



Reflections on 1 and 2 Peter

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Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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1 Peter

1 Living Hope

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Peter begins this letter by giving praise to God for the living hope that we have in such abundance through Christ, what an amazing hope this is! It cannot be taken away from us, and it is being kept pure and unsullied by the very power of God in Heaven, waiting for the day we will inherit. It remains intact even though we will have our share of problems during this time on earth, but take heart, for whatever may happen to us now, we remain co-heirs with Christ, and if what He received after His sufferings is any indication, our inheritance is far greater than the human mind can even begin to comprehend.

Even now, because we believe, we are filled with joy, and we have already received the salvation of our souls, which is to say that we have received forgiveness for our sins. But wait! There's more...

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

1 Peter 1:10-12

This is one of my favorite passages, for it demonstrates that the work of Jesus in establishing His Kingdom at the time and by the methods He used were no mistake, having been part of God's purpose from the outset. Look carefully at the words here and you will see something truly amazing... The Old Testament prophets were filled with the spirit of Christ and understood that they were serving a different people in a different time when they foretold of the salvation that we have received. Notice that we have already received this salvation; it is not still in the future. Those prophets searched carefully to figure out when this would happen as they wrote of the work of Christ, and in this, they were serving us!

Then, Peter says the most interesting thing: *Even angels long to look into these things.* Even the angels want to look into these things, for our inheritance is far greater than anything they will

get, and we have been sinners. When God created Man, he had a great purpose in mind, and even though things went astray back in the Garden, God is sticking with his plan, and you and I are right in the middle of it, for we are on a track where even the angels cannot follow.

2 Who do we Reach Out to?

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:13-16

In this passage, we begin with "therefore" and whenever you begin with "therefore," you need to think back to what came before. Last time, we saw Peter made reference to our great salvation and with our inheritance that is still to come, and that is what he is referring to here. So, with that in mind, we set our alert and sober minds on that inheritance that we will receive when Jesus comes. Remember, our salvation is already here; our inheritance is more than we can even comprehend.

Peter then tells us that we, as "obedient children" shouldn't concern ourselves with the evil nonsense of the past, reminding us that next to what is coming, such things appear to be foolish indeed.

Then the "be holy" part...

It seems that many of us think that we are being "holy" when we are busy disapproving other people, but that is far from being holy. "Holy" means "set apart," and we are not to be set apart from other people; far from it, in fact. We are to be set apart from the evil of this world, not from the inhabitants of this world. In truth, these are the very people we are supposed to be reaching out to in love. Think about it this way, when a person is "set apart" and they reach out in love, and then the person who needs Jesus Christ sees Him in the faces of those who are reaching out, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most powerful force on the planet, and it can bring about nothing less than a movement, sometimes called a "revival."

Now, I ask you: Is any part of this complicated? No, it is simply simple!

I wonder why this sort of thing is so rare. Surely not because it is complicated!

3 "Reverent Fear"

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:17-21

These few verses have really been "messed with" over the years! I used to read terror into them, as though they were a serious threat of hellfire, but these days, I've changed my view.

Let's bear in mind what Peter has been telling us up to this point. Recall that he has been talking about our great salvation, pointing out that it *has already come*. Then he mentioned our inheritance as co-heirs with Christ and reminded us that we have so much to look forward to that, in faith, we set this crazy world and its ways aside for Him. Now, he is continuing in that vein.

He reminds us that our salvation is great, by pointing out that it wasn't bought with mere perishable things, but with the very lifeblood of the Son of God; what amazing, incredible, awesome powerful love! WOW!! Jesus, the Son of God, God incarnate was chosen from the beginning to redeem us all. He was without sin, totally undeserving of His fate, and yet He willingly allowed Himself to be led to slaughter for you and I: Amazing Love! He took our sin away...

So then, why would we want to go back to the old ways? With this great salvation that came from indescribable love, why ignore it for a moment's amusement? It makes no sense.

Are we missing anything if we decide to knock off the things we really don't need to be wasting our time with?

NO! We are gaining everything!

The long and short of it is simply this: We modify our behavior not because we fear punishment, but because God loved us and in return we love Him. Remember that next time you are tempted, and see if the temptations don't fade significantly...

See, I told you this stuff wasn't complicated!

4 Love... Again!

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

*“All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of the Lord endures forever.”*

And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 Peter 1:22-25

Peter wraps up chapter one with these wonderful verses, bringing his discussion of our lot as followers of Jesus back to the source of everything in a Christian's life: Love. His reference to our having "purified" ourselves is another reference to our having our sins taken away. I wonder how many of us really grasp what that means... Our sins haven't been merely atoned for, as they would have been under the Old Testament Law, they have been taken away, removed, eliminated entirely. They are gone. It is as though they never happened. This is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Great news... in Christ you have been "purified." This is the truth, and when we obey the truth, we love one another as God loved us. If you were with us as we went through 1 John recently, this will sound quite familiar; Love one another.

Why should we love one another? Because we have been born again. We were not born again in the biological sense, but in a spiritual sense. We are without sin because our sins have been removed, so we no longer have the stain of sin... *and it's about time we acted like it.* Again, this is the power of the Gospel going forward; act as though you are in Christ... because you are.

Take careful notice of the quote from Isaiah 40 in the next verses. Isaiah tells us that we are like grass or flowers. We will grow, fade and die, but God's Word is eternal and will endure forever.

