

2 Peter 3:15b-18

Introduction

- 2 Peter 3:14–15a — Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, bring all your energy to bear so that you may be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation...

What is our salvation here in these verses? Our salvation is the *result* of being found on the day of the Lord without spot or blemish. Our salvation is the *result* of bringing all our energy to bear *in order that* we may be found by Him without spot or blemish. Most often, when we speak of “salvation” we’re thinking of a finished work in the past (our conversion and justification). But our conversion and justification was not in any way the result of any striving or effort on our part to be found without spot or blemish. When the Bible speaks of our salvation, it’s actually more often talking about our future salvation and deliverance on the day of the Lord. And our salvation on that day will have everything to do with being found by God without spot and blemish, and therefore truly worthy of obtaining (*not* meriting) final salvation (Mat. 22:8; Lk. 20:35; 2 Thess. 1:5, 11). I think of the words of Jesus in Revelation chapter three:

- Revelation 3:4 — Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

Our *future salvation* on the day of the Lord will be granted on the ground of the holy and blameless lives we’ve lived *only in so far* as those lives are the fruit of having been justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

- Romans 6:22 — But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Therefore, we count the patience of our Lord (or, the delay of His coming) not as an excuse to indulge the flesh (cf. the false teachers), but as the opportunity that He gives us to earnestly cultivate the fruits of our justification in a holy and blameless life – *so that* we might be found by Him on that day without spot or blemish and granted entrance into that new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. Or, we could also say it like this: We count the patience of our Lord as the working out of His sovereign will for our salvation – who is not willing that any of His beloved children should perish, but that all who are confidently waiting for the new heavens and the new earth should come to repentance and be *found* by Him on that day holy and blameless, without spot or blemish.

We remember that being found without spot or blemish doesn’t mean being found perfect and sinless. It involves *on our part* a continuing attitude of repentance over our remaining sin and *on God’s part* a gracious willingness to accept even our flawed good deeds as acceptable in His sight because of our union with Christ.

“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, bring all your energy to bear so that you may be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as [your] salvation...”

I. 2 Peter 3:15b–16a — ...just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

What Peter’s saying, here, is “I’m not the only one who’s teaching these things.” Peter isn’t the lone, renegade Apostle who’s teaching that holy and blameless living is essential to the inheritance of salvation on the final day of the Lord. The Apostle Paul also teaches the same thing in all his letters, and Peter’s readers can know this because at least one of these letters of Paul had actually been addressed to them.

This is more than just a case of, “He agrees with me, he’s on my side.” Peter’s point isn’t just Paul, but Paul *the Apostle*. And, of course, we remember how Peter introduces himself in the opening words of this letter: “Simeon Peter, a servant *and apostle* of Jesus Christ...” (1:1). What Peter’s really wanting to emphasize here is the unity of the Apostolic message. In other words, there aren’t any competing Gospels, or even competing versions of the Gospel preached by competing Apostles, but one and the same Gospel preached by those who were themselves beloved brothers and co-laborers in the faith. Peter identifies Paul as his “beloved brother” because he wants to emphasize the oneness and the agreement between them in the *Gospel* that they preach.

Peter not only calls Paul his “beloved brother,” but then he’s careful to say that when Paul wrote to these believers, he wrote “according to the wisdom given him.” The wisdom given him *by whom*? This is what’s known as a “divine passive.” In other words, Paul has written his letters “according to the wisdom given him *by God*.” This “wisdom” isn’t the kind of wisdom that we have when God enables us to rightly understand and apply His word. That *is* wisdom, but it’s not the wisdom Peter’s talking about here. This is the wisdom that comes from receiving divine revelations of previously unrevealed mysteries of the Gospel and then understanding that revelation in such a way as to be able to impart it accurately and faithfully to others (cf. Eph. 3:1-6; 1 Cor. 2:6-7). In other words, this is the wisdom of divine inspiration. The letters Paul wrote were not the result of any wisdom that *he* had, but of a wisdom given to him and *revealed* to Him by God (cf. 1:20-21). Aren’t you grateful for the wisdom given by God to the Apostles and preserved in the letters that these Apostles have written – which we now have in our Bibles? It’s because Paul wrote his letters according to the wisdom given him by God that Peter can write in verse sixteen not only of Paul’s letters but also of “the **other Scriptures**.” The letters of Paul, Peter says, have an authority equal to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Notice how highly Peter’s speaking of Paul, and then remember that this is the same Peter who writes at the end of his first letter:

- 1 Peter 5:12 — I have written briefly to you, *exhorting* and *declaring* that *this* is the *true* grace of God. Stand firm in it.

