

Studies in Second Peter

"Patient Impatience" Second Peter 3:1-18

Introduction

Have you ever tried to get people to look up by gazing at the sky as if you were seeing something? The joke is on them.

A lot of people think that, if you are a Christian, **the joke is on you**. You've been looking-up, telling them that Jesus Christ is coming back to earth a second time... But He hasn't, and now it's been about two-thousand years and you are still waiting.

Peter was there when Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after His resurrection from the dead. As Peter and the other disciples stood gazing up, "two men in white clothing" suddenly stood by them and said,

Acts 1:11 ...“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

I wonder how long they would have stood there, gazing up, if God hadn't sent those two messengers? Instead they returned to the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit was poured-out upon them from heaven, and they went about turning the world upside-down for Jesus.

They learned to **wait** for the coming of the Lord while at the same time **working** for the Lord as if there was no tomorrow! They were patient in their impatience.

The Lord's return was on Peter's mind as he closed-out his second letter. In the first few verses he encouraged you to be *patient*; but in the closing verses, he exhorted you to at the same time be *impatient*.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Look Back And You'll See God Was Patient With You, and #2 Look Forward And You'll Be Impatient With Yourself.

#1 Look Back And You'll See
God Was Patient With You
(v1-9)

Where would you be spiritually if Jesus had returned twenty years ago? Ten years ago? Five years ago? Last year? For some of you who may not yet be saved: Where will you be if Jesus returns to Rapture His Church *right now*?

Look at verse nine. Let me read it to you from the Amplified Version of the Bible:

2 Peter 3:9 AMP The Lord does not delay and is not tardy or slow about what He promises, according to some people's conception of slowness, but He is long-suffering (**extraordinarily patient**) toward you, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance.

God is "extraordinarily patient" with you, not willing that you should perish and be lost for all eternity.

It's just silly to look back over the past two thousand years and think that the delay means the Lord is not really coming. It's silly for at least two reasons: *Prophecy* and the *past*.

Peter appealed to prophecy in verses one, two, and three:

2 Peter 3:1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both* of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),

Peter's letters "stir up your pure minds." *What a great description of the effect of God's Word upon us!* Our minds get polluted by ideas and ideals from the world and from our own way of thinking. Add the Word of God and your mind is made "pure." It happens by "reminder" as we read and re-read God's Word. Someone commented, "*You more frequently need to be reminded than to be informed.*"

2 Peter 3:2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

The "words which were spoken before by the holy prophets" means the Old Testament was and is the Word of God. The "commandments of us, the apostles..." means the New Testament is the Word of God. The completed Bible is the "words" you are to be "mindful" of and be reminded of.

Both Old and New Testaments are full with prophecies about the Second Coming of Jesus. There are, in fact, about eight-times more prophecies relating to the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth than His first coming!

Skepticism of the Lord's return was itself a prophecy in both Testaments. Jesus, for example, told a parable in which the servants would scoff at the return of their absent Master - only to be caught off-guard when he did return (Matthew 24:48). So Peter wrote,

2 Peter 3:3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

The "last days" is a period of time which includes the whole time between the first and second coming of Jesus, and the Great Tribulation, and the future kingdom of heaven on earth. Peter seemed to be focusing on the fact that "scoffers" were to be expected. They were part of the prophecy. Their reasons for scoffing may seem intellectual or scientific or philosophical; but it isn't. It's moral (or I should say, immoral!). "Walking according to their own lusts" tells you they are more interested in earth than eternity and definitely do not want to see the Lord.

Peter appealed to the past in verses four through seven:

2 Peter 3:4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation."

They argue that the universe follows certain natural laws and that there is no supernatural intervention by God into the affairs of men.

Most people are taught to think that science supplants Scripture; that faith and facts are incompatible. The Bible is compatible with science; there is no conflict between the facts we observe in the natural world and God's supernatural intervention. As an example Peter mentioned the global flood:

2 Peter 3:5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,
2 Peter 3:6 by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water.

Creation scientist Ken Ham is fond of saying that, if there was a global flood, you would expect to find "billions of dead things buried in rock layers laid down by water over most of the earth." What does science find? *Billions of dead things buried in rock layers laid down by water over most of the earth!* We call them fossils.

The global flood is an established fact. The scoffers "willfully forget" that it occurred because they refuse to submit to their Creator and Savior.

A future judgment is coming upon this earth:

2 Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

"Reserved for fire" is an incredible statement. It means *stored with fire*. It seems to be describing the very elements of matter - what we call atoms. Peter anticipated the atomic age. But it isn't that mankind is going to destroy itself with atom bombs. God is simply going to quit holding atoms together and the universe, as we know it, will be destroyed in the blast. Our universe did not start with the big bang, but it will end with one!

I haven't dwelt on proving the Flood because that was not Peter's point. If people want to say there was no Flood, it's like the people who deny any other historic event. His point was that God has judged in the past and will judge in the future; but in the mean time,

2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God's relationship to time is different than ours. To Him, all time is the same in a way I cannot understand. God might do in a thousand years what I might want Him to do in a day, and vice-versa. The two thousand years between the resurrection of Jesus and today is like two days to God.