As mortal humans, living in a physical, biological body, we will grow up, fade and then die, but as followers of Jesus Christ who have been redeemed from the old, sinful life and filled with the truth of the salvation of Jesus Christ, we too will carry on forever. Do you know why that is?

Note that Isaiah said that the word of the Lord endures forever. The word is none other than Jesus Himself who lives in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, we are different now... love one another, and let the earthly things go...

5 Like a Newborn

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

1 Peter 2:1-3

Peter is summing up his discussion in the first chapter and transitioning into the next section in these three verses. There's some good stuff here...

You will recall from last time that Peter has reminded us of our salvation, and how we have been purified from our sins and now it's time to live as followers of Jesus by loving one another. *Therefore*, we need to rid ourselves of the old ways, and he mentions several things that we should no longer harbor or practice. I'm sure (or at least I hope) that I don't need to elaborate on malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy or slander; we can move on to the "good stuff."

Like newborn babies... Can you think of what a newborn baby is, that we were not, but now are in Christ? (Hint: We covered this in the last post)

Newborn babies are *innocent*. Now that our sin has been taken away by the blood of Christ, we are as innocent as a newborn. So, Peter uses a metaphor, a baby's milk. Peter says:

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

We've received so much already from our relationship with Jesus; crave more! Seek out His Truth in your relationship with Him. Dig into a healthy portion of His Word, pray unceasingly and seek His guidance, asking Him always to grow in your being so that in all things you do, your walk with Him will grow closer. Form the habit of seeking His presence and His Word so that your testimony to the lost will give Him glory... and do all of this because you love Him and remember that we love one another because He loves all of us.

6 Living Stones

This passage, 1 Peter 2:4-10, is a really rich one, but it might seem a little confusing at first because of the imagery involved, that of living stones, but as you'll shortly see, this, too is a simple passage to understand. To begin with, Peter writes:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

It's pretty obvious that "the living stone" that we have come to is Jesus Christ; He was chosen from the beginning and is precious to God. Next, that we are also illustrated as living stones is also pretty clear. The next part used to puzzle me, until I caught the fact that all of us living stones are being built into a spiritual house where sacrifices are to be offered. Oh, easy money!

The Old Testament Temple was the place where acceptable sacrifices were offered. It was also said to be the dwelling place of God on earth, and that His Spirit dwelt in the Holy of holies, behind the veil. But now in the New Covenant, His Spirit is the indwelling Holy Spirit that lives within us as covenant partners of Jesus Christ, and we offer spiritual (not animal) sacrifices through Jesus Christ as a holy priesthood. What is a priest? A priest is one who intercedes between man and God, offering sacrifices as they do so. Because of what Jesus did in taking sins away, He is our only intercessor, and as His co-heirs, we can approach the throne of God with confidence, and we do so in prayer all of the time. Thus, when built up together, all of us living stones are a royal priesthood, the dwelling place of God on earth... the Church. (Hebrews 8-10)

Peter is using these images from the OT to illustrate our awesome relationship with God to teach Jewish Christians how all of this works together to fulfill the Law, and once we get the hang of it, it's actually really simple, and really very cool! Next Peter cites some OT passages that show where this imagery came from...

For in Scripture it says:

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:6 c.f. Isaiah 28:16)*

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

*“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,” (1 Peter 2:7 c.f. Psalm 118:22)*

and,

*“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined
for. (1 Peter 2:8 c.f. Isaiah 8:14)*

Notice that the first quotation, Isaiah 28 is Jesus, the cornerstone or foundation stone for Zion. Zion is the mountain upon which the Temple was built, the seat of worship, the dwelling place of God. Those who trust in Him (yes the stone is a "him") will never be put to shame, for their names are written in the Book of Life. The next 2 quotes are contrasts. Psalm 118 is why a believer would consider the "stone the builders rejected". Remember that Jesus was "despised and rejected by men," because Jesus is the very foundation of all of our hopes. Contrast that with the Isaiah 8 quote that follows. For an unbeliever, one who has rejected Jesus, He is their stumbling block and causes them to fall, why? For the Jews of Peter's time who refused to follow Jesus, He was not what they wanted or expected in a Messiah. This caused them to turn away from him and that was their ultimate undoing. For the unbeliever today who refuses to follow Jesus, because they just can't accept the story of His death, burial or resurrection... or because they are just too cool... their rejection of His grace will also be their undoing, ultimately. Yes indeed, they stumble because they disobey his message. Finally, something truly wonderful...

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that
you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received
mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:9-10

We as followers of Jesus Christ are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession! No, Peter is not addressing Old Testament Israel, he is writing to Christians. The old Temple is over. Israel is over. The Law of Moses is over. We are in a whole new age, we who were not a people, are now God's special people; we come from every Nation. In His church, God has recaptured the purpose for which He created Mankind in the first place: Fellowship. (Relationship + Purpose = Fellowship) We have what Israel never had, direct contact with God's presence. We have an inheritance Israel never contemplated, being co-heirs with Christ to *everything*. We have received what Israel never received, mercy and eternal life. Yes, dear reader, I think Peter may have understated one thing: That we "may declare the praises of Him..." should be more like praise Him from the rooftops!

Reviewing all of this, how can we not love Him? How can we hold back any longer taking up His work to share this great salvation, brought about by His great love, with those who still hold back from following Him?

