar way, Christ’s return will not be announced ahead of time. Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come (Matt. 24:36). This is why we always need to be ready for it. *Today* could be the day.

But before Peter explains more about how we are to live in preparation for Christ’s return, he wants to be sure the church understands that while Jesus’ return is not known now, when it occurs it will be known by all. It will not be a mystery when it happens. No one will miss it.

When Jesus returns, “the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Pet. 3:10). Peter may have been remembering Jesus’ teachings recorded in Matthew 24 as he wrote this line. Jesus had told His disciples what would accompany His return, including signs in the heavens. Undoubtedly this is what Horatio G. Spafford had in mind when writing, “And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll.”¹²

The Day of the Lord is presently concealed to all, but when it happens, it will be revealed to all. The church need not worry about waiting for Jesus’ return only to miss it when it happens. But there is something else we *should* be concerned about.



What are some ways we can prepare ourselves for the second coming of Christ and be ready each day as the possible day of His return?

Because Jesus’ return will be marked by the passing away of the present heavens and earth, Peter warns the church to live accordingly. In verse 11, Peter builds on the thought of the passing away of the present heavens and earth with a *since/then* premise: since what was just said is true, then you should live a certain way.

We see this construction throughout Scripture. Peter used it in 1 Peter 4:1 when he wrote, “*Since* therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, [*then*] arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” In Colossians 3:1, Paul wrote, “*If then [since]* you have been raised with Christ, [*then*] seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” And the writer of Hebrews instructs us, “Therefore, *while [since]* the promise of entering his rest still stands, [*then*] let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (Heb. 4:1).

The “*since*,” or motivation, of Peter’s premise is remembering the sinful and ungodly systems of the world will be judged when Jesus returns. The coming judgment will purge the world as we know it of all sin and the stains from the fall. Knowing this should compel God’s people, the “*then*” of the premise, to live with holiness and godliness.

We live with holiness as a people set apart from the world. We are *in* the world but not *of* the world. And we live with godliness as the fragrance of Christ in a world saturated with the stench of sin and death. We are not of this world; we are of the world that is to come when Christ returns and makes all things new. *That* is when we will finally be home. For now, we are ambassadors of that future home. We live differently because it reflects the truth of who we are and to whom we belong. We also live differently so that others, for whom God is being patient, might repent and be spared from the judgment that is to come (see 1 Peter 2:11-12).

Peter concludes this passage by declaring that righteousness dwells in the new heavens and the new earth. Jesus will make a new heavens and earth because the old heavens and earth were saturated with the curse of sin due to the fall of Adam. Adam's sin cursed humanity and nature. However, when the last Adam, our Lord Jesus, shall come again, that curse will be reversed and the Edenic conditions prior to the fall will return, for Christ will make all things new. The Lord will come down and dwell in the midst of His people and be their God (Rev. 21:3). When we remember this, we can stand steadfast and immovable with patience because our Lord's promise is true and we know great reward awaits those who persevere to the end.



How does the since/then construction used in the Bible help us consider our motivations for obeying God?

Conclusion

Patiently waiting, even when we know what we are waiting on will come, is difficult to be sure. Moreover, our goal is not merely to wait for God to make good on His promises to us. Instead, we are to make the most of our time as we wait. We join in with God in His purpose while we wait, and we find hope in knowing that one day Jesus will return for us and make right everything that is wrong. At the same time, we find purpose in knowing that every day Jesus does not return is another day we have to share the gospel with others. So, what are you doing today?

CHRIST CONNECTION: When some scoffed at the early Christian hope in Jesus' second coming, the apostle Peter explained that God's timetable is different than ours. He is patient in giving people time to turn to Him in faith. The Day of Judgment will come, however, and Jesus will return and establish a new heavens and new earth.

Voices from the Church

"People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."¹⁵

—D. A. Carson

Additional Resources

While We Wait

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Study Material

- "Living When Dying Is Gain"—Chapter 8 from *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream* by David Platt
- "Waiting"—Article by Thabiti Anyabwile; find a link to this article at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Peter's Eschatological Understanding," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon

Leonce Crump: "The Return of Christ and the Christian's Responsibility"

Find a link to this at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

Tip of the Week

Staying Open While Going Deeper

One big challenge for open groups is satisfying the desire of believers who want to go deeper into God's Word while still maintaining an openness to non-Christians. There are ways to navigate that dilemma. Most importantly, make sure Bible study is the center of the group experience. Unchurched people overwhelmingly say if they decide to attend a church or small group, a primary motivator is to understand the Bible. You don't have to dumb down Bible study. Most people want to go deeper through discussion. A proper balance of lecture and discussion—and even other teaching/learning methods—is critical to helping a group be both deep and open.

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