

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Number:	99		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S RETURN

Throughout Peter's two epistles there is a strong link between the Christian's expectation of Christ's return and the believer's daily conduct. When we speak of daily conduct, what is involved? J. Douma, a noted Dutch theologian, gives us this insightful analysis: "We are always interested in answering the question, Why are we doing this? (in the sense of, For what purpose are we doing this?). This question, in fact, brings us to the outer limit of morality. For our moral conduct often serves purposes which themselves are not of a moral nature. In ethical reflection, this kind of goal is frequently termed a *value* or a *good*, although this latter term has become a bit old-fashioned. We could mention quite a number of values, like health, beauty, freedom of expression, religious freedom, democracy, happiness, attaining one's ideals, and serving God. Each one can be described as nonmoral, or, still better, as supramoral. Moreover, we strive to realize such values, not only by moral conduct, but in other ways as well. Take, for example, the value of happiness. If each person behaved well morally, that would certainly advance personal and social happiness. But the happiness of many people is also advanced by, for example, developing their intellectual or aesthetic gifts, or cultivating their business acumen. We cannot understand morality completely without looking at this question of purpose or goal. Norms and virtues are affected by one another. If we should be doing something, a reason why that thing needs doing should be able to be given. When we talk about virtues, it is obvious that these are *good* for something. The surgeon's tools look quite different from the farmer's implements, because they are used for a different purpose. Similarly, norms and virtues can differ radically, depending on the values being pursued by an individual or a society. Values can be subordinated to still other values. Everyone values health, but health can be subordinated to a higher value. A Christian will subordinate health, well-being, or happiness to a higher purpose, namely, serving and honoring God. We can say that purposeful conduct has much to do with motivation. The question, Why are we doing this? Deals with motivation as well as purpose. The difference is that with motivation, we are still moving within the moral arena. But when it comes to the purpose of our conduct, we move beyond the moral arena by asking, Why are we doing *this* (as opposed to something else)?"¹

- I. **PURSUING A LIFE THAT IS PLEASING THE LORD.** Note how often the theme of pleasing God is accented in Scripture: Learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10); how you ought to live and please God (1 Thess. 4:1); we do what pleases him (1 John 3:22); to please the Lord in every way (Col. 1:10); the unmarried man is concerned to please the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32); whether home or away, we want to please him (2 Cor. 5:9); a soldier wants to please the one who enlisted him (2 Tim. 2:4); may God work in you what is pleasing in his sight (Heb. 13:21). Without faith it is impossible to please him (Heb. 11:6); not pleasing men but God (1 Thess. 2:4); it pleased God that Solomon asked this (1 Kgs. 3:10); children, obey your parents, for this is pleasing to the Lord (Col. 3:20); your sacrifice was well-pleasing to God (Phil. 4:18). In 2 Corinthians 5:9, Paul used the word *philotimoumetha*, translated "we make it our aim." The word refers to that which is loved and honoured. It stresses devotion and zeal. "To be well-pleasing" is the meaning of the

adjective *euarestoi*. In concert with Peter, the apostle Paul's "perspective for modern and postmodern people in the West is that history is going someplace beyond itself and that at the end of history stands the judgment of God. Hence, the goal of life is not the progress of pleasure on earth, but striving to please God in heaven. We live under the coming judgment of Christ. This is the lens through which Paul views life, and we must work hard to help Christians regain this fundamental perspective. Our lives should be driven by the certainty of Christ's future reign. Our hope is that in Christ we will endure the day of judgment, forgiven and clothed with the good works born of faith and done by the power of God."² Peter asks the readers a personal question: "What kind of people ought you to be?" He bypasses the scoffers, who, he says, are kept for the day of judgment and destruction (v. 7). Instead, he challenges the recipients of his letter to examine carefully what their purpose in life is. The verb *ought* indicates that a divine obligation rests upon the readers; they are to be holy in all that they do (compare 1 Peter 1:15-16). Peter exhorts them to live in the sphere of God's holiness, so that when that great and awful day appears they continue to live in the presence of God. In the introduction to his first epistle, John encourages the Christians to have "fellowship . . . with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1:3). In different wording, Peter says the same thing. Christians must cultivate holy living in full awareness of God's sacred presence, so that they become outstanding people. This is exactly Peter's question: "What kind of people ought you to be?"³