7 Strangers

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

1 Peter 2:11-12

Verses 11 and 12 are again transition into the next section of Peter's letter, transition that is of particular interest to us today. Peter's general context here is that we are in this world of Mankind at the present, but we are citizens of a heavenly Kingdom that is not of this world at all, thus we are foreigners and exiles. Oh no, we are not exiles from the heavenly Kingdom, we are exiles from this world. As such, we are here representing that heavenly Kingdom of which we are citizens.

Have you ever visited a foreign country? When you did so, did you behave as unofficial representatives of your own country and adopt your best behavior, or were you a jerk? We Americans have sometimes been described as "ugly Americans" in other countries because apparently we don't behave well when we travel. I don't know if that is true or not... when I visit other countries I am on my best behavior... but I have seen how we are usually portrayed on British television and I must say if Americans are really like that in Britain, they don't act the way we do at home! Suffice it to say that Peter is going in much the same direction that Paul went when he spoke of us as Ambassadors of Christ.

The other side of this "strangers and exiles" metaphor is that we really don't belong to this world any more, and as such we need to let the priorities of this world go by the wayside.

This is what Peter is referring to when he says that we should abstain from "sinful desires that wage war against your soul". Sin is over. Slavery to sin is over, and it has no hold on us any more... our chains are gone; we have been set free from the law of sin and death! So why must we insist on holding onto sin? Peter's alternative is that we should so conduct ourselves, that the un-Christian world we live in may come to belief when they see how we live.

There is one other point we should consider here. Notice that Peter says, *though they accuse you of doing wrong*. Have you ever read any of the posts here on WordPress that are posted by atheists? I refer to the ones that are openly using the label "atheist." If so, you have no doubt noticed two things, first that they have no concept of the Bible, and feel quite free to openly misrepresent it. The other thing is that they are self-appointed experts on what is and what is not "Christian" when it comes to behavior. They are looking for any slip-up on our part in our personal conduct to justify their own lifestyles and condemn Christianity. I guess there's nothing new under the sun, since Peter saw the same thing in the first century pagans.

So, here we are, strangers in a strange land, citizens of a heavenly Kingdom, representing our King... let's act like it, and show the world what Christ's love looks like in action.

8 Are we Driving too Fast?

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

1 Peter 2:13-17

You will recall that Peter has told us in general terms that we need to behave in a manner that is right and proper, as citizens of heaven and not of this world. His particular concern in verse 12 is that we must live good lives among the pagans, even though they will accuse us of all sorts of things, so that the love and light of Christ will save some of them. Now, starting with verse 13 Peter gets more specific, first talking about our relations with government officials, then with Masters, and then within our own homes.

First off, we are to show proper respect to the rulers of human government. I always told my students here, that this is where the Bible commands that they obey the speed limit, and do you what they always did? They laughed, thinking that I was joking! You are probably laughing as you read this... Brothers and sisters in Christ, if we can't do the little things, how can we do the big things? Oh yes, put a "Jesus" sticker on your car and drive recklessly... great, just great. We are to obey the laws, and show proper respect to our officials, even when they aren't as respectable as they should be. Why?

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. (v. 15)

If we behave badly, it will reflect badly on the Gospel. What goes through your mind when you read a news story about a foreign diplomat who breaks the law and gets away with it because they have diplomatic immunity? Probably something not very close to good feelings, shall we say maybe something negative? How does it appear to the unbeliever when you tell them about Jesus and then misbehave? Does that unbeliever want to hear more from you about righteousness? Not likely, you've lost your credibility, and so have all other believers as well.

Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. (v. 16)

This is a contrast between free people and slaves. Keep in mind that the Roman Empire was a slave economy, and a significant percentage of believers were slaves. Peter is reminding them and us as well, that we are God's servants (slaves) and our freedom in Christ must never be used to enable evil conduct on our parts. This is followed by Peter's imperative in verse 17:

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

As Peter has set this up quite nicely, I have little else to say here... Oh, except that you should obey the speed limit!

9 I Don't Want to Hear This!

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:17-21

Slavery was a fact of life in the Roman world of the first century, and Peter addresses it as such. It isn't accurate to insist that the Bible condones it, however, as some would do. It was not permitted under the Law of Moses, and the New Testament addresses it only as one of the ways of this world. There were many in the past who cited the New Testament's treatment of slavery in an attempt to justify the practice, and of course there are some today who use the same approach to discredit Christianity, but in both cases, such commentators demonstrate a complete lack of understanding concerning the nature of the New Covenant, which established a Kingdom not of this world, and in opposition to this world.

Since we, for the most part, live in places where slavery does not exist as an economic system, we can draw insight from this passage regarding our relations with employers, and that is how I'll approach it here.

Peter is telling slaves (employees) to submit themselves to their bosses out of regard for God. He goes on to say that we should do this not only with "good" bosses, but with the harsh ones as well. For our time, let's look at it this way: If you are a Christian and you have a bad attitude at work, how does this look to your fellow workers or your boss? You talk about all the good and wonderful things, and then you are resentful, demanding, and lazy and cause problems for everyone. So, is this what it is to be a Christian? Seems a fair question. If you are always telling your friends that the boss is always trying to cheat you, what kind of impression does that make?

OK, to be fair, I was almost always in management, but to me you would just sound petty and selfish, certainly not like a humble servant of Jesus... but maybe I'm wrong.

