

UNDERSTANDING THE DAY OF THE LORD (2 Pet 3.1-10)

Focus on “eschatology,” “the biblical doctrine of last things.” “The day of the Lord” (DOL), a major biblical theme, “that predicted time when God will intervene, finally, universally, and decisively, in the affairs of humanity and all creation, in both blessing and judgment.” Previous instances of the DOL were all temporal and local judgments (Obad 15, end of Edom c. 300 BC) → eternal and universal judgments of “the great and terrible DOL” (Joel 2.31). This DOL is not an age between ages but a literal day, the end of this age and beginning of the age to come or the eternal state. The DOL is when Christ returns, general resurrection and judgment, all moral creatures forever in either heaven or hell, cosmic redemption, full realization of God’s kingdom.

Peter chooses DOL as his second and last epistle’s closing theme to help believers spiritually more than anything else (cf. 1.14-15). He alludes to it earlier in 1.11 (abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of LJC); 1.16-17 (transfiguration a glimpse of 2nd coming); and 2.4-9 (judgment of angels, Noah’s generation, and Sodomites, all precursors of DOL, righteous delivered, unjust punished). My aim → review DOL basic truths (3.1-10) and to apply them (3.11-16).

The DOL will come, certainly, finally, and suddenly, and everything will be changed forever.

ITS GUARANTEE (3.1-2)

Guarantee → “a formal promise or assurance, typically in writing, that certain conditions will be fulfilled” (NOAD).

By Divine Promise. We K-N-O-W for sure DOL is coming because of God’s ancient, oft-repeated promises. Peter reminds readers of what they already knew from previous revelations, “words spoken before [predictions, ESV] by the holy prophets” (OT), and “the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (NT, including this epistle). Latter expression emphasizes divine authority of the apostolic message. Many biblical passages from Gen-Rev foretell DOL; to doubt them is the height of irreverent unbelief, in this passage an evidence of wickedness (3.3-4). As sure as God is, has spoken in Scripture, and cannot lie, the DOL will certainly come as He said.

For Devout Remembrance. Peter writes of this to “stir up” (awaken, stimulate thinking) the “pure minds” of believers by remembering God’s promises. Implies our forgetfulness about this, when we should “be mindful of” (in other contexts: “be betrothed,” Luke 1.27) these prophetic words of the promised DOL. God intends His guarantee to be spiritually motivational.

ITS MERCIFUL DELAY (3.3-9)

We must resist the temptation to forgetfulness and discouragement because the DOL seems so long in coming.

An Occasion of Scoffing (3.3-4). This prophecy builds on others (Matt 24.36-39, 44; Luke 21.34-35; cf. 1 Thess 5.2-3). Their speaking this way is a mark of “the last days.” They scoff to continue “walking after their own lusts;” their skepticism is a cloak for self-gratification. Assumes “uniformitarianism,” that things must continue as they have. Contrary to reason (why is it necessarily so?) and evidence.

A Parallel with the Flood (3.5-7). They “willingly are ignorant of” [forget, overlook, suppress] biblical “catastrophism,” sudden cataclysmic changes are possible by God’s command (two down, one to go):

1) **CREATION** (3.5). God spoke the heavens and the earth into existence. Each of the six days of creation begins with “And God said” (Gen 1.1; cf. 1.3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24). Earth from the water (Gen 1.9). We know this *by faith* (God said so, Heb 11.3), not by science. We must depend on God’s Word to know the very beginning and the very end of the world, since these are miracles, not ordinary providence. Denying a six-day creation is evil unbelief.

2) **THE FLOOD** (3.6). A type of the end of the world: “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” It did not cease to exist but suffered a kind of ruin. All mankind died except for the ark’s 8 people (1 Pet 3.20). The entire earth was covered with water (Gen 7.19-20). “Whereby” → the waters. God commanded them and the earth appeared; God commanded the waters again and the earth perished → God’s total control of His creation (Psa 33.6-7). Denying a worldwide flood is evil unbelief.

3) **THE FIERY DOL** (3.7). By His Word, God first created, then flooded, now preserves, and will burn up, His creation. This will happen on “the day of judgment and perdition [destruction] of ungodly men,” that is, the DOL, yet future ONLY because God has not willed (i.e., commanded) it. Denying or doubting the future DOL is evil unbelief.