Peter also wrote with the authority of an Apostle and according to the wisdom given him by God; but Peter is not in any competition with Paul. In fact, the very opposite is true! Part of what makes this so special—and so important and such a big deal—is that Paul the Apostle was not one of “the twelve” Apostles. Paul never met Jesus during His earthly ministry. He was never one of Jesus’ disciples as were the other twelve Apostles. Paul never walked and talked with Jesus in Galilee and Judea as did Peter and the others. It was only after His resurrection and ascension into heaven that Jesus finally appeared to Paul “last of all, as to one untimely born” (1 Cor. 15:8). Furthermore, while Peter was entrusted with the Gospel to the Jews (along with the other “pillars” of the church, James and John) Paul was entrusted with the Gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Gal. 2:1-9). These are really some pretty major differences. The Apostle Paul had a very unique calling as well as a very unique mission compared to all the other Apostles and especially compared to Peter and James. Paul also had his own unique style and even a unique vocabulary. No other New Testament writer uses the language of being “in Christ” quite like Paul does. And no other New Testament writer uses the language of being justified by faith *alone*, *apart* from works of the Law as Paul does.

The result of all this is that it was tempting for some people to argue that Paul and Peter were actually preaching different Gospels (people still argue this today). On a superficial reading of their letters, there were some who could conclude that Paul was preaching a law-free Gospel while Peter was preaching a law-observant (or even a law-based) Gospel. So if you believed in a works righteousness, you might try to appeal to Peter and “his” Gospel and dismiss Paul. On the other hand, if you wanted to emphasize freedom from rules and obligations, you might try to appeal to Paul and “his” Gospel and dismiss Peter. In other words, if you wanted to emphasize law over grace you might appeal to Peter, and if you wanted to emphasize grace over law you might appeal to Paul. But what Peter’s affirming here is that for all their differences in calling, in mission, and even in language and vocabulary, the Gospel that Paul preached was identical with the Gospel that Peter preached. It’s against this backdrop that we can more fully appreciate Paul’s words in Galatians two:

- Galatians 2:1–2, 6–9 (cf. Acts 15) — Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain... And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

It's also against this backdrop of the supposed competing Gospels of Paul and Peter that we can more fully appreciate what Peter writes *here* in 2 Peter chapter three: “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, bring all your energy to bear so that you may be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as [your] salvation, **JUST AS**

our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you *according to the wisdom given him*, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.”

The Gospel that Peter preaches, especially when it comes to what the Law and holy and blameless lives have to do with our salvation, is the same exact Gospel that Paul preaches. There’s only one apostolic message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. But *what about* those people who appeal to Paul against Peter? What about those people who might appeal to parts of Romans or parts of Galatians in order to support their rejection of what’s being said here in 2 Peter? Peter goes on, now, to write in the second half of verse sixteen:

II. 2 Peter 3:16b — There are some things in them [in Paul’s letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Sometimes we might read this verse as a source of comfort to ourselves when we have a hard time understanding Paul’s letters, but Peter’s intention was not at all to comfort us. That’s actually the furthest thing from Peter’s mind. Notice first of all that Peter says there are “*some things*” in Paul’s letters that are hard to understand – only *some things*. Notice second of all that Peter doesn’t say that these things are impossible to understand, but only hard—or, more difficult—to understand. Most importantly, notice that Peter says the only people who can ever *misinterpret* Paul are the ignorant and the unstable, and the only way these ignorant and unstable people can ever misinterpret Paul’s “hard to understand” sayings is by willfully “twisting” them – even as they twist “the other Scriptures.” Finally, notice how Peter says that these ignorant and unstable people who willfully twist the things in Paul that are “hard to understand” are actually deserving of eternal destruction.