Peter goes on to ask what good it would do for you to suffer a beating for doing wrong. For our time, you sure can't complain too much if you get fired for doing something wrong, can you? Getting in trouble for doing right is a whole different matter! In all cases, Peter is saying that we need to do what is right in God's eyes and in building God's Kingdom, and if that requires some sacrifice on our parts, that's well worth enduring for His sake. Jesus thought so, and as a result of His willingness to suffer and sacrifice, you and I are free from sin and death!

In the next section, Peter looks directly at the suffering of Christ, and we will dive into that one next time!

10 The One Who First Loved Us

*“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”*

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:22-25

The second chapter concludes at the foot of the cross, as Peter applies the prophecy of Isaiah 53 so as to make clear that Jesus is our example in dealing with the hardships of life. In everything that Jesus said or did during His ministry, His priority was on serving the Father by serving others in a way that would advance the Father's purpose. When this involved sacrifice, He sacrificed. When it required suffering, He suffered, for that is how great His love for us was... and is.

As followers of Jesus, can we expect to do less? If that means putting others first, we put others first, because we love Jesus. If that means that we endure hardship, then we endure it for His sake because we love Him. If that means we love our neighbor even when our neighbor seems less than lovely, then we do it because we love Him. Through this process, we are modeling the behavior of our Savior to the world. Some might scoff and call us fools, but others will respond and follow the One who reached out to them through us in love, and we will have added to His holy spiritual house one more living stone.

And all because we love Him who first loved us.

11 Marriage

1 Peter 3:1-7

Peter moves on from his discussion of Christian slaves and their masters in which he called upon slaves to be good and reliable workers who respect their masters for the sake of the Gospel, and now applies the same thinking to marriage.

Marriage is an interesting relationship. Two people love one another, live together and relate on multiple levels with each other... and they get to know each other for all of their faults, and all of their strengths. They see each other at their worst and at their best, and they have times of bliss and times of turmoil. Peter teaches that each is to put the other first.

He tells wives that they should submit to their husbands, as Paul says that wives should obey their husbands. Peter says that husbands should be considerate to and give respect to their wives. Paul says that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave his life for her. Even though some today would be critical of these comments, in truth, allowing for the fact that Peter and Paul wrote in a very different cultural context, the message is really the same: Each should put the other ahead of themselves. For one thing, this is a recipe for a happy marriage in most cases, for another reason, this is how we are supposed to treat *everyone*. It is how Jesus behaved toward everyone also.

Sadly, as in some other areas, there have been those who used Bible passages for selfish purposes at various points over the years, using selectively some of these injunctions to assert male dominance over women. People who deliberately misapply Scripture are called "false teachers" by the Scriptures, and in our time, I think that it is important that we not allow the sins of false teachers to sour God's Word for us. The whole point of these passages is to demonstrate what Christ's love looks like in action in various everyday situations.

Oppressiveness toward one's spouse can hardly be called the love of Christ! Putting the interests of the other person first, even when they are not being very lovable, is always Christ-like. Being abusive and then citing the Word to justify it is downright evil.

Putting others first, is very much like something Jesus said one day. It's a rather famous statement, and I'll bet you've heard it once or twice: Do unto others as you would they should do unto you. Yes, that's it, the Golden Rule! That is how husbands and wives are supposed to behave toward each other. So, one cup of the Golden Rule, plus a teaspoon of forgiveness is a good recipe to begin a happy marriage.

12 Life 101

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:8-9

In these two verses, Peter is telling us what it looks like when we love one another. What may confound us at times is that He has set this out as an imperative, making it a lesson or instructions. When a group of people share real fellowship, what happens, what do they look like to others?

Well, let's see, they are in harmony, they aren't fighting, they are gentle and they are humble in their demeanor, caring for one another. They are forgiving of one another, and they are blessings to one another. Isn't that about what he said? OK, maybe you are thinking that I simply found different words and re-wrote the text... a kind a paraphrase. Fine, then let's think about it.

To love is to put the interests of others ahead of our own interests. So, when it comes to opinions, we are not going to argue and fight to "win" every point, we are going to respect the views of other people, and in this we are "like-minded." That love involves being sympathetic with those whom we love is pretty much a given, right?

Can you love a person and not have compassion when they are hurting? Of course not, because you care about them. Isn't the same true for humility? If you are putting their interests ahead of your own, you aren't going to be cramming things down their throat are you? It would seem not...

If someone you loves sins against you, aren't they usually the first ones that you are willing to forgive? So then there is no evil for evil and insult for insult. No, you would try to be a blessing to those you love, even when they aren't being good to you... forgiveness again.

See it now? Peter is describing love in action!

For,

*“Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.
They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

1 Peter 3:10-12

Lord, may we become the people you would have us to be, loving one another as you loved us, so that in all that we do, we would be pleasing in Your sight.

13 Opportunity and Suffering

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Peter 3:13-17

In our earlier post, Peter told us what it looks like to love one another in the form of a lesson or instruction, and he continues the theme here asking who would want to harm you if you are doing good? He continues with transition, into an implied question of "What if they harm me anyway?" Peter's answer to that unwritten question is that you will be blessed in spite of everything. The result of course, is that even if we suffer for doing the right thing, as sometimes happens in this life, we will be blessed.