A Result of God’s Patience (3.8-9). “But” (in spite of this long delay) remember “this one thing,” an important point to bolster your hope for the DOL. “One day is with the Lord [i.e., in the divine reckoning] as a thousand years,” etc. This is not to say that God cannot tell time, or that one day equals 1000 years in some sensational prophecy calendar. Much less is this “an indication of the fact that there are actually 1,000 years after the first phase of the Day of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation, and the last phase of the 1,000 years later at the end of the millennial kingdom when the Lord creates the new heaven and the new earth” (MacArthur Study Bible). Here MacArthur rejects a literal Day of the Lord, stretching

it to 1,000 years! Rather, this saying means that God does not reckon time as we do (cf. Ps 90.4). He is the God of eternity; we, the creatures of a day.

A denied explanation: “the Lord is not slack [slow] concerning His promise.” He is not late re: the DOL. We may procrastinate keeping promises through inability or insincerity, but not God. The *true explanation:* “the Lord is . . . longsuffering” (forbearing, patient). He forbears destroying sinners because He will save them. “Us” → all He intends to save, the elect. God is “not willing that ANY [of the elect] should perish, but that ALL [of the elect] should come to repentance.” If this were absolutely universal, the DOL would never come! When God has saved the last of one His chosen people, then the end will come and destroy many sinners.

ITS SUDDEN ARRIVAL (3.10a)

Now because men seem tempted to speculate more in the realm of prophecy than in any other sphere of biblical teaching, and because we seem more likely to go astray in our views of these things, a considerable proportion of what we will hear now is the plain testimony of Scripture itself rather than much interpretation of the Scriptures.

Like a Thief in the Night. Points of similarity—*surprising* (skeptics don’t expect it), *sudden* (not gradual), *disastrous* (to those unprepared; cf. 1 Thess 5.4).

At the Return of Jesus Christ. In Peter’s doctrine, this DOL is Christ’s “coming” (3.4), His “promise” (3.9; cf. John 14.3; Acts 1.11; 3.20-21). Both the DOL and Christ’s return are repeatedly compared to a thief’s coming because they are the *same event* (Matt 24.42-44; 1 Thess 5.2; Rev 3.3; 16.15).

ITS CATAclysmic CHANGE (3.10b)

Brethren, this one verse absolutely destroys any notion of premillennialism—that a literal, 1000-year earthly kingdom comes between Christ’s return and the beginning of the eternal state. Watch Peter’s language very carefully here.

The End of This Age. “In the which,” i.e., in this DOL which will come as a thief in the night (3.10a), this day when Christ will return from heaven to earth, when the present created order will suffer the greatest catastrophe ever known, of which the great flood was only a shadow. Other translations agree with the sense of the AV’s precise rendering, linking the DOL with the very end of the world.

- ESV: 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.

- NET: But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; *when it comes*, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare.
- Weymouth: The day of the Lord will come like a thief—*it will be a day on which* the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise, the elements be destroyed in the fierce heat, and the earth and all the works of man be utterly burnt up.

What, then, will happen at Christ’s return? “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” This is God acting to “purify His creation from all traces of human sin and rebellion.”¹ This is the fire and judgment of 3.7; the dissolution of this present created order of 3.12; the prelude to the “great white throne” scene, when the earth and the heaven flee away from the face of Christ and all mankind are raised to stand before Him for judgment (Rev 20.11-15; cf. John 5.28-29; Matt 25.31-32).

The Beginning of the Age to Come. Right after this general resurrection and Judgment Day, the new heaven and the new earth appear, the cosmic renewal and full realization of God’s eternal kingdom of grace and glory (Rev 21.1-8). This is the complex of events (Christ’s return, resurrection and judgment of all mankind, and the beginning of the eternal state) toward which Christians “look” (expect, anticipate) because this DOL is PENDING (2 Pet 3.13). How could we be looking for a new heavens and a new earth as the next thing in God’s plan of redemption if it is going to be postponed for at least 1007 years after Christ appears and we are raptured to heaven?

The book of Revelation emphasizes the suddenness and swiftness of this judgment at Christ’s return. It is not stretched out over a literal seven-year tribulation period as dispensationalism alleges, but rather it takes place very quickly, within a day, even in one hour, and this is part of its terror. John’s vision stresses this point in “Babylon’s” destruction, a symbol for the demise of the entire world order arrayed in rebellion against God (Rev 18.1-2, 8-10, 16-19). The swiftness of this destruction displays the Lord’s terrible wrath and awe-inspiring power.

