

*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as 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. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:14-18*

On March 20, 1980, Mt. St Helens, a supposedly dormant volcano on the western side of the state of Washington, began to quake and rumble. The local population was evacuated to a supposedly “safe” distance eight miles away. As time went on, the side of the mountain began to bulge. Scientists were not alarmed because past research of volcanoes indicated that they never blew sideways. But on May 18<sup>th</sup>, the side of Mount St. Helens exploded, shooting tons of debris downhill at the speed of 150 miles per hour. A minute later, the volcano exploded upward with the equivalent power of 500 atomic bombs. Two hundred thirty square miles of forest were devastated and 57 people lost their lives. The scientists had assumed that natural events would just continue on as before. But they were tragically wrong.

The same is true for us and for all of creation. Last week, as Pastor Eric shared the words of the apostle Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:1-13, we heard the truth of the Word of God tells us that someday an event will occur, that that will explode outward with more than the equivalent of 500,000 million, billion, trillion atomic bombs – when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ returns to cast judgement of those who have rejected him - and to gather together and take home those who have surrendered their lives to him - and also to destroy the heavens and earth He created at the beginning and then create a new heaven and earth where were everything will be new and perfect and glorious, for those are with him forever. Now this will happen – because it says so in the Word of God. Which means we better drop our assumptions that life as we know it, even in the next moment, will continue on. Peter wrote about that last week.

*The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:10-13*

These are the words of the apostle Peter as a concerned shepherd who wanted those in the church to *stay focused on the promises of God* that - in the midst of their struggles with persecution and conflict within the church - Jesus would return to give them victory and a new life with him forever. In our text for today Peter continues on this theme of staying focused - but now he ends his letter by telling us the four things we should be doing as we focus on the return of Christ, in the midst of the struggles of life.

1. In light of the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should be diligently pursuing personal holiness and righteousness. *“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace”* (2 Peter 3:14). Peter is clearly stating the truth that God’s coming day of judgment should motivate us to a diligent perseverance in our walk with God. Because we believe in the Second Coming of our Savior and Lord - *we should be motivated* to be found diligent in our pursuit of personal holiness and righteousness so that when Jesus returns he will find us living to please Him. To be *“diligent”* implies making every effort or exerting ourselves toward a goal. That doesn’t happen accidentally. It requires deliberate focus so we don’t drift into the wrong direction.

The phrase *‘to be found by him without spot or blemish’* means to be blameless before God *because we have been forgiven*. There is only One in all of the universe who is capable of making us *“without spot or blemish”* – and that is Jesus. 1 John 1:7-9 says: *“The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* We need Jesus to do this for us because the human approach to sin is to either ignore sin or to justify ourselves by rationalizing the reason for our sin. However, God does not ignore or rationalize when it comes to sin. He takes sin so seriously that He sent His only begotten Son to rescue us from the eternal death that results from sin.

God deals truthfully with our sin. We can either receive His righteous judgment or we can enjoy His forgiveness - by repenting of our sin and turning to for His forgiveness. When God forgives He also forgets our sin. It is as though we had never sinned—we are then *“without spot or blemish.”* In Isaiah 1:18 God himself tells us what happens we when He forgives us: *“though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”* In Colossians 1:19-20 we read that in Jesus: *“all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”* Romans 5:1 declares: *“since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Today Peter tells us that we are to be diligently pursuing the peace of Jesus: *“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”*

The Greek word *“peace”* means more than mere quietness. It has some of the sense of the Hebrew word *shalom* in that it implies well-being of soul or spirit. Peter’s concern for us is that we be at peace with the Lord, with others, and with ourselves. We are to be found prospering spiritually in God and trusting in His faithful provision. We are to maintain this peaceful relationship with Christ right up to the end, whether it be in death or rapture. In John 16:33 Jesus said: *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* Jesus Christ has given us the way to live in peace, to be without spot and blameless. If we are not found to be with Jesus and maturing in being more like Jesus, we can only blame our own selfish self-wills.