In telling us not to fear their threats (or the things that others fear) Peter is quoting from Isaiah 8:12, and if you think about it, this is a very apt quote, for we who will live even though we die, and to whom blessings are assured, need not fear what the world can do to us for doing right. It may seem odd what Peter says next: always be ready to tell people, who ask, why you have this hope in Christ, and do it with gentleness and respect...

It may be that Peter is thinking that the way we react to problems will serve as a catalyst for such questions; after all, shouldn't we be afraid? Everyone else would be! That makes "evangelism" look quite different from handing out leaflets and knocking on doors! Those who slander you may become ashamed and who knows? They might come to see things quite differently than before.

In any event, if God wills it, it is better to suffer for good than to suffer for wrong... so always do what is right in the eyes of the Lord!

Now, when you view this in its fuller context of 3:8-17, the whole thing becomes clear: Love one another, live your life in the love of Christ so that the world may see His love through you. If the world should react badly, you have nothing to fear because of what you have in Christ... and it might even give you a better chance to share. In any event, living our lives as Christ would live is better than doing wrong!

14 Jesus' Example

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

1 Peter 3:18-22

As the chapter concludes, Peter continues his discussion of opportunity and suffering, with the ultimate example of Jesus. Jesus suffered greatly that we might be saved from sin and death, and He did this while deserving none of the suffering, but accepted it anyway for the opportunity to redeem humanity. As a result, He was killed in the body, but made alive again in the Spirit. This is a familiar story for a Christian I hope...

I really try to avoid complicating these lessons with discussions of various translations and Greek... but to understand verse 19, I can't see a way to avoid it, sorry!

The NIV goes on to say: *After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits*— In the NIV, there is a footnote after the words "...made alive..." that I have edited out (but probably shouldn't have) that reads, "Or *but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also.*"

The more literal translation of the NASB says, *in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison*, Looking at the Greek, I found the words, ὧ καὶ (*hos kai*) which mean "in which also"

Thus, I conclude that what Peter is telling us is that Jesus died in the body and was made alive again in the Spirit, in which also (in the Spirit) he preached to those who are now dead, but who were disobedient in Noah's day. The introduction of Noah's day is important in Peter's overall point as we will see in a minute. Sorry for this little excursion, but this is a verse that is often misunderstood, as some do teach that Jesus died and went to Hell to redeem the lost there, and while that might be a nice thought, it isn't the point Peter is making here, I'm afraid.

Jesus, in the Spirit, or as the Spirit, preached repentance to those who were acting in rebellion against God while Noah was building his ark, as God was about to judge the earth and wanted to save as many as possible from His judgment, but in the end, only eight would follow God and they were saved through the waters of the flood (being in the ark). The waters of the flood now symbolize baptism, which saves us also, *not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...* You will surely recall that Paul makes similar comparisons between our "death" in baptism, and our being raised out of the water to a new life.

As a result of what Jesus did, He now sits in majesty in heaven... and in due course we, as His co-heirs will join Him. This is the ultimate opportunity for suffering, should God will it for us, to become a testimony of our faith in Him, that others who see this will come to belief and repentance. Therefore, should suffering come your way, take heart, for God is working through you, and you will receive the prize for which we all strive.

15 Enough of that stuff!

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

1 Peter 4:1-6

Peter is now summing up what we covered last time: Therefore...

Jesus as our great example suffered death so that many would be saved from sin and death; therefore we need to take on the same purpose as He, which is to say that we too need to concern ourselves with the salvation of those who have not yet found it, even in our times of trial and suffering. This somewhat awkward sentence goes on to tell us that since those who suffer for Christ have put an end to living for the allures of this world, they will now live for the will of God. This is another way of saying that we set aside the things of this world to serve Christ.

We have already had our chance for worldly living, that is now over... and our former associates will sure be surprised!

I've run into many who hesitated to commit to Christ for fear that their family and friends will think them crazy, and I've always assured them that they are probably right! When they commit to Him anyway, and over time their lives change, friends and family often follow them to the cross. Let's be clear, this doesn't usually happen overnight, but it often happens with time. These former associates may also "malign" you, but this is something for which they will ultimately be called to account for.

This is why the gospel has been preached to those who live without Christ, even though they are dead in their sins, they may respond to the gospel and live as children of God. To be perfectly honest, this is our calling, to take the gospel to those who have yet to commit to Christ, or as Jesus Himself said, to "make disciples." It is what we do because we love our fellow humans, even when they do not first love us.

That might sound familiar to some of you...

16 Generous or Selfish?

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:7-11

In approaching this text, you can go one of two ways. The first and most common way of looking at it is to analyze it line by line and word by word. The second is to read it in its entirety and ask yourself what Peter is getting at. Both approaches should take us to the same place, but sometimes we become sidetracked in the details and forget why we are looking in the first place. Thus, for this lesson, let's use the second and less common method. What's Peter trying to say here?

I think it is something like this: *Set aside selfish things so that you may glorify God.*

Let's go back and check...