Thus we have seen from Scripture itself that the DOL will come—certainly, finally, and suddenly—and when it does come, everything will be changed forever. Now this has very definite implications about how we should think and live here and now, explained in 2 Pet 3.11-16, to be expounded later.

¹ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, p. 138.

APPLYING THE DAY OF THE LORD (2 Pet 3.11-16)

Right now counts forever. What kind of a person you are and how you spend the few days of your life has eternal consequences. That is a sobering thought we all need to take more seriously and to remember often.

Further, everyone needs to be spiritually renewed, both Christians and unbelievers alike. You who are not yet true Christians are dead in your trespasses and sins, totally cut off from fellowship with God and enslaved to sinful desires. Even real Christians, though spiritually alive, are not as spiritually healthy and vigorous as we ought to be. Our faith, though true, wavers; our zeal wanes. We have a natural tendency to revert to our old worldliness, to think and live just as we did before conversion.

Knowing he would die soon, Peter wrote one more inspired letter to his beloved brethren. In this last chapter, he focuses on the coming DOL as the most important truth for us to consider, we who are all *desperately in need* of spiritual renewal. Some Christians shy away from “eschatology” because it is controversial, but the biblical message about the future promotes our salvation. This accounts for so many enemies to eschatological truth. Just as the fundamental truths of the gospel are under siege, so also are basic truths of the biblical teaching on the end.

Surveying 2 Peter 3, we see first of all (3.1-10) some basic truths about the Day of the Lord (DOL), namely, that *the DOL will come, certainly, finally, and suddenly, and everything will be changed forever*. Of everything you could learn from the Bible, this is one of the most important.

Second, Peter applies the truth of this coming DOL toward our spiritual renewal (3.11-16).

The coming DOL calls for a renewed life, a renewed outlook, and a renewed effort toward ultimate salvation.

You see, if the coming DOL does not first grip your heart as a vital truth, if you are confused about it or neglect it, then you cannot have the spiritual benefit of applying it to your life. God has used this prophetic truth again and again to save sinners and revitalize saints. My prayer is that He will do it again through these messages.

A RENEWED LIFE (3.11-12)

Notice two topics: future ruin and present spirituality. The coming cataclysmic ruin of this present creation order implies we must act *now* to be saved *then*. The very moment Christ returns, it will be too late to repent and believe.

This World Is Coming to a Ruinous End

Future ruin is the thought of 3.11a and 12b. The time when it will happen is referred to as “the day of God,” a phrase which is equivalent to “the day of the Lord” (3.10; 1

Thess 5.2), “that great and notable day of the Lord” (Acts 2.20), “that great day of God Almighty” (Rev 16.14), “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” and similar expressions (1 Cor 1.8; 5.5; 2 Cor 1.14; Phil 1.6, 10; 2.16; 2 Thess 2.2), “the great day of his [the Lamb’s] wrath” (Rev 6.17), “the day of judgment” (Matt 10.15; 2 Pet 2.9; 3.7; 1 Pet 4.16), and “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2.5). It is the last literal day of this age and the first day of the age to come or eternity. Peter writes about the “coming of the day of God.” It is coming toward us even more certainly than sunrise tomorrow. It is THE future event toward which God’s people have looked from the beginning, and especially since Christ left for heaven.

What will happen on this great day, the last day? Here Peter emphasizes the complete ruin of the present creation, “the heavens and the earth which are now” (3.7). In 3.10 this is further described as “the heavens” with its “elements,” and “the earth also, and the works that are therein.” The creation account lays a foundation for biblical cosmology. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1.1). Throughout Scripture, this phrase is all-encompassing, designating the whole creation (Gen 2.1; 14.19; Josh 2.11; Psa 89.11). Everything except the moral beings to be judged (humans and angels) will undergo the cleansing conflagration.

“All these things shall be dissolved” (3.11a). “The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (3.12b; cf. 10b). In both instances, the original for “dissolved” means literally “loosed,” and has been used of the demolition of a house and dismantling of a ship. It does not mean that the materials cease to exist but that they are broken down into their constituent parts. The first phrase (3.11a) is a present tense, stimulating our imagination as if we were there. One day the heavens and the earth will “flee away” in a huge ball of fire and you stand apart and before the glorious Son of God upon the Great White Throne whose eyes are like a flame of fire (Rev 20.11; 1.14). Too few people really believe this and live like it.

