

Dear Friends,

When I was young in the faith, the common view of Biblical teaching and preaching was to firmly focus on either "Doctrine" or "Practice." It took many years for me to realize that this is not the Biblical example. In Scripture, "Doctrine," those Biblical teachings related to God, who He is, and what He does for His children, always appears as the foundation, and "Practice" the ethical/moral implications that follow on our understanding of God, of "Doctrine," are the building structure itself. Unfortunately, I also lived through a reactionary trend of young preachers who adopted the attitude, "Too much doctrine has been preached in the past. It is time to preach practice," so they preached nothing but practice. They failed the Biblical example fully as badly as the "Doctrinal" emphasis which they criticized. God's way is not to replace one extreme with the opposite extreme. God's way is to replace any errant or extreme teaching (Or practice) with the balanced Biblical blend of both in their interrelated harmony. During an era when I was seeking a better balance in my own study and preaching, I read a quip that captures the problem of these two extremes perfectly. "If you preach only doctrine, you'll dry up. If you preach only practice, you'll blow up."

Only when we learn the Biblical model which we see in such passages as 2 Peter 3 can we learn God's better way of studying, preaching, and empowering our personal Christian conduct. It would be difficult to find a more focused lesson on the Second Coming than this chapter, but twice in this lesson (Before Peter begins his closing thoughts) Peter emphasized the necessary ethical implications of our belief in the Second Coming. If the Lord is coming back, as He promised, and if He shall raise our bodies and glorify them for eternity with Him, "**What manner of persons**" ought we to be? (2 Peter 3:11 KJV) To repeat the story from our last study about those Appalachian students with their "Fingerprints and noses" eager anticipation of the Lord's return, such a gleeful anticipation that this belief impacts our whole outlook on and reaction to whatever comes our way in life. "Come Lord Jesus."

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Biblical Second Coming Ethic

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. (2 Peter 3:13-14 KJV 1900)

I hold strongly to the concept that context is essential to gain a right and sound understanding of a passage. This chapter primarily deals with the certainty of the Lord's "Promise" to return, bring this world to an end, raise the dead, judge the wicked, and receive His chosen "vessels of mercy" into His presence and joy for eternity. No matter how long the delay, our faithful God made this promise to His people in Scripture. We can rest securely in the certainty of that day of all days. Unbelieving scoffers may taunt and ridicule believers, but their scoffing shall not hinder our God and His promise. As Peter

affirmed the link between the Second Coming and our present Christian ethic, how Scripture teaches us to live because we do believe God and His promise, he encouraged us with a reminder of the Lord's promise.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise. (2 Peter 3:9a KJV)

Notice the singular form, "Promise," not "Promises." Peter is teaching us about one particular promise the Lord made to His people. Because He is not "Slack" regarding that promise, Peter continues in Verse 9 to encourage and teach us to embrace repentance as a habit.

Again, in our study passage, Peter uses the singular "Promise" again. Contextually, we are compelled to regard that "Promise" as the same in both verses, the Lord's promise regarding His Second Coming. Peter was martyred around 68 AD, possibly earlier. In the first chapter, Peter seemed to know that his death was imminent.

Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. (2 Peter 1:14 KJV)

The "New heavens and earth" of the New Testament era, including the New Testament Church, existed over thirty years at the time of Peter's writing, so Peter's anticipation of a future "new heavens and earth" cannot refer to the change from Old to New Testament. Further, the predicted divine judgment against the city of Jerusalem and the Lord's unfaithful Old Testament people, though coming shortly after the time of Peter's writing the letter, cannot be rightly symbolized as "new heavens and new earth." Are we to think no gospel blessings, including the New Testament Church existed prior to 70 AD? Not logically or Biblically.

Consider. At the time of Peter's writing this letter, the New Testament era was already fully established, and the Lord's faithful disciples were daily tasting of those blessings. Jesus dated the beginning of the New Testament era, witnessed by the gospel being preached to the Lord's people, regardless of their race or culture, with the beginning of John's preaching. (Luke 16:16 KJV) The Lord's righteous judgment against the people who rejected Him, the AD 70 Roman siege and destruction of the City of Jerusalem, can hardly be compared to this new heavens and earth. It was a divine judgment, not the culmination of the gospel era and related blessings. What was yet to come that could accurately be described as "new heavens and new earth"? What future event appears repeatedly in the New Testament as the primary motive for believers to live faithfully to the Lord, no matter the trials they face? And our answer (I listed just a few "Resurrection Ethic" passages in our last study), I believe, is the Second Coming.