We hear of something hard to understand and we sympathize with those who fail to interpret it correctly. But Peter’s certainly not showing any sympathy here. That’s because when Peter talks about things “hard to understand” he’s not talking about things that are so complicated they sound to us like a foreign language; he’s just talking about things that could easily *appear* to mean one thing when they’re taken in isolation, but when carefully read in the light of everything that Paul says everywhere else, the true meaning and interpretation of these “hard to understand” passages will *always* be made clear – crystal clear. The reason these sayings of Paul are difficult to interpret is simply because they require us to work extra hard at understanding what Paul says *in the context* or *in the light* of what he says everywhere else. They require us to work extra hard at making sure we hear Paul saying exactly what *Paul means* to say. But the ignorant and unstable are too lazy to do that work. More than that, they don’t want to do that work because they’re more than happy to let Paul say what *they want* him to say. Do we ever approach the Scriptures like this – carelessly and selfishly? Are we ever unwilling to do the extra work of carefully listening to *all* of Scripture *in its context*?

There were some people who emphasized “law over grace” who twisted Paul’s “hard to understand” sayings just so that they could have an excuse for *rejecting* the Gospel that he preached.

➤ Romans 3:5–8 — But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? ... But if through my lie God’s

truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying.

- Romans 5:20; 6:1 — Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more... What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

There were others, however, who emphasized “grace over law” who twisted Paul’s “hard to understand” sayings not so they could reject Paul, but so they could *use* Paul as their “authority” for loose and self-centered living.

- 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23 — “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything... “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.

Here in Peter, it was the false teachers and their followers who were twisting the “hard to understand” sayings of Paul in order to excuse their sensuality and their greed and still comfort themselves with the hope of avoiding eternal destruction. How many people, today, have done the same thing and twisted the Gospel that Paul proclaims into an “easy-believism” that guarantees eternal life regardless of whether or not we’re making every effort to live blameless and holy lives that will be found without spot or blemish at the coming of Christ? How many people, today, have turned “grace alone” into “cheap grace.” How many of us have turned Paul’s “justification by faith alone apart from works of the law” into a final salvation and inheritance of eternal life that has nothing to do with the works we’ve done and the law we’ve kept and the lives we’ve lived? This is a twisting of Paul that’s still leading many people to eternal destruction. And that’s what Peter’s so concerned about here at the close of his letter. That’s why Peter’s at such pains to remind his readers—and us—that the Gospel Paul proclaims is the *same* Gospel that he proclaims and that the only people who can say otherwise are the ignorant and the unstable who twist Paul’s words *to their own destruction*.

Brothers and sisters, there *are* some things hard to understand in the Bible, not just in Paul, but even here in Peter, and in James and John, and in the letter to the Hebrews. These “hard to understand” things aren’t related to obscure and peripheral topics, but rather to our understanding of the Gospel itself. One hard to understand passage might seem to be teaching a “works righteousness” (“Bring all your energy to bear so that you may be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace.”) Another hard to understand passage might seem to be teaching a salvation that has nothing at all to do with our righteous living and keeping of the Law. But when we’re careful to do the extra work of listening to all of Paul in context and listening to all of Peter in context (and all of the Scriptures in context) the true meaning of these “hard to understand” places will always be made clear to us so that we can always have a *true* understanding of the *true* Gospel that’s *truly* powerful to save. The Gospel matters, and therefore understanding the Gospel *rightly* matters – especially understanding what the Gospel has to do with the Law, and what the Law has to do with our final salvation. It was on this most important of all subjects that Peter and Paul were fully agreed.

The false teachers twisted Paul’s “justification by faith alone apart from works of the Law” to excuse their lives of sensuality and greed. But Peter reminds us in this letter that it’s only those

who live holy and blameless lives who will be provided an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. 1:10-11). It's only those who are found without spot or blemish who will be welcomed into the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. This is *why* we count the patience of our Lord as our *salvation* — because He is not willing that any of His beloved children should perish, but that all should be found by Him on that day holy and blameless, without spot or blemish.

Why do we come to church? One of the reasons is so that we won't be among the ignorant and the unstable, but rather among those who know how to rightly interpret and faithfully live out even all of the "hard to understand" places in the Bible – places that have everything to do with the Gospel and our own salvation. It's in this light that I especially encourage us all to review the message from last week. It's also in this light that we read what Peter goes on to say in verses 17-18:

III. 2 Peter 3:17 — You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand [knowing that there will always be the ignorant and the unstable who twist the Scriptures to their own eternal destruction], be on guard so that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability.