Therefore We Must Be Godly and Live Holily

Present spirituality is our reasonable response to this announcement about the future. College students finish each semester with final exams, those all-important tests announced beforehand that measure their overall grasp of the material. A good student lives all semester long with those finals in mind. If making good grades is her greatest goal, then she tempers her desires for other things and gives day after day to class attendance and night after night to homework. In other words, she knows she *is* a student and she *acts like* a student. When the last day

comes, this student-attitude and student-conduct pays off. She aced her finals with much satisfaction and no regrets.

The stakes are infinitely higher in the spiritual realm. Peter asks rhetorically, “What manner of persons ought ye to be?” “Manner” is a word of division and classification. In some contexts, the original can be inquiring about one’s native country. Here, it reminds us that spiritually there are only two kinds of people after all. True Christians are citizens of heaven (Phil 3.20; “conversation” = country, citizenship). All the rest are worldlings under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5.19)—those who love the world and the things in the world (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life), these things which will pass away forever (1 John 2.15-17). Remember Paul’s counsel based on the premise that the time is short (1 Cor 7.29-31). Nothing you are or accomplish or possess or experience in this world will matter at all on *that* day, except what was pleasing to God. “Only one life / T’will soon be past; / Only what’s done / For Christ will last.”

Not satisfied with a probing question, Peter supplies the answer for what kind of people we must be: “in all holy conversation [conduct, NKJV] and godliness.” Pleasing God is first a matter of what you ARE before Him, and only then of what you DO. Christianity is not just religious “behavior modification” but a radical transformation of your soul with the most blessed consequences in your life. Plurals are used: “in holy behaviors and pieties” (Alford), many instances of Christian acts spurring from many experiences of a truly pious frame of mind. The true Christian life is one characterized by reverential awe towards God that makes one live differently than unbelievers (Jas 1.27; compassion and purity).

Another trait that makes sense before the world comes to a ruinous end is “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.” People who are ready for this can and do 1) expect it and 2) desire it earnestly (so the two Greek words). Some scholars say this verse teaches we can make “the day of God” come sooner than it would have otherwise, but that great day has been fixed from eternity in the divine decree.

The second verb can take on a sense of “hastening,” but if so, the day is hastening us, not vice versa. Calvin translates the phrase “waiting in haste” and wonderfully comments, “As quietness and waiting are the peculiarities of hope, so we must always take heed lest the security of the flesh should creep in; we ought, therefore, strenuously to labor in good works, and run quickly in the race of our calling” (in loc.).

This Christian hope for the end of the world is very motivational and practical (1 John 3.2-3). Barnes wrote,

An habitual contemplation of the truth, that all that we see is soon to pass away, would produce a most salutary effect on the mind. It would make us serious. It would

repress ambition. It would lead us not to desire to accumulate what must so soon be destroyed. It would prompt us to lay up our treasures in heaven. It would cause us to ask with deep earnestness whether we are prepared for these amazing scenes, should they suddenly burst upon us.

A RENEWED OUTLOOK (3.13)

Now Peter turns from creation’s ruin to its redemption. The word he chooses for “new” is one which means “new primarily in reference to quality, the fresh, unworn” (not the other Greek word for new which has primary reference to time, the young, the recent).² This is so very positive and should inspire optimism.

A Glorious New World Is Coming

The TV program “Extreme Home Makeover” always starts with a demolition which never upsets the owners because they know what comes afterward. They get a brand new, large, luxurious home to replace the old one. The old, creaky, miserable house of this present creation is only going to be destroyed so that a new, fresh, clean, pristine, and very, very glorious one can take its place. This is the way our redeeming God operates!

The original creation was a true Paradise. God Himself judged everything that He had made to be “very good” (Gen 1.31). Through Satan’s temptation, *man* rebelled against God’s benevolent rule and then justly suffered a divine curse imposed on the whole creation, subjecting it to vanity (Gen 3). But God subjected it to this in the hope for a glorious future, because not only mankind, but the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption precipitated by sin (Rom 8.20-21). To quote Milton, Paradise lost will become Paradise restored! Not only will all elect sinners inherit heavenly glory, but there will be a total renewal of the heavens and the earth.

Peter seems to be alluding to Isa 65.17-25. This is not the premillennialist’s millennium but the eternal state—even the *Scofield Reference Bible* admits that “verse 17 looks beyond the kingdom-age to the new heavens and the new earth.” Isaiah uses language of accommodation. He writes in terms his contemporaries could understand, incorporating concepts from both OT Judaism and human experience in a fallen world to explain something of the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. We must not interpret every phrase in a crassly literal way.