II. THE IMPACT OF THAT DAY UPON BELIEVERS (vv. 11-12a). "Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved" (*toutōn houtōs pantōn luomenōn*, literally, "these things all thusly being dissolved"), as a genitive absolute construction, sets forth the background facts. "These things all" summarizes verse 10, which the adverb "thus" (*houtōs*) underlines that the dissolution will be in the manner indicated. The present tense participle (*luomenōn*) has two different interpretations. One may take it to mean that the process of dissolution has already started, that the seed of destruction inherent in the very nature of creation is already at work in creation. Or the present tense may have the force of the future, with coming events vividly portrayed as a prophetic reality. The participle in itself is timeless, deriving its time from the context. Verse 10 has already made clear that the dissolution in view is still future. In view of that coming dissolution, "what manner of persons ought ye to be in *all* holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God" (vv. 11b-12a). The adjective rendered "what manner of persons" (*potapous*) is not so much a question as an exclamation of astonishment. In the New Testament it is not used to ask a direct question which expects a direct answer. If one feels a question mark to be necessary, it is better to place it at the end of verse 12. Perhaps an exclamation point would best convey the connotation of the expression. We agree with Lenski that the force of the adjective here is "exclamatory with a note of hortation." The life of the committed believer should have a moral quality which incites wonder in the sensual worldling. "Ought ye to be" (*dei huparchein humas*) indicates the abiding obligation resting upon believers to manifest moral maturity as an abiding profession. "In *all* holy living and godliness" (*en hagiais anastrophais kai eusebeiais*) declares the kind of lives they must live. Both nouns are in the plural as pointing to the different forms and directions in which their moral character will display itself. The use of these two nouns in the plural does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, but in 1 Peter 1:15 "in all manner of living" is practically a plural. Both 1 and 2 Peter reveal the peculiar tendency to use abstract nouns in the plural. "All holy living" underlines the point that separation from evil and dedication unto God must mark their daily conduct. "All," not in the original, is added to bring out the comprehensive scope of the plural. "Godliness," the last of four occurrences of the term in this epistle (cf. 1:3, 6, 7), depicts their lives as characterized by a personal piety which reverently seeks to do what is pleasing to God. Their lives must thus present a marked contrast to that which the false teachers permitted and practiced. Two present tense participles, "looking for an earnestly desiring he coming of the day of God" (*prosdokōntas kai pseudotas tēn parousian tēs tou theou hēmeras*),

characterize the readers in their relation to the future (v. 12a). “Looking for” (*prosdokōntas*) portrays an attitude of expectancy; it pictures their minds as continually turning to the future while enduring the present pressures of evil around them. The fact that Peter repeats the term in the next two verses underlines its importance. Lollie remarks, “The habitual expectation of *the coming of the day of God* is urged by Peter upon his brethren as being at once a characteristic mark of the true Christian, and itself a most powerful motive to universal holiness.” The second participle, *earnestly desiring* (*speudontas*), has two different meanings possible in this context and so has evoked much discussion. The verb means “to hurry, to make haste.” When used with a direct object, as here, it may indicate the personal response toward that object, hence, “earnestly desiring” (ASV) or “hasting unto” (KJV). This is linguistically possible and makes good sense here. But the more usual meaning with the accusative is “to urge (or) hasten on, to accelerate.” This is the alternative followed by the New American Standard Bible: “and hastening the coming of the day of God.” Then Peter would be urging his readers as God’s chosen people to be His instruments in furthering the divine purpose. This participle then is not just an indication of their pious attitude but also a call for aggressive Christian action.⁴

CONCLUSION: The future judgment of the earth that Peter focused upon is not designed so that people can turn back to their former ways, like the scoffers (2 Peter 2:22). Rather, Peter’s words have an ethical basis for how believers should live in light of that future judgment. Peter has continually reminded his readers of these things because the false teaching of the scoffers concerning the future caused them to follow their own sinful desires (2 Peter 3:1-3; cf. 1:12-15). While the scoffers attack the idea of the return of Jesus, Peter gives an eschatological exhortation for believers. In expectation of Jesus’ return, Peter urges believers to live holy lives. Why? Because skepticism in the return of Jesus can produce indifference in believers and how they live out their lives in the present. A proper understanding of the future (eschatology) should not cause us to be skeptical in our thinking or immoral in our conduct but to live holy and godly lives, as Peter says in verse 11: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness.” In focusing on the future, Peter tells us how to live in the present world. Peter has already stressed that God’s “divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). He also pointed out that holiness reflects God’s own character: “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, *You shall be holy, for I am holy* (1 Peter 1:15-16). So, when Peter says, “what sort of people ought you to be,” it is really a rhetorical question. It should be obvious that in looking forward to the return of Jesus, believers should be living holy and godly lives (1 Peter 2:9-12). The idea that believers can live any way they want is contrary to what Peter has already said in that they should make every effort to supplement their faith with self-control and godliness and to “be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. . .” (2 Peter 1:6, 7, 10). In a Western world which is rapidly decaying morally and skeptics scoff at the idea that they will be held accountable for their actions, Christians need to recognize the difference between God’s perspective and human perspective.⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ J. Douma, *Responsible Conduct: Principles of Christian Ethics* (P&R, 2013), p. 22.

² S. J. Hofemann *2 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 2000), p. 223.

³ S. J. Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1987), p. 338.

⁴ Once again I owe this section to D. E. Hiebert, cf. his excellent work *Second Peter and Jude: An Expository Commentary* (BJU Press, 1989), pp. 162-163.

⁵ Simon Turpin, *Scoffers: Responding To Those Who Deliberately Overlook Creation and The Flood* (Master Books, 2021), p. 230.