

Dear Friends,

Over the last few studies, we've examined Peter's teaching in 2 Peter 3 on the Second Coming. When He returns, He shall not come in obscurity. We shall not hide our faces from Him or regard Him as **"...stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."** (Isaiah 53:4 KJV) Scripture does not teach a "Secret rapture." It rather teaches that, when the Lord returns, **"...every eye shall see him,"** even those who crucified Him, along with all the kindred of the earth. (Revelation 1:7 KJV)

Over my time in the faith, I've known a number of very devoted and sincere believers who honestly believed that they would live to see the Lord's return, and I sadly witnessed their death. Though the Lord didn't return as they expected during their lifetime, they died in the hope of seeing Him. And in that point, I believe they were not disappointed. The moment they closed their eyes to this life, they opened them to the Lord and His glory. Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 3 that, though the Lord's return may be tomorrow or a thousand years or more in the future, He shall return. Our faith in that bright day is sound and true.

As Peter concludes his teaching on this comforting theme, he turns, as do many Scripture writers, to instructive teaching on our conduct for the here and now. Since we are waiting for the Lord to return, and since we do not know--cannot know--when, how should we spend our time now?

A final word regarding today as we remember and celebrate the Lord's resurrection. It is interesting to ponder the exact day of Jesus' death. He compared His death and burial with Jonah's three days and nights in the whale's (Or "Great fish") belly. So, did He die on Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday? At one time, I formed some ideas and made too much of them. When Paul described the gospel that he preached to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:1-11), he emphasized **"...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures."** (1 Corinthians 15:4 KJV) But he didn't mention a word about when He died. The essential message of the gospel reminds us of what Jesus did, and that information should command all our interest and faith. Not just on Easter, but every day we live, we should celebrate, "He is risen!" And that fresh faith should nudge us to live a "Resurrection ethic" lifestyle. (Colossians 3:1-17 KJV)

Celebrating His glory,
Joe Holder

Work While You Wait

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Peter 3:15-17 KJV 1900)

Followers of God have always found it difficult to wait. Waiting for something, especially something we know to be good, tries our impatient hearts. Peter started this lesson by refuting scoffers who argued against the Second Coming from their faithless perspective of impatience. He reminds us in those early verses that the Lord is long-suffering (Verse 9) “...**to usward.**” Generally, when Scripture refers to how we deal with things, it uses the word “patience.” When dealing with how we deal—or in this case, the Lord deals—with people, it uses “Long-suffering.” Peter leads us to ponder the Lord’s “Long-suffering” kindness toward us, toward His people.

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. We are born into this world, we live, we are born again into the family of God, but through our lifetime, we often stumble and fall. The Lord chastens, grievously so when we refuse to repent, but He never abandons His Father’s heart of love and, yes, “**longsuffering.**” He never regards us as other than His beloved children.

While the scoffers used the long delay of the Lord’s return as grounds for rejecting any idea of the Second Coming, Peter uses the same delay as his grounds for believing in that glorious day. A while back I overheard a dejected young person say she had given up on God because of the pain and unfairness of life. The thought occurred to me. In the same vein of thought as Peter’s teaching in this chapter, the pain and unfairness of life is one of my strong grounds outside the Bible for believing in God. If we immerse our minds in this world, we inevitably reach the same concluding that Solomon reached in Ecclesiastes. “**All is vanity and vexation of the spirit.**” However, in the end, Solomon rejected this hopeless concluding and remembered the right “... conclusion of the whole matter” of life. “**Fear God and keep his commandments....**” (Ecclesiastes 12:13a KJV) If this whole universe collapses into pain and unfairness, there can be no meaning or sense to anything. However, if we look past the pain and consider that Scripture reveals a God who is “Long-suffering” and kind toward His people now, regardless how other humans treat them, and that, in the end, He shall bring all those who caused pain and unfairness to account before His righteous judgment, we can join Solomon in that final conclusion, “...**for this is the whole duty of man.**”

If we follow Peter’s teaching, every day the Lord delays His coming should remind us. Today we are one day closer to His coming than we were yesterday. Not only in the sense of our ultimate and final salvation, but equally in terms of our daily living, healthy faith remembers the certainty of that day and rejoices in its coming. Heaven is real and eternal. This life with all its pain, unfairness, and trials, difficult as they are now, is temporary. In the end, we shall fully realize that glorious event and “...**ever be with the Lord.**” (1 Thessalonians 4:18 KJV) Keeping the Lord’s certain coming firmly fixed in our minds leads to our “Salvation” from the hopelessness and fear of this present world. Considering the contextual setting of this chapter, our faith in the Lord and His promised return also saves us from unbelieving scoffers who reject Scripture and our God.

...**even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.** None of the apostles or early Christians were immune to error, but they worshipped a God who is flawless. Galatians 2 contains a detailed account of Peter’s stumble in the faith, and of Paul’s confrontation of him. In that lesson, there is no record of how Peter reacted to Paul’s rebuke. But this verse speaks volumes. Instead of allowing his pride to rule and justify his pouting at Paul, Peter accepted Paul’s rebuke and returned to godly faith. Our whole culture today is so ruled by pride that few people indeed manifest the spiritual maturity which Peter exemplified in this situation. I’ve sadly observed more than a few occasions when believers who well knew what Jesus taught in Matthew 18 regarding personal offenses (Different from a manifest error such as Peter’s in Galatians 2), but who refused to even attempt to practice what Jesus taught in that chapter. When we choose to ignore Jesus’ teachings in anything he taught, we need to read and ponder His lesson in the latter portion of Matthew 18.