Isaiah’s prophecy is an early prophetic glimpse which is progressively revealed in later biblical statements. The greatest is Rev 21-22, where John received the most clear and full vision of this redemption of creation (n.b. 21.1, 8, 27). I believe we may be warranted from Rev 21.2-5 to say that the heaven/earth distinction will finally be eliminated

² ESL #5852.

altogether. I believe this is implied by the New Jerusalem’s descending from heaven to earth, and the announcement that “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them,” besides many other biblical intimations.

From [Rev 21.3] we learn that the dwelling place of God will no longer be away from the earth but on the earth. Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the new earth.³

Peter highlights one trait of this new creation in particular: in it *righteousness* dwells (i.e., “has its home. In the word there is both the sense of permanence and of pervasive influence”⁴). The blessed residents of this redeemed eternity all love God supremely and love their neighbor as themselves, for such love is the essence of righteousness. At its very center is the God of all righteousness and His righteous Son Jesus Christ, adored by the saints for eternity through the constant and powerful influences of the righteous Holy Spirit.

Therefore We Wait Eagerly for It

With this understanding of the blessings awaiting true Christians, we who believe do indeed “look for” it with hope according to His promise. Hebrews 9.28 says, “unto those who look for him [i.e., Christ] shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” Here, “those who look for him” is just another label for real Christians.

This looking for the coming of Christ, which is a description of faith by a principal effect and fruit of it, called also waiting, expecting, longing, earnest expectation, consists in five things: 1) *Steadfast faith of his coming and appearance . . .* 2) *Love unto it, as that which is most desirable . . .* 3) *Longing for it, or desires after it . . .* 4) *Patient waiting for it, in the midst of all discouragements. . .* 5) *Preparation for it, that we may be ready and meet for his reception.*⁵

We only begin to *yearn* for the new creation after we *become* a new creation (2 Cor 5.17). All this passing away of the old and creation of the new, both personal and cosmic, comes about through the Savior Jesus Christ, and He begets in our hearts an incurable and infectious optimism.

The doctrine of the new earth should give us hope, courage, and optimism in a day of widespread despair. Though evil is rampant in this world, it is comforting to know that Christ has won the final victory. . . . This does not mean that we need do nothing about [current] problems, but it does mean that we work for solutions to these problems, not with a feeling of despair, but in the confidence of hope. . . . We must indeed be working

for a better world now. Our efforts to bring the kingdom of Christ into fuller manifestations are of eternal significance. Our Christian life today, our struggles against sin—both individual and institutional—our mission work, our attempt to develop and promote a distinctively Christian culture, have value not only for this world but even for the world to come.⁶

And they will be crowned with success at last! The coming DOL warrants our response in a renewed life and a renewed outlook of optimism, dear brethren (1 Cor 15.58)!

A RENEWED EFFORT (3.14-16)

The coming DOL also calls for a renewed effort toward ultimate salvation. To many professing Christians today, that sounds like heresy. They judge any connection of effort and salvation as a denial of the gospel of grace. Rather, this widespread reaction only illustrates how little most professing Christians understand the true gospel.

That Wonderful Day Is Yet Future

Peter’s spiritual and ethical appeal, starting in 3.14b, is based on 1) the actual futurity of the day, 2) our eager expectation that day, and 3) our common identity as those especially beloved by God.

First, the terrible (3.10-12) and wonderful (3.13) DOL has not yet occurred. Understanding the nature of the DOL puts this matter beyond all debate. The consummation of God’s redemptive plan is not yet come. We are living in the “already but not yet” time of God’s developing kingdom, inaugurated by Christ in His first coming, and only to be fully accomplished in His second coming. We are greatly advantaged in *this particular time* of redemptive history, between the advents.

- Before Christ came, God “suffered all nations (Gentiles, pagans) to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14.16).
- Before Christ came, mankind lived in “the times of this ignorance” of universal idolatry when men thought “that the Godhead was like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”
- Before Christ came, “God winked at” or “overlooked” (alt. trans.) those times, . . .