Who's Peter talking to here? He's talking to Christians. What kind of Christians is Peter talking to? He's talking to "stable" Christians. How is it then that we, as stable Christians, maintain that stability until Christ comes? As stable Christians, how do we avoid ever being carried away with the error of lawless people to our own eternal destruction? We do this by heeding the gracious warnings of Scripture. We do this by coming to church every week to be reminded and instructed in the true Gospel and the *whole* Gospel. We do this by always taking with the utmost seriousness these closing words of Peter: "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on guard so that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability..."

IV. 2 Peter 3:18a — But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Notice that Peter *doesn't* say: "But be careful to obey the Law so that you can be saved." Peter *doesn't* say, "But make sure to do good works so that you can inherit eternal life." Instead, he comes back again to root all of our law-keeping and all of our good works in *grace*, and in the personal, experiential "*knowing*" of our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ: "But **GROW** in *grace* [and **GROW**] in the *knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*." As Peter closes his letter with these words, he's picking up the very same words that he started with in chapter one and verse two:

➤ **2 Peter 1:2** — May **grace** and peace be multiplied to you **in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord [in the personal, experiential knowing of God and of Jesus our Lord by faith]**.

Here in chapter three, Peter emphasizes *growing* in grace and *growing* in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and here, too, we're brought full circle back to where we started in chapter one, verses 3-8:

- 2 Peter 1:3–8 — “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and piety, **through the knowledge of him** who called us by his own glory and virtue, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. And so for this very reason, **bringing all your energy to bear, supply** by your faith, an abundance of moral excellence, and [supply] by [your] moral excellence, an abundance of knowledge, and [supply] by [your] knowledge, an abundance of self-control, and [supply] by [your] self-control, an abundance of steadfastness, and [supply] by [your] steadfastness, an abundance of piety, and supply by [your] piety, an abundance of brotherly affection, and [supply] by [your] brotherly affection, an abundance of love.” For when these things belong to you *and* are abounding **more and more**, they make you neither useless nor unfruitful **in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

We see, then, how in concluding his letter in the same way he began, Peter's actually summarizing the whole theme and reason for his letter in just a few words:

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand [knowing that there will always be those ‘who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality; Jude 4], be on guard so that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability. But **grow in grace** and [**grow**] *in the knowledge of our Lord and [our] Savior Jesus Christ.*”

One commentator writes, “If we are to find a single ‘key verse’ for all of 2 Peter, this would probably be it. Here Peter summarizes his root concern: that his readers, resisting the heresy of the false teachers, continue to grow spiritually, becoming more and more like the Christ whom they confess [until they inherit the promise of final salvation and the hope of eternal life]” (Moo). Peter's point is not that any one of us should have already arrived, but that we must all, always be growing. His point isn't even how fast we're growing (cf. Davids), but simply that we *must* all, always be growing, abounding more and more in every Christian virtue – in moral excellence, in knowledge, in self-control, in steadfastness, in piety, in brotherly affection, and in love.

It's in this way—by *growing* in grace and *growing* in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—that we'll never be carried away with the error of lawless people or fall from our own stability. And so we're reminded again of Peter's words in chapter one:

- 2 Peter 1:10–11 — Therefore, brothers, be all the more zealous to confirm [complete] your calling and election, for as long as you do these things you will most certainly never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided to you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Notice those words: “The eternal kingdom **of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**” And now notice how Peter ends his letter with these same words: “But grow in grace and in the knowledge

of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” At the end of the day, from beginning (1:1-2, 8, 11; cf. 1:14, 16; 2:20) to end (3:18), this letter has not been about our own self-efforts to earn or merit salvation. Instead, this letter has been about a perseverance, and a strenuous effort, and a striving, and a growing, and a final salvation that is ultimately the gracious work of *our Lord* and *our Savior JESUS CHRIST*. In the end, *He* is the one who keeps us from falling and who will cause us to stand on that day—and be found on that day—holy and blameless, without spot or blemish (cf. Schreiner). And that’s why Peter concludes—and that’s why we rejoice to conclude with Peter, with all of our hearts:

V. 2 Peter 3:18b — To **HIM** be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.