Peter's abiding love and respect for Paul speaks volumes to us regarding godly mature faith. We have much to learn about godly interpersonal relationships. We are all flawed people struggling to do better with other flawed people as we attempt to serve a perfect God. When I slip, either in my faith or in my conduct toward you, please tell me and help me learn from my failures. And when I confront you, pray for me to do so in grace and not with anger. In most cases of people refusing to practice Matthew 18 (Often claiming that they once tried it and it didn't work), the failure relates more to their wrong attitude in their attempt than the failure of Jesus' teaching. I've been on the receiving end of both types of confrontation, and sadly I confess that I've also confronted other believers in both ways. Whenever my effort failed, reflection convicted me that my failure was not because of Jesus' teaching, or even necessarily a problem with the other person. It was my own failure to confront with love and grace.

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Although the New Testament was incomplete at the time Peter wrote this epistle, obviously Peter was aware of some of Paul's writings. Peter doesn't mention the things in Paul's letters that are "**hard to be understood**," but anyone familiar with Paul's letters might list some of those difficult passages.

How do we go about interpreting those "**hard to be understood**" passages in Scripture? Often Bible readers tend to unleash their imagination when they encounter a difficult passage, a guarantee for a wrong view of the text. I offer a few basic principles for wise Biblical interpretation that we should follow when studying all Bible lessons, not just the difficult ones.

1. **Context.** Look within the immediate context of the difficult passage, both before and after it, for the flow of information and reasoning. If we can learn from the context that the writer was reasoning or teaching "1," "2", followed by the difficult passage, and then "4," study to learn the identity and meaning of "4." Study other passages that teach the same truths in a clearer form to learn from them.

A word of caution. "Context" refers to writings in near proximity to the text in question. I've known people (And even read one book) who identify one word in a passage, and then chase that word all over the Bible, claiming they are following context. They ignore literary context in this unwise habit, a practice that leads more to confusion and errant interpretations than to right ones.

2. **Literal over symbolic.** Important Bible teachings are regularly taught in literal form. If the inspired writer uses symbols, look for the reason. Knowing he was writing on a difficult idea, he might have been directed to illustrate that lesson with a simple analogy or other symbolic form. Always, no exception, interpret any symbolic Bible text by literal passages on the same theme or subject. Never reach an imaginative interpretation of a symbolic passage, and then apply your imaginative idea onto the literal text.

3. **Harmony and repetition.** If you study a passage and think of an interpretation that you like, check your thinking with other Scriptures on the same theme or subject. If your idea contradicts or strains other Scriptures, abandon your idea. A basic premise of studying Scripture as God-inspired and God-given, accepts that, regardless of the human writer, the Holy Spirit directed the writing of all Scripture, and He never contradicts Himself.

Repetition. A novel interpretation of a given passage that never appears in any other passage should always be avoided. The Holy Spirit repeats His teaching throughout Scripture, so look for those repetitions in passages that teach on the theme you are studying.

...which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. It is not wrong to be unlearned at a point in time, though it is a grievous wrong to remain in ignorance, especially when the Lord gave us such a thorough and informative Book as our Bible. Being unstable in our faith is a greater problem. A believer who lacks stability in faith has a deeper problem than mere ignorance. Instability often indicates unbelief. "I don't agree with the Bible on this point, so I'll poll various people and get their ideas." Often the unstable believer will give eager voice to the last person who

gave him their ideas. Don't be surprised if, the next time you see this person, he has a different idea about the doctrine or passage in question. He is merely echoing a more recent idea from another person. Worse yet, the unstable believer may randomly think of a different idea and adopt it for the moment as, in his thinking, absolute truth. Literally, to "wrest" means to twist out of joint or place. Most errant ideas claim a "Wrested" interpretation of Scripture, a "**private interpretation**," (2 Peter 1:20 KJV) and not the intended-by-the-Holy-Spirit meaning.

Peter warns us. These two habits reveal a far deeper and more serious problem. To wrest a passage of Scripture means to distort or to misrepresent its teachings. For this person, the idea that the Holy Spirit intended His meaning, not whatever we imagine it to be, is unfathomable. They literally prefer to twist the Scriptures out of joint and reshape the Scriptures into their personal opinions, their "private interpretation," as Peter described the error.

Peter has confirmed our faith in the Lord's final and victorious return. He has refuted the scoffer's "wrested" error. And, finally, he instructs us how to live our life while we wait for His return. An old hymn reads, "We'll wait till Jesus comes." Occasionally, you might read a revised, "We'll work till Jesus comes." I suggest the wise and Biblical chorus should be, "We'll work while we wait till Jesus comes." Paul teaches this same truth. (1 Corinthians 15:58 KJV)

Elder Joe Holder