...**wherein dwelleth righteousness.** Despite the blessings New Testament believers have enjoyed in the gospel, we do not live in a world where righteousness rules. Ah, but we long for such a place.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on

the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16 KJV)

The grand fulfillment of that prepared city “...**wherein dwelleth righteousness**” remains yet to come, but its coming is certain, assured by the faithful promise of our God who has never—ever—failed to honor His promises to His children. Therefore, we can long for that day and joyfully anticipate it (Biblical hope) in faith. In fact, in His symbolizing of the final judgment, Jesus shall welcome His redeemed “Sheep” with the declaration that their place in eternal glory with Him was “...**prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**” (Matthew 25:34 KJV)

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. We seldom use “Wherefore,” but it appears consistently in Scripture. It is a connective word. It links what has gone before in the immediate context with what follows. The idea is simple. Because of what has gone before, it is self-evident that what follows is or should be. In our study lesson, Peter builds his admonition to diligently, faithfully strive to live our daily life so that the Lord may always find us “...**in peace, without spot, and blameless.**” If we incorporate the omniscience and omnipresence of God, we cannot imagine that the Lord doesn’t know what is going on in our life, so He occasionally checks on us and “Finds” us in a particular state. Think of these traits of the Lord and apply them to “Found” as Peter uses the word. We spend much of our days busy with work, caring for our household, interacting with business associates or with loved ones. How do we manage all these activities? Though the Lord always knows, periodically He touches our conscience to either affirm and encourage us in well doing or to convict us to do better. It is those “Found” moments in our own experience of which Peter wrote. When the Lord so touches our awareness with His teachings, how will our conscience respond? Will we feel a sense of peace, and faithfulness to the Lord? In this setting, “blameless” refers more to a clear peaceful conscience than to flawless perfection.

Believers infected with the spirit of legalism often observe that it is impossible for any believer to reach a “Blameless” degree of obedience before God. If this is true, why did New Testament inspired writers admonish believers to be “Blameless” in their faith? Our study passage is not the only New Testament reference to godly conduct described as “Blameless.”

1. Luke 1:6. Luke described Zecharias and Elizabeth as “Blameless” in their walk.
2. Philippians 2:15, Paul admonishes us to be “...blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke.”
3. 1 Timothy 3:2, a bishop, spiritual overseer, is to be blameless.
4. 1 Timothy 3:10, as is a man considered for the office of deacon.
5. 1 Timothy 5:7, a “widow indeed” is to be blameless.
6. Titus 1:5-6, Paul twice requires the men Titus is to consider as elders to be ordained to be blameless.

All these passages use this “blameless” in specific reference to lifestyle, not to the standing in eternal

salvation of individuals named.

If we embrace the legalist's strained and defeatist's mindset, we might give up and become lax in our efforts in godliness. But the Holy Spirit directed this word and concept too many times in the New Testament to allow a believer to rest in legalism. If we regard ourselves as saved-from-the-gallows criminals, this unbiblical idea might be understandable. However, if we follow Scripture and regard ourselves as children of God, members of His beloved family, everything changes.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Romans 6:11-13 KJV)

If we respect Paul's teaching in these verses, how are we to regard ourselves? He repeats his point, "... **alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord,**" "...**as those that are alive from the dead.**" To "reckon" in this lesson means an official, and constant mindset. Think of yourselves in this way, no longer as pardoned criminals. I spent most of my business career in accounting. In an earlier time, characterized by the image of the accountant with a garter on his shirt sleeve, the accounting process, tightly defined by known rules and procedures, was referred to as "Reckoning the books." Likewise, in this passage, Paul intended a formally defined outlook that believers should faithfully embrace and maintain. A person's outlook has a material impact on the outcome of his/her conduct. Many hymns regrettably celebrate this unbiblical attitude. Instead of singing about how sinful we are, Scripture teaches us to sing in church about our God and His gracious goodness to us. Far more appropriate to this Biblical "Reckoning" are such hymns as "I'm a Child of the King!"

If we regard ourselves as children in the beloved family of God, such values as "Blameless" take on a different meaning than if we think of ourselves as pardoned criminals.

How do these qualities which Peter names manifest in our conduct? I offer a tame description of daily activity, though life is seldom so tame. A work associate says or does something that irritates you, a family member takes advantage of you or speaks hurtful words to you. And then there are all those "Life happens" moments that surprise us. You forgot to pay an important bill last month, and you get a warning note in the mail. You forgot to enter a large check in your checkbook, so you thought you had sufficient funds in your bank account to cover another check you just wrote, but your bank notifies you that you've overdrawn your account. Those surprise moments are the stuff that drives us to the wall and puts our faith-in-action to the decisive test. We are liable to react before we ponder our faith. How does our conscience react tonight when we reflect on the day, perhaps as we are reading some verses from our Bible? Oh no, I didn't deal with that unpleasant situation at work in a way that honors my faith. And I was just telling a fellow employee about my faith, hoping to encourage him to attend church with me next Sunday. Did my reaction show him how deep the roots of my faith grow in my life? Or did I just persuade him that my faith is shallow? It is these moments that Peter likely intended with "**be found of him.**" How we "Reckon" ourselves joins with how we regard the Lord's return to empower us to "**be found of him in peace, without spot, blameless.**" These two key "Outlooks" can transform

our lives. He's coming! Heaven is real! How then should we live through the daily stuff of life?

Elder Joe Holder