

### **THREE GUIDELINES FOR GODLY LIVING AS WE AWAIT CHRIST'S RETURN**

*3<sup>11</sup>Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? —[You ought to live] in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>as you watch for and eagerly await the coming of the day of God. On that day the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will be dissolved by the intense heat. <sup>13</sup>But, according to his promise, we are watching for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness resides. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, since you are watching for these things, make every effort to be pure and blameless so as to be found at peace with him. <sup>15</sup>Recognize that the great patience of our Lord is [intended for] salvation, just as our beloved brother, Paul, also wrote to you, in accordance with the wisdom given to him. <sup>16</sup>Just as in all his letters he speaks about these things. In [his letters] there are things that are difficult to understand, which those who are ignorant and unstable distort, just as [they do] the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. <sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, knowing this in advance, be on guard so that you will not be led astray by the error of lawless men and fall from your own secure position. <sup>18</sup>But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:11-18)*

#### **Introduction**

Back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a certain English family spent their vacation at the seashore. While there the father received a message urging him to return to London on business. His wife and two little daughters accompanied him to the train station to see him off.

The two little girls loved their father very much and were sorry that he would be away. They said, "Father, tell us when you will come back and we will meet you at the station."

Their father replied, "I am not sure what day it will be. But it will be on the one o'clock train either Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday or Friday."

When Tuesday came, the girls put on their prettiest Sunday dresses and went to the station to see if father had arrived. But he did not arrive on Tuesday. On Wednesday they again put on their best dresses and went to the station. But father did not arrive on Wednesday. Neither did he arrive on Thursday.

But when Friday came and the one o'clock train rolled into the station, there was father. And his little daughters were ready to greet him, dressed in their finest clothes. That night their mother remarked to her husband, "I never had such an easy time keeping the girls' dresses clean! They wanted to be ready for your return." (*Mrs. Knight's Book of Illustrations*, Alice Marie Knight, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 1964, pp. 311-312)

The knowledge that their father would return and their desire to be ready to greet him had a very practical impact on the lives of those little girls. All the more, the certainty of Christ's return in glory and the final judgment that shall accompany His return should have a very practical impact upon our lives.

In verse 11 the Apostle Peter asks the question, "In view of Christ's return, what kind of people ought you to be?" He then proceeds to supply the answer to that question: "Because of the certainty of Christ's return, we must conduct ourselves in a godly manner."

### **I. Conduct Yourself in a Godly Manner, ...by Anticipating the Coming Day of God**

As a Christian, your attitude should be that of watching for and eagerly awaiting the coming of the day of God (vs. 12.)

In light of verse 12b, "*On that day the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will be dissolved by the intense heat,*" one might ask, "Why would we be looking forward to this day?" The answer is revealed in verse 13, namely, the fact that the day of God's coming will bring the fulfillment of God's promise—the appearance of the new creation characterized by righteousness. This great Christian hope can sustain us in hard times; but it is sometimes hard to sustain this hope (to maintain it as the guiding light of our lives) in good times when there are so many things of this present world to distract us, note Deuteronomy 8:11-14a,

*Be careful that you do not forget Jehovah your God, failing to observe his commandments, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. <sup>12</sup>[Be careful] for fear that, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup>and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup>then your heart becomes proud and you forget Jehovah your God. (Deut. 8:11-14a)*

What are some biblical incentives to rekindle and stimulate our desire for the day of Christ's coming? First, there is the realization that the fullness of joy is found in the immediate presence of the LORD: "*You have made known to me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore*" (Psl. 16:11.) Second, there is the realization that that day will bring the final triumph of the kingdom of God. With regard to that great day the angels declare, "*The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*" (Rev. 11:15.) Third, and most importantly, there is the knowledge that on that great day the Lord Jesus Christ will be vindicated to the glory of God. It will be on the great day that all of which the Apostle Paul writes of Christ will be realized: "*before the name Jesus [now] possesses 'every knee should bow'—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—*

*11'and every tongue confess' that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father"*  
(Phil. 2:10-11.)

As a Christian, you should be actively anticipating the coming of the day of God—the Greek word translated, *"eagerly await"* (σπευδω,) has more of an active rather than a passive sense. How are we to actively anticipate the coming of the day of God? We are to do so mainly by means of prayer. Consider one of the first petitions of the Lord's Prayer: *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:9-10.) Note, too, the response of the church to our Lord's testimony concerning His return: *"He who testifies to these things says, Indeed, I am coming swiftly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus"* (Rev. 22:20.) Think about a time when you were really earnest in prayer—you really wanted and needed God to do something for you. Remember how you prayed at that time. Pray like that again, this time praying like that for the coming of the day of God—and do so consistently, even daily.

Let us conduct our selves in a godly manner, by anticipating the coming day of God. Let us take to heart the warning and counsel our Lord gives with regard to the day of His return:

*Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. 35It will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.* (Lk. 21:34-36) Note: "dissipation" means, "to indulge in pleasure recklessly;" it refers to the extravagant pursuit of pleasure, rather than pursuing and cultivating the spiritual life.

The Christian writer, Harry Blamires, remarks, "A prime mark of the Christian mind is that it cultivates the eternal perspective. That is to say, it looks beyond this life to another one. It is supernaturally orientated, and brings to bear upon earthly considerations the fact of Heaven and the fact of Hell" (*The Christian Mind*, Harry Blamires, Servant Books, Ann Arbor MI, First American Edition, 1978, p. 67.)