The second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and God’s coming day of judgment should motivate us to diligent perseverance in our walk with God. I trust that we all believe the truth that Jesus is coming back and God is coming to judge - but how much do we think about it? Wouldn’t it affect how we live out our lives if we kept in view the fact that Jesus is coming and we will give an account to God? Would husbands and wives argue about things if they both had in view that Jesus is coming? Would children disobey their parents and politicians tell lies and people disrespect those in authority on earth? Would churches fight and divide if the members were living in view of Christ’s coming? Would we spend money on all of the stuff that we think we need if we were living in view of Jesus’ coming? Would we waste our time in so many frivolous ways if we were living in view of Christ’s coming? In our text for today, when Peter says that we are to be *“without spot or blemish”* - he is not implying that we can be perfect in this life. Rather, he is pressing us, prodding us, exhorting us to make it our normal everyday, every hour, every minute habit and effort to *“be diligent to be found by”* Jesus *“without spot or blemish, and at peace”* when he does come back. In light of the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should be diligently, constantly, continuously pursuing personal holiness and righteousness.

2. In light of the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should be diligently and passionately sharing the gospel with those who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. *“And count the patience of our Lord as 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”* (2 Peter 3:15-16a). Verse 15 tells us why Jesus has not yet returned. God is being patient, so that more can come to faith in Jesus. The longer God delays His return, the greater the opportunity for people to be saved. Peter adds further weight to that idea by saying that the apostle Paul taught the very same thing.

Here Peter is affirming what he just said in 2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”* In both verses, the implied thought for us is, “Don’t get so caught up with our own issues and problems with sin. that we spend so much crying out for the Lord to come back and bail us out, that we neglect the salvation of the lost.” The reason the Jesus has not come back is that He is patiently waiting for sinners to repent – *which means Jesus is waiting for us share the gospel with everyone we meet.* Our trials are nothing compared with the eternal punishment that unrepentant sinners will experience. In other words, Peter is telling us to get our focus off of ourselves and put our focus those who need to hear the good news of the gospel - that God the Father sent Jesus Christ His Son into the world to die on a cross, in our place. for our sins, so we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back to God, when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

This is the sacrificial call of passionately proclaiming the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people We read of this in 2 Timothy 2:10 when Paul declares: *“For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory”* (NASB). This is also the call of the Great Commission our Lord Jesus gave his disciples and us after he had risen from the dead: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:18-20). When the Lord returns, it will mean salvation not only for us, but also for all who have believed through our witness of sharing the gospel. Any discomfort that we have to endure through trials now, will be more than worth it, when we see in heaven those whom the Lord has saved because of our sacrifice. In light of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we should be diligently and passionately sharing the gospel with those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

3. In light of the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should be diligently resisting the lure of false teachings of the truth of the Word of God. *“And count the patience of our Lord as 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. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”* (3:15-17). As a concerned shepherd who wanted his readers to persevere, Peter once again brings up the danger of false teachers in the church. He began in verse 15 and finishes in verse 16 when he commends that apostle Paul’s writings to us as *God’s Holy Word* - and then points out the false teachers who were “twisting” the writings of Paul and other parts of the Bible.

The history of the church of Jesus Christ is inseparable from the history of Satan’s attempts to destroy her. While difficult challenges have arisen from outside the church, the most dangerous have always been from within. For from within arise false teachers who masquerade as bearers of God’s truth. False teachers take on many forms, custom-crafted to times, cultures, and contexts. Within the evangelical church there are a range of errors that require correction and rebuke. Most of these have something to do with the outworking of the gospel in the life of Christian. False teaching in this area inevitably raises questions about the nature of the gospel itself. The most common false teaching we see today is the gospel is moralism where the Christian life is our effort. God blesses those who help themselves. Work hard, keep their noses clean, tell the truth, and live a good life. Another false teaching is legalism. Legalism and moralism are related to each other. Where moralism affirms its exchange with God in broad terms - morality for God’s blessing - legalism has a very specific, unbiblical, understanding of the kind of obedience God wants before we will bless us. Another kind of false teaching is the opposite of moralism and legalism – it’s called antinomianism. Strictly speaking they deny any legitimate place for God’s law as a guide for the Christian life. They teach that God doesn’t demand anything from us but trust in Jesus. Christianity is all about grace. As long as we believe in Jesus, we can do what we want.

The church is also in danger of false teachings as cultural pressures press in on the church's message and mission and cause it to swerve off track. When the church begins to accommodate its message to the prevailing cultural, it invariably takes the form of false teaching of the false gospels of politics and social issues. Of late the therapeutic gospel is making headway in churches. In the end, however, our culture poses the most significant danger through its constant drumbeat of *independence/autonomy*. As Westerners, we assume that we are self-sufficient, self-determining individuals, and that we can create our own identities and our own futures. As a result, we assume that no one has the right to tell us what to do or even to hold us to account. We see this today in the area of sexuality, we define our own gender or sexual practices; in the areas of conception, we rationalize abortion; in the area of marriage, we justify easy divorce, adultery, open marriage, polygamy or polyamory (any gender/multiple partners).