The bottom line is this: What we see as God's delay is really His longsuffering with sinners. Every day He waits, more souls are won to Jesus. Heaven gets new citizens and Hell gets more vacancies! As I suggested earlier... Many of us would have perished by now in our sins if the Lord had already come.

This verse means exactly what it says. I only say that because in recent years it has come under attack by those who want to argue that God is only willing that a certain predestined group come to repentance. **That's not true!** It is the nature of God to desire the salvation of all men. The word "any," as in "not willing any should perish," is what language scholars call an individualizing plural. It means men *individually*, not a particular class or group of men. Salvation is open to *any* human being, *all* who "come to repentance" are saved. Don't let people attack the longsuffering of God and slander His nature.

Look back and you see God was patient with you; or, if you are not saved, **He still is patient with you.** There is a place for being impatient in the Christian life -

#2 Look Forward And You'll Be
Impatient With Yourself
(v10-18)

God is longsuffering; but His longsuffering will end:

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

The "Day of the Lord" is the whole period of time during which God prepares the world for final judgment. It will "come as a thief in the night" upon any who are unprepared for it. The final moment in which "the heavens will pass away" is described. It is a great description of a nuclear catastrophe. It won't be men pushing the button; it will be God letting go of the atoms that make-up matter.

Peter wasn't wondering whether or not this would occur. He was telling you it will occur; it is inevitable. So he said,

2 Peter 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,
2 Peter 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

This is not a question; it's an exhortation. Thinking backward from the future, knowing you are living in the Last Days of human history and that men are going to perish for all eternity... You ought to be *holy and hastening*.

"Holy conduct and godliness" describes your daily **activities**. "Holy" means *set apart*. It is keeping yourself away from sin. "Godliness" is the more positive way of looking at it - deliberately living in a way that is pleasing to God. To paraphrase, this means you should be impatient with your progress as a believer by living everyday moving forward in your walk with God.

"Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" is an incredible phrase that has to do with your **attitude** in all your activities. First, you are "looking for... the coming day of God." You are to really expect today to be your last day - whether it's the day Jesus Raptures His Church or the day He takes you home through death.

Secondly, you should have the attitude that you can "hasten" His coming. One of the meanings of the word is *to accelerate*. **You should think you can accelerate the coming of the Lord.**

Wait a minute: I thought the Lord was longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance? Yes, exactly... And you can accelerate His coming by telling more people about Him.

I don't want to club people over the head for slacking-off, as if God can't come back because they are pew-potatoes. It's an attitude Peter wanted us to adopt toward the unsaved, not toward each other.

Holiness and hastening fill you with hope:

[2 Peter 3:13](#) Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

God knew Adam and Eve would sin, bringing sin into and upon His creation. He had a plan of redemption and has been working it out throughout human history. He is still working it out; it is right on His schedule. In the end there will be "new heavens and a new earth" for eternity "in which righteousness" dwells permanently, with no possibility of sin. Believers have this hope - a certain hope based upon the "promise" of God Who cannot lie, Who never changes, and Who loves us.

In verses fourteen through eighteen Peter gave you a slightly different way of remaining impatient: He suggested you think backward, beginning with your meeting the Lord at His Reward Seat:

[2 Peter 3:14](#) Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

"Looking forward" to eternity enables you to look backward to the present and make spiritual adjustments. The Bible speaks of a glorious day in which believers (you) will appear individually before Jesus to have their lives examined and rewarded. You should think backward from that meeting and "be diligent to be found by Him in **peace**..." and with **purity** ("without spot and blameless"). This implies personal impatience with your progress. While on the one

hand it is the work of the Holy Spirit to make you more like Jesus; and at the Reward Seat it is Jesus Who will fully and finally make you spotless; you should strive to be at "peace" with the Lord and live in purity before the Lord as you anticipate seeing Him.

You remain impatient if you think backward about the destiny of the unsaved:

2 Peter 3:15 and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation...

The Lord is only waiting in order for more souls to be saved. The unsaved perish for all eternity. It ought to motivate us to be about the work of the Lord.

You will remain impatient if you think backward about the potential of falling prey to false teaching:

2 Peter 3:15 ...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

2 Peter 3:16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:17 You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;

Verse seventeen presents the very real possibility of believers ruining their lives by following after "the error of the wicked." (Earlier in this letter Peter had warned about false teachers among the Church). You should be honest about the possibility and, instead, stick with God's Word. Peter used the letters of Paul as his example. Notice he called them the "Scriptures." He knew that they were the inspired Word of God. Scripture might seem "hard to understand," but earlier in his letter Peter said that no Scripture was of any private interpretation. In other words, with careful study you can arrive at the truth God is teaching. False teachers are among us who "twist" God's Word, so we must remain on our guard. Be impatient and don't put up with false teaching for even a moment.

Peter ended with an encouraging blessing upon his readers:

2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

You can "grow in the grace... of... Jesus..." I take this to mean we ought to appreciate God's unmerited favor more and more in our lives.

You can also "grow... in the knowledge of... Jesus..." The Person and work of Jesus should always be your focus. You want to know more about Him so you can better know Him.

Conclusion

If you are a Christian, you understand God's patience... And you should be impatient with yourself. Patient impatience should mark your life.

Not saved? God's longsuffering is waiting for **you**.