## **II. Conduct Yourself in a Godly Manner, ...by Giving Diligence to be Found at Peace with God**

Since it is appointed for us to meet God, and on that great day to stand before the Lord of glory, it is imperative that we be at peace with Him. The Scriptures assure the Christian of having peace with God; the Apostle Paul declares, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 5:1.) At the same time we are exhorted by the Apostle Peter to *"make every effort"* to assure that we will *"be found at peace with him"* (vs. 14.) We have peace with God through our relationship with the

Lord Jesus Christ, and that relationship must be kept in good condition. When Peter exhorts us to be "*pure and blameless*," he is exhorting us to be diligent to deal with known sin by means of repentance and the grace provided by God, rather than to condone or conceal such sin. By way of illustration, it is like regularly taking your coat to the cleaners, and not allowing the spots and stains to set in the fabric.

To be in a state of peace with God and to maintain that state, it is necessary for us to be honest with God and open with Him. David discovered this and testifies of it:

*Blessed is the man whose sin Jehovah does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. <sup>3</sup>When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long; <sup>4</sup>for day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. <sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psl. 32:2-5)*

Furthermore, it is also necessary to be on guard against those attitudes and views that "disturb the peace" we have with God. We must avoid entertaining the sinful attitude and outlook that abuses the unique relationship we have with God in Christ and assumes that we can take an unholy advantage of that relationship. Let us bear in mind 1 Peter 1:14-19 as a safeguard against such an abuse:

*As obedient children, no longer conform to the passions you formerly had when you lived in ignorance. <sup>15</sup>But just as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup>because it is written, "Be holy, because I am holy." <sup>17</sup>And if you call upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, live your remaining time [on earth] in fear, <sup>18</sup>knowing that you were redeemed from your futile way of life handed down from your forefathers—not by perishable things, such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish or defect, [the blood] of Christ. (1 Pet. 1:14-19)*

As Christians, we have been called to be obedient children. We have been called to share in the heavenly Father's divine nature, His command is, "*Be holy, because I am holy*." We must recognize that our heavenly Father is the divine Judge of all the earth, and that He carries out that sacred work without partiality and with perfect justice. All this must cause us as Christians to reverence our heavenly Father with a holy fear and recognize the impossibility of taking unholy advantage of Him without disturbing the peace.

We must avoid entertaining the sinful attitude and outlook that misinterprets the long-suffering of the LORD. We must recognize that the great patience of our Lord "*is intended for salvation*." That is to say, His long-suffering patience is intended to show His kindness and mercy and to afford sinners the opportunity of coming to Christ the Savior. Our Lord's long-suffering must never be

misinterpreted as an indication of negligence or indifference on the part of God. In verse 15 of our present passage (2 Pet. 3:11-18) Peter refers us to the Apostle Paul's teaching on this subject. One passage in particular that Peter may have had in mind is Romans 2:4-6,

*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself on the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup>God will give to each person according to what he has done. (Rom. 2:4-6)*

Let us conduct ourselves in a godly way, by giving diligence to be at peace with God.

*The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup>The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy; <sup>14</sup>rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the sinful nature so as to fulfill its lusts. (Rom. 13:11b-14)*

### **III. Conduct Yourself in a Godly Manner, ...by Growing in the Grace and Knowledge of Christ**

All of life is dynamic and changing, life never stands still—neighborhoods, institutions, societies, individuals, are either progressing or regressing, either deteriorating or advancing.

Our Christian life—our relationship with Christ—is also dynamic. Hebrews 5:11-12 contains an example of and a warning against retrogression in our spiritual life:

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! (Heb. 5:11-12)*

The writer to the Hebrews laments the fact that these Christian people have retrogressed in their spiritual life and are thus unable to receive the important teaching he desires to impart to them.

Conversely, 2 Thessalonians 1:3 provides an example of progress in the spiritual life: *"We ought always to thank God for you, brethren, and rightly so,*

*because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”*

The great British preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones remarked, “The only way to avoid falling in the Christian life is to advance. The only way to avoid slipping back is to go forward. There is no such thing as being static in the Christian life.”

Peter gives us an exhortation for positive change, for advancement in our Christian lives (vs. 18.) He exhorts us first to *“grow in the grace ... of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* We are to use God’s grace (His divine resources for godly living) as a means of getting more grace. By way of illustration: You work your muscles on the exercise machine in order to build more muscle. Likewise, as we employ the grace God has made available to us we increase our capacity to receive more grace, which is to be used for still further spiritual growth.

Such questions as the following may serve as the “measuring stick” by which we may discern spiritual growth: “Am I able to do greater things for God (i.e.; I am better able to resist temptation, better able to take a stand for Christ and His righteousness, better able to endure hard times, etc.)? At the same the same time, am I more conscious that these are the works that God is doing in me?—as the Apostle Paul testifies to the Corinthians: *“I worked harder than all of them—not I, but the grace of God that was with me”* (1 Cor. 15:10b.)

Peter also exhorts us as Christians to *“grow in the ... knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* We are called to grow in our understanding of Christ—how He works, what we can expect to find Him doing in our lives. We are called to grow in our appreciation for Christ—what He has done for us, what He presently is doing for us, what we are yet to receive from Him. We are called to grow in our love for Christ—He should become more precious to us and ever more important in our lives. We are called to an ever greater experience of Christ and a deeper relationship with Him.

Let us conduct ourselves in a godly way, by growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The Word of God not only insists on the certainty of Christ’s return in glory and judgment, but it also insists that the certainty of the Day of God must have a very practical impact on our lives. Because of the certainty of Christ’s return—because of the certainty of the Day of God—let us be sure to conduct ourselves in a godly way.