He starts by telling us that time is short, so let's get serious: *The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.* Yes, this is an easy one... Then he reminds us to love one another with fervor. Such love is never selfish, for selfish, 'what I can get out of it' love, is never "fervent." This is even clearer when you read the second part of the sentence, for it points directly to forgiveness. Forgiving those whom we love fervently is a selfless act. Here's how Peter put it: *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*

Then he tells us to be hospitable without complaint, and since the Greek word can also be rendered as "generous" it's clear once again that Peter wants us to be selfless. Here are his words: *Be hospitable to one another without complaint.* "Without complaint" seals this one for me, how about you? He goes on to mention that we have each received a special (spiritual) gift from God, and then tells us to use it for the building up of the Body as good stewards, not for our own advancement. *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Now it gets really interesting. If we speak, we are to speak as though our words were the Word of God, so I see that they are not just my own words, my own thoughts any more. If we serve, we should serve like we are serving from God's strength and not our own. This would seem to imply that we are to serve for God's purpose, since He supplied our strength: *whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies;* nothing of me here...

Finally, we have arrived at the "why" part, so that God will be glorified: *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Looking back to where we started, I'd say we got it just about right! Living for Jesus in love is all about God and other people, and not at all about me. Lord, may each of us take this message from your Word to heart!

17 Pain and Suffering

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

And "if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?"

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

1 Peter 4:12-19

Peter ends the fourth chapter by once again mentioning those under persecution for their faith. Since he is repeating the thought here, I thought this might be a good time to reflect upon those who suffer for other reasons. We all know people who suffer with chronic disease, mental and emotional problems, financial hardship, disabilities and other conditions or circumstances that cause pain, hurt and despair, and these need our loving support. It is for us to reach out to offer help, to nurture and to bring comfort; may we not forget this.

For those who might find themselves in such a situation, Peter offers encouragement and guidance. We should be cheerful and hopeful. Always we should keep our trust and hope in Him, that we might give Him glory and impress those around us, not with how great we are, but so that they may see how great He is.

Yes, it is true that this life has been called a "vale of tears." There are certainly times like that, but our hope, our joy and our strength in Christ has overcome all that. It is rather for us to have our eyes, minds and souls fixed upon Jesus through any hardship, so that His glory, power and love might be made manifest to the whole world around us.

Within the Church

Peter is winding up his letter now with some insight that he shares with local church leaders... and the younger men. First for the leadership:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

1 Peter 5:1-4

The words that are usually translated into English as "elder, pastor, shepherd, bishop and overseer" are used interchangeably in the New Testament to refer to the leaders of each local church congregation; what I like to call the Leadership Team. I realize that many who read this come from church backgrounds that have a structure different that of the first century church, so in that case, the principles and application should apply to your church leaders, whatever they might be called.

The thing that really jumps out to me is the fact that a leader is not at all a big shot, he is instead the servant of all. Notice that Peter emphasizes humility, rather than position, service, rather than rank and sacrifice rather than personal gain. An elder is to be an example of servant-leadership, as Jesus Himself was our example of servant-leadership. So often churches go wrong because the leaders of the church seek to exalt themselves above their flock, rather than to serve in humility, forgetting entirely that the crown of glory does not come in this life, but when Jesus returns!

Next, Peter has insight for the younger ones...

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

*“God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble.”*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.
Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

1 Peter 5:5-7

Younger people are not famous for being submissive to their elders. We must understand that in context, Peter isn't referring only to those who are young in years, but also to those who are spiritually young. When my kids were teenagers, they knew everything. They knew that getting along in life, paying bills, managing finances and maintaining a household was really easy, and that I wasn't very good at it; they all could have done a better job than I did. Now they are grown and have their own households... and they all, each in his or her own way, have admitted that it isn't as easy as they thought it would be! As a leader in the local church for more years than I'd like to count, I can recall many times when younger Christians of various ages were quite vocal about things they knew much more about than the leadership; they didn't hesitate to point out everything we did that was wrong in their eyes... and then later had to admit that there had been so many things they hadn't understood before. Peter, of course, is aware of all of this, for little has changed in human nature.

He advises the younger to submit to the leadership of their leaders. His instruction for all of us is to be clothed in humility, as Jesus was humble. In time, as the younger in faith grow in their understanding and maturity, they will be lifted up in the congregation. Until then, we must always remember that you aren't in a position to make disciples until you are mature enough to become a disciple yourself.

As a final observation, have you noticed that Peter's message in this context is essentially the same as that for slaves, wives, husbands, good citizens and those in suffering? Humility, service, putting the needs of others first and giving glory to God. These can all be summed up in a phrase: Love one another.

18 Summing Up

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:6-11

Peter sums up his letter in these few verses, so let's join in his summation...

We need to humble ourselves in his service, casting off our anxieties, and firm in our hope and faith in his love. Don't be too concerned about earthly challenges and problems; keep your focus on your relationship with Him. He cares for you... can you imagine? He has a whole universe to run, and yet He cares for *you*. Just let that sink in.... Amazing.

Humble in spirit, and secure in Jesus Christ, we also need to be clear in our minds, alert in our lives, for we are on the front lines in a conflict that rages all around us, a conflict that we can't exactly see in the usual sense, a spiritual contest. Our foe is on the prowl, looking to pick us off one by one: Scary. Be ready to resist!

It might not strike you at first that Peter's admonition to resist the devil is good news, but actually it is. Once again, I find myself pointing out here that something which can be commanded is something that we can do, therefore, in spite of the strength and cunning of our Adversary, he can be resisted. Come to think of it, why should this be a surprise? Jesus has already overcome this world, He has already defeated the devil and His Spirit lives within us, therefore, in Him is our victory! Better let that one sink in too...