. . . “but *now* [that Christ has come and the gospel is preached, God] commandeth all men every where to repent. Because He hath appointed a day [the DOL, yet future even now in the 21st century], in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained,” that is, our risen Lord, Jesus Christ (Acts 17.29-31). Now that Christ has come, you have gospel light, and since Christ has not yet returned, you have gospel opportunity. How highly blessed and privileged each one of you are! Before Christ came the pagans perished in

³ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 285.

⁴ EGT, Nicoll, in loc.

⁵ John Owen, *Commentary on Hebrews*, in loc.

⁶ Hoekema, pp. 286-287.

darkness and their souls are now in hell. For twenty centuries now countless people have spurned gospel light and have joined the old pagans. In eternity the reprobate will be weeping and gnashing their teeth for their lost opportunities, so lightly esteemed by them before (cf. Prov 5.11-14). But today you are suspended between heaven and hell and God mercifully calls you upward through Christ.

Second, Peter's exhortation appeals to the believer's eager expectation of that day. "Wherefore, . . . seeing that ye look for such things" refers to a positive, hopeful, forward-looking eager expectation of the new heavens and the new earth (3.13). The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Sprinting only takes a brief spurt of motivation; only the tenacious finish a marathon. However, even marathon-finishers are vulnerable to losing heart along the way. They may slacken their pace and even feel strongly tempted to quit altogether. Even champions suffer these things, and Peter is here encouraging future champions in the race of salvation by reminding them of the gladness and the glory of the finish line. You can keep putting one foot in front of the other as long as you relish the end because that will motivate you. *Then* is your rest, not now. *Then* is your reward, not now. *Then* you will be done with running and be praised by your Exemplar and Inspiration. Until then, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (Heb 12.1-3)!

Third, Peter addresses his readers as "beloved," not just to him, but more importantly, to God, and if we are beloved, the DOL will be a wonderful day to us. "Beloved" (Gk. *agapetos*) is a beautiful term of endearment related to that distinctively Christian word for love. It indicates a close relationship, especially that love of a parent for his only child,⁷ the special object of affection.⁸ Isaac was Abraham's beloved (Gen 22.2 LXX, same word). Jesus is His heavenly Father's beloved (Matt 3.17). You saints, among all the people who live on earth, are God's beloved (Rom 1.7). He loves you with exactly same kind and degree of love, *indeed with the very same love* that He has for His only Son, because He loves you *IN* and *FOR THE SAKE OF* His Son!

As little is more demoralizing than thinking no one cares about you, so it follows that little strengthens us more than considering the greatness of God's special love for each and every one of His elect, a love so far beyond His general love for all mankind that God did not withhold even His only begotten Son for your sake, while He leaves the reprobate to their just condemnation! If God so loves His favorites, can we think for a moment He will stand to let them perish? No! no! a thousand times no! If God so

loves you, then how can you harden your heart to His call for greater devotion to Him?

What reason is there why I should leave my Lord? What defense could I make, what excuse could I offer for so doing? Is there any reason why I should not abide in constant fellowship with Him? Why should I be like one who turns aside? Perhaps it may be said that others turn aside, but why should I be like one of them? There may be excuses for such an act in others, but there can be none for me: Thy rich love, Thy free love, Thy undeserved love, Thy special love to me, has bound me hand and foot: how can I turn aside? There may be some professors who owe Thee little, but I, once the chief of sinners owe Thee so much, how can I turn aside? There may be some with whom Thou hast dealt hardly who may turn aside, but Thou hast been so tender, so kind to me, how can I forget Thee? There may be some who know but little of Thee, whose experience of Thee is so slender that their turning aside is not so amazing; but how can I turn aside when Thou hast showed me Thy love, and revealed Thy heart to me?⁹

So much of your spiritual instability is the result of shaky assurance, but you ought to believe the words of Jesus to His disciples with all your heart: "the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16.27 ESV). With this foundation laid in 2 Pet 3.14, the Spirit exhorts us.

Therefore We Must Keep Doing Two Things:

These exhortations come with great force as commands directed to you Christians in particular. "Be diligent" and "account" are the two verbs around which the exhortations cluster.

➤ Make every effort to be found ready for Christ.

The first verb in the original can mean "to make haste, be zealous . . . [and in this context] zealous effort. . . . At issue . . . is an actualizing of salvation, a fulfilling of what has been opened up by grace."¹⁰ The AV chose "be diligent" for its excellent connotations: "steady in application to business; constant in effort or exertion to accomplish what is undertaken; assiduous; attentive; industrious; not idle or negligent."¹¹ The NIV paraphrases aptly here, "Make every effort." You can only live the Christian life on purpose. Living as a real Christian does not come naturally to any of us, but requires diligent and persevering effort, day after day. I know that grates on antinomian ears, but so be it.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones identified a lack of discipline as a common cause of spiritual depression, and repentance as a cure. He points out that the outstanding men and women in church history like Edwards and Whitefield have all been highly-disciplined. Then Lloyd-Jones answers an objection:

⁷ BAGD.

⁸ LN 25.45.

⁹ Spurgeon, MTP #1115.

¹⁰ TDNT.

¹¹ Webster's 1828 Dictionary.

“But,” says someone, “your preaching, is it not an inculcation of justification by works?” You see how subtle the devil is! “Surely you are going back to the Roman Catholic heresy and the whole Catholic type of devotion?” The answer to that argument is that it is the Apostle Peter [who exhorts us to diligence.] . . . And, of course, there is no contradiction at all. The error of justification by works is in trusting to the discipline of your own soul to save your soul; but the opposite to trusting your works is not to do nothing, it is to do everything but not to put your trust in any of it. It is not the works that are wrong, it is the faith in your works, trusting in your works. . . . It seems to me that one of the chief dangers . . . especially in evangelical circles is that, in our fear of the error of justification by works, we have been saying that works do not matter at all. We argue that faith alone counts, and because I am a man of faith it does not matter what I do and my life can be thoroughly lacking in discipline. Out upon the suggestion!¹²

Just as we must give diligence to adding other Christian virtues to our faith (1.5) and to making our calling and election sure (1.10), so we must also give diligence to meet Christ with these two things in order.

First we must keep striving to be found by Him “in peace” when He comes. I agree with Matthew Poole who understood the phrase to mean “at peace with God, from whence proceeds peace of conscience, and an amicable, peaceable disposition toward others; all which may here be comprehended” (in loc.), but this may especially have our legal justification before God in view, our being counted righteous in Christ. When Christ returns, He will find every professor of faith either saved or lost, either reconciled or still bound in deep-seated resistance to Him. You must be diligent to make your calling and election sure (1.10), and then you will be found “in peace.”

Second, we must keep striving to be found by Him “without spot, and blameless.” This must refer either to spiritual perfection as our goal or to spiritual integrity as our real attainment by grace.¹³ This is our actual sanctification, the process of God’s righteous image being restored in our souls.

Only as we heed these exhortations will we be legally and spiritually ready to meet Christ at His second coming, and fit to become blessed inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth. Christ is coming. How will He find you?

Now Peter exhorts us in one more way (vv. 15-16).

➤ Count His patience as your opportunity for salvation.

The way you look at things makes all the difference in how you behave. That is why Peter is so concerned about our perspective on things. The ungodly also notice that this

DOL has not yet come, but they interpret it in the worst possible way. They say, “Where is the promise (i.e., its fulfillment) of His coming?” (3.4), insinuating that the Lord is not trustworthy. Consistent with their perspective, they live as “scoffers, walking after their own lusts” (3.3). Without a trustworthy Word from God, both the incentive and the standard for godliness disappears.

By contrast, you must have a totally different way of looking at this time before the DOL comes. It is not because God lied, nor because He is slow to keep His promise, but because the Lord is longsuffering (patient) toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (3.9). Because this is God’s purpose in postponing judgment, then you must appreciate that, not only in theory but in practice. This is Peter’s second exhortation: “[You must] esteem (i.e., value) that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” for you (3.15), that is, this time is your golden opportunity for salvation. The only ones that truly esteem the spiritual significance of this opportunity are those who seize it with both hands, making the right use of it as God has directed.

Here “salvation” is a very sweeping term that includes, even especially connotes, future justification and reward at Judgment Day. You can do things *now* related to your salvation *then*. Don’t become paralyzed by fatalism!

Peter further appeals to the same doctrine from the writing of his fellow-apostle Paul (3.15b-16), whom he counts a “beloved brother” possessing wisdom given him from the Lord. Evidently the readers were familiar with some of Paul’s epistles, presumably Romans at least, for Peter seems to allude here to Rom 2.4 in particular: “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” The goodness Paul has in mind in that passage is “the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.” The fact that unconverted men, whom Paul is indicting here, do not repent before judgment comes, while they have the opportunity, is evidence that they “despise” these spiritual riches.