We are not alone. Not only can we access the presence of Christ any time, we are also one with our brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world! Oh yes, there are tough times ahead, but we can and will endure them, and in the end our destination in Christ is safe and assured... and glorious!

Love one another!

2 Peter

1 Participation in Christ

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:3-11

After the customary greetings, Peter gets into an interesting concept that he calls "the knowledge of him who called us." For me, the notion of having "precious promises" by which we can "participate in the divine nature" is staggering; just stop and think about that... we are able to *participate in the divine nature!* When you see a statement like that, you must come to realize the fact that this is not just some academic or abstract concept... it is participation, which is an active way of life! This is all brought about by the fact that we have "escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." What are these "precious promises"? Forgiveness of sins, eternal life, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the transformation of minds... for starters.

The second paragraph of our text shows what spiritual growth looks like. We add several qualities to our faith. Faith is the point of beginning for all of the rest, so with faith as a foundation Peter calls upon us to add goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love. Notice how each one of these leads to the next one, as though they were bricks being added to the foundation to build the walls of a house. Then notice what Peter says next: *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* It sounds like there is an expectation that we will be doing something with this growth, serving God in some capacity. If we don't have these qualities, it will be as though we are blind, forgetting that our sins are no more. This sounds like lacking the qualities he mentioned will result in our lives seeing no change from our relationship with Christ, as though nothing had ever happened. I'm guessing that we have all seen Christians who were in possession of faith, but who never changed in any other way, almost like they were Christians in name only...

In the last paragraph, Peter calls the addition of the qualities he mentioned confirming your "calling and election." which gives a different twist to these terms than is often preached about. Here's an idea for you, think on this:

So God has called all people to repentance and faith in Christ. Many will respond to this calling, and they will be called elect. Those must add certain qualities and traits to their faith by growing

in their understanding and maturity as Christians. When they do, they will serve His purpose because above all else, they are filled with his love for others, and in so doing, their warm reception into His presence is assured, and will never stumble in their walk with Christ.

Sounds like a plan to me!

2 Always Growing

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

2 Peter 1:12-15

These verses are the transition that brings together two things that Peter is connecting for our instruction. The text we looked at last time and what follows. Earlier, Peter spoke of our spiritual growth in Christ and how that is a participation in Him, and next, the idea of how prophecy in Scripture is from God... remarkable and wonderful implications!

These verses not only connect, but they remind us of something else that is wonderful to ponder: the coming of Jesus Christ! Peter is reminding us of the things we are already supposed to know, and this is some great discipleship on his part... he learned from the Master Himself! You will recall how Jesus often had to remind Peter of things he was already supposed to have grasped, but that Peter might have forgotten. Remember the times that Peter understood something one time, and then later blurted out the opposite? Now here is the mature Peter, trying to keep us from making his old mistakes.

Yes, he is going to keep reminding us of what we already know, reinforcing that firm foundation upon which our hope is built. For as long as he remained with them, he would continue to teach and re-teach the truth about Jesus and about our spiritual development so that we can serve Him.

So maybe we should consider these things before we go on to Peter's next topic, and see amazing linkage. Maybe we should be reminded of our foundation in Jesus Christ and of our need to grow in our relationship with Jesus each and every day... and maybe we should also carefully observe the method of making a mature disciple from a disciple who learned at the feet of the Master Himself: Keep reinforcing the foundation of faith and how we grow from there. Patiently remind those with whom we work to ensure that the Way becomes part of their beings, and patiently allow our older disciples to do the same in us, so that we may continue to grow into His likeness.

3 Eyewitness of Greatness

For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

2 Peter 1:16-18

After the brief transition of the last few verses, Peter is moving on to remind us that he is an eyewitness of Jesus Christ, that he was present when God the Father spoke from heaven on the mountain announcing who Jesus was; Peter knows what he is talking about! Peter is reminding us that he is an authoritative witness to these factual events, and isn't merely a teller of stories and "oral traditions", as some might claim. Do you get the impression that he might be building up to something...? I do!

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:19-21

In these last few verses of chapter one, Peter makes a rather bold statement, that he has the prophetic message, and that it is completely reliable. Now our question is this: Is Peter talking about the Old Testament prophets, or is he about the prophesy himself? He goes on to tell us that we had better pay attention, and then reminds us that no prophet speaks on his own, but that they deliver a message from God, as they were led by the Holy Spirit. So, which is it?

The easy thing to do would be to "cheat" and peek at the next chapter! It doesn't look like Peter is quoting much there, but he sure has a message!

This letter is included in the New Testament because it was believed that Peter, the Apostle was writing it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we consider it to be reliable as a message of God. The old prophets prophesied under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and thus their prophecies are considered to be the reliable message of God. Thus, Peter's statements are on a par with those of the prophets. Prophecy is the delivering of a message from God. It is not telling the future, although sometimes that is part of the process, but most often they are delivering a message from God about a situation that God wants to communicate about. Most often, the books of prophecy in the Old Testament contain God's indictment of the way His people are acting, including warnings about what might happen if they don't knock it off.

Peter has just established his own credentials as an eye-witness of Christ, and added the injunction that we'd better pay attention to what is coming... and this after telling us how to grow spiritually. Thus, I just might conclude that in our next session, we are going to receive a serious warning!

4 Peter the Prophet

This post is hard to write. The text in 2 Peter Chapter 2, doesn't lend itself to being broken down into "bite-sized" pieces upon which to easily chew on one at a time, rather it is one big thought.

Reflecting on it bit by bit would probably cause us to stumble into the same mistakes made by preachers and commentators for centuries, and before we would finish, we'd be pointing fingers here and there and hollering about fire and brimstone; things better left to God, who has reserved all rights as to vengeance and wrath to Himself!

So, for best results, please [read Chapter 2](#) now...

OK, welcome back, wasn't that a scream! There are a few verses that we ought to take a closer look at...

Verses 1-3: Peter sets up the discussion: *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.* (1a) Following Peter's remarks about the old prophets, now he points out that they also had false prophets back in the day, and we will have false teachers. He pulls no punches describing what will happen to them.

In verses 4-10, he recalls God's judgment of angels who sinned, and then reminds his readers of the times of Noah and of Sodom and Gomorrah, and what God did about the wickedness of the people. He continues through verse 16 describing the wicked ways of false teachers, and how they all came to ruin and judgment, recalling the story of Balaam and the donkey. This description and ruin scenario continues through verse 19, and then comes home to us:

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud."

2 Peter 2:20-22

There's the warning we were looking for! If we, as followers of Jesus Christ, allow ourselves to be drawn back into the old, wicked ways of this world by false teachers, we will have a serious problem with God. Please understand that the things that Peter has said about the false teachers are not so that we can be ready to heap abuse on them. He even pointed out that they heap abuse on angels, and the angels don't return fire, even when they are there to execute God's judgment. (verse 11) No, there is no finger-pointing, no fire and brimstone stuff, and no condemnation from any one of us! Peter has given us this information so that we can, 1) Recognize what is going on, and 2) avoid falling victim, and 3) encourage and sustain one another so that all of us can avoid falling prey. Remember that he began in chapter 1 telling us what spiritual growth looks like; there wasn't any condemnation going on in that process, and we must bear in mind that any sort of retribution, condemnation or judging that will take place is God's job, not ours!

In the next section, Peter will continue with his letter, and you might be amazed at the turn he takes...

5 Peter's Application

must admit that this is my very favorite chapter of Peter's... it's awesome! It clearly and directly tells us what the point of everything else is. Why did he go on in chapter 2 about false teachers? Why the big build up? Where is all of this really headed? Pull up a chair, grab a cup of coffee, and let's find out!

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

2 Peter 3:1-2

Here's the set up; he wants to encourage us to wholesome thoughts, reminding us of the teachings of the prophets and of the Lord, given through the Apostles. In the last chapter, Peter spoke as a prophet bringing us God's indictment of false teachers, not for us to point accusing fingers, but for us to avoid being fooled and to remain firm in our walk with Christ. Here he is telling us that he is trying to influence our thinking towards wholesome things... but this is the introduction, not the conclusion.

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

2 Peter 3:3-7

As is always the case in the New Testament, the "last days" are spoken of as having come already; we are today living in the "last days" just as Peter's readers were living in the "last days" back in the first century. Oh, how I grow weary of the teachings of some today that things have changed, and of their bellowing that writers like Peter meant this only for us! Read your history! There were these "scoffers" in Peter's time, there are such "scoffers" now, and there have been in the centuries in between... and every generation has thought itself to be the last. Peter then points out that God created everything in His own time, and that He has done various things throughout history at the time of His choosing... and the return of Jesus Christ will also be at the time of God's choosing. Yes, He is coming back, yes; he is coming back to judgment... just as soon as the Father gives the word.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:8-9

God's perception of time is much different from ours, for God is not subject to time or space.

We, who live but a short while in the body, think two thousand years is a very long time... but to God? It's nothing! Just think, dear friends... If Jesus came back in Peter's day, Peter would have rejoiced... and you wouldn't have had an opportunity to have a relationship with Jesus at all... ever. Are we so selfish that we would deny this opportunity to unborn generations? Relax, and be patient! Know that God has this all figured out the right way, and you will spend eternity with Him. No amount of our time compares with the length of eternity! For now, let's be about serving God and thinking wholesome thoughts.

6 The Climax of the Ages

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

2 Peter 3:10

Here we are at the thrill-packed climax of the letter. The thrills are not just in the action, but in the application that Peter gives us, so that we might be pointed in the right direction. Yes, the Great Day will come! When it does, Jesus will come to judge... and in spite of all of the noise we hear today from End Times teachers, everybody will be surprised, for He will come like a thief... suddenly and without warning... and then big things will take place!

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:11-13

Suddenly, the heavens and the earth will be consumed, destroyed, terminated. Believe me, when Jesus returns, everybody will know about it, and not because they saw it on television! God will create a new heaven and a new earth... a whole new creation will result. So, what should we do now; how should we live? Should we head for the hills and wait for the Day?

Should we get out our Bibles and make a checklist of all of the things that must happen before Jesus can return? Should we go to Disneyland? No! We should live our lives the way He taught us, as the light of the world, making disciples and building His Kingdom in love. There are no special last-minute commands, as though we are going to know the day of His return, for we will not know until it happens one day. See, this is simple: Love God, love one another: make disciples.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

2 Peter 3:14-16

Just keep on living for Christ; simple. Just like Paul has written; live for Christ, obey His commands and you will be ready.

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

2 Peter 3:17-18

The summation of everything? Just live for Christ, do what He taught, and don't listen to false teachers. Simple. Wonderful.