To despise [in the original] is to form a low estimate of. They despise the goodness of God, who form such a wrong estimate of it, as to suppose that it gives them a license to sin; who imagine that he will not punish, either because he long forbears, or because his goodness towards us is so great that we shall escape, though others perish.¹⁴

The free grace that Peter and Paul exalted in their letters is not a license to sin but an incentive to holy, forward-looking spiritual diligence. Peter laments that people were “wresting” [distorting, twisting] Paul’s message. Although Paul wrote some things hard to understand, there is no excuse for this misinterpretation.

¹² *Spiritual Depression*, “Discipline,” pp. 210-211.

¹³ Again, Poole’s comments are very helpful here.

¹⁴ Charles Hodge, in loc.

False teachers mishandle the “other Scriptures” (clearly implying canonical status for Paul’s inspired epistles), but they harm no one more than themselves. They are preparing for “their own destruction” (in this context, condemnation on Judgment Day and its aftermath is especially in view). Brethren, the biblical doctrine is plain:

- God gave Noah 120 years to build the ark, and Noah believed God, built the ark, and was saved from the flood.
- God warned Lot to flee from Sodom before the fire fell, and Lot believed God, fled from Sodom and was saved from the fire.
- God ordered Israel through the Red Sea, and Israel believed God, followed Moses, and was saved from Pharaoh’s army.
- God sent two spies to Rahab the harlot, and she believed in their God, hid the spies, and was saved from the destruction of Jericho.
- God promised to be with Joshua in his conquest of Canaan, and Joshua fought the Canaanites and inherited the Promised Land.
- Christ called Peter to follow Him, and Peter left everything and inherited eternal life.
- Jesus appeared to Saul the Pharisee on the road to Damascus, called him into His service, and Paul the Apostle spent himself in missionary work and won a martyr’s crown.

We are saved through faith alone, but we are not saved through a “faith” that is alone, that is, without obedience to God. The great “faith chapter” (Heb 11) emphasizes how that by faith God’s people accomplished great things (see 11.33-34). If the announcement about the coming DOL does not move you to seek the Lord now, you can assure yourself that you lack saving faith. Puritan William Gurnall wrote,

We are obliged to provide for that day, as a suitable return for, and improvement of, the opportunities and means which God affords us for this very end. We cannot without shameful ingratitude to God, make waste of those helps God gives us in order to this great work. Every one would [find fault with him] who basely spent that money on riot *in* prison, which was sent him to procure his deliverance *out of* prison. And do we not blush to bestow those talents upon our lusts and Satan, which God graciously indulges to deliver us from them, and Satan's rage in our dying hour?

What do we have Bibles for, ministers and preaching for, if we do not intend to furnish ourselves by them with armor for the evil day? In a word, what is God’s intention in lengthening our days, and continuing us some while here in the land of the living? Is it that we might have time to revel, or rather [busy oneself] upon

the pleasure of this vain world? Does He give us our precious time to be used in catching such butterflies as these earthly honors and riches are? It cannot be.¹⁵

Jonathan Edwards exhorted his congregation along these very same lines this way:

Men have no reason to expect to be saved in idleness, or to go to heaven in a way of doing nothing. No, in order to it, there is a great work, which must be not only begun, but finished. . . . It is not only necessary that men should seem to be very much engaged, and appear as if they were devoted to their duty for a little while; but there must be a *constant* devotedness, in a persevering way, as Noah was to the business of the building the ark, going on with that great, difficult, and expensive affair, till it was finished, and till the flood came. Men must not only be diligent in the use of the means of grace, and be anxiously engaged to escape eternal ruin, till they obtain hope and comfort; but afterwards they must persevere in the duties of religion, till the flood come, the flood of death. Not only must the faculties, strength, and possessions of men be devoted to this work, but also their time and their lives. They must give up their whole lives to it, even to the very day when God causes the storms and floods to come. This is the work or business which men have to do in order to their salvation.¹⁶

From all this, it must be perfectly obvious to all of you, at least on an intellectual level, that

The coming DOL calls for a renewed life, a renewed outlook, and a renewed effort toward ultimate salvation.

Now your part is to believe God and obey His Word. May He give us all grace to do it then to experience all the blessedness of life in the new heavens and the new earth after Jesus’ return. Amen.

¹⁵ *The Christian in Complete Armour* (p. 248).

¹⁶ From a sermon entitled, “The Manner in Which the Salvation of the Soul Is To Be Sought.”