But this autonomy plays out in other ways. Because we determine our own selves and destinies, there is no God who can or would actually send people to hell. As a matter of fact, there is no true religion anyway; all religions are simply private means by which we are able to function in this world. Proselytizing (preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the danger of hell) is not only bad manners, but it is bad policy because it contradicts the independent autonomy that each of us has to choose our own pathways. From the garden of Eden on, we follow the enemy's promise—"You will be like God"—and we ask the enemy's question—"Has God really said?" While our culture's *forms* of autonomy *might not* find their way directly into a local evangelical church, that doesn't mean we are free from autonomy's temptations. When people refuse to join a Bible-believing local church because they want to remain independent, that's a form of autonomy. We live much of our lives immersed the pool of our culture's fundamental assumptions. This kind of fundamental cultural autonomy is a prime character trait of *false teachers* - in that they distort and twist Scripture around to suit their own views and teachings.

What does a false teacher look like in the church today? Erik Raymond, the Pastor at Emmaus Bible Church in Omaha, Nebraska wrote an article entitled "The Most Dangerous Person in Your Church" where he asked the question: "Who is the most dangerous person at my church?" Pastor Raymond answered that question, not by focusing on an individual, but rather by looking at a *type of person* - and what he ultimately found was the most dangerous people in our churches *are the apparently the smart people who are unteachable*. Raymond wrote: "When I say 'unteachable,' I mean that he has it all figured out. He is the classic, 'Don't confuse me with the facts, I know what I believe' guy." Those who are unteachable are constantly critical - and this is dangerous for the church in that it invariably brings division. This type of boiling pot eventually spills over. When they do this, they hurt unity and people.

"In my experience, "Pastor Raymond says, "that division in the church usually is a result of somebody being unteachable. This type of thing has a long legacy. Consider how Diotrephes liked to put himself first and stir up division. How did he do this? He did not submit to the teaching of the apostles. He was unteachable." We read of this in 3 John 1:9-10 where the apostle John wrote: "*I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.*" Pastor Erik Raymond closes by saying: "This is obviously dangerous for his own soul but also the church. Just like Diotrephes had influence in that congregation, so too the unteachable guy no doubt has influence in your local assembly. The influence of an unteachable guy is a vehicle for division."

What God's Word tells us here is that false teachers in the church are those who are unteachable. And false teachers also crave and seek attention - and they also reject the authority of the leadership of the church. A sad aspect of church life, even as we often experience it today, is that those who lead people astray end up causing divisions among God's people - *as they draw people to themselves, rather than pointing them to the Lord*. False teachers in the church promote the Kingdom of Self rather than the Kingdom of God - and they teach the Gospel of Self rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is worth remembering as we seek to discern those who would ultimately tear apart our churches, that one of the evidences of the Holy Spirit's presence in our leaders will be their constant attempt to bring aboard the unity of the body of Christ - *based not on themselves but on the revealed truth to be found in Jesus and in the Word of God*. But false teachers undermine that work of the church by claiming that they are more spiritual and more knowledgeable and more experienced than the leaders of the church and their fellow members of the church. Instead of seeking to build others up in the faith and encouraging the chosen leadership in the church - they grumble, and cause divisions between good Christian people. False teachers flatter themselves and urge others to become like them rather than become more like Jesus Christ. The centrality of the message of Jesus Christ crucified is then compromised or even lost.

1 Corinthians 1:10: *"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."*

Romans 16:17-18: *"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve."*

Titus 3:9-11: *"Avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."*

In light of the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we must diligently resist the lure of the false teachings of unteachable false teachers – who crave attention and make themselves known and reject the authority of the leaders in the church - who are called to protect the church from division!

4. In light of the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should be pursuing spiritual maturity by growing in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen"* (2 Peter 3:18). Peter ends his letter in verse 18 as he began it, by urging his readers to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In 2 Peter 1:2 he had said: *"May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."* Peter closes by saying, "keep on growing in that grace." The grace of our Lord and Savior is not just the starting point, grace is the main ingredient in spiritual growth. We all still have room for spiritual growth in his grace.

The verb "grow" is a present imperative, which could be rendered "be continually growing." So Peter provides the pointed advice to grow in grace and knowledge - *if we want to remain steadfastness in our battle against the false teachings of false teachers*. We are to grow "in grace," that comes in the God's unmerited favor, and in the exercise of spiritual graces Peter spoke of in the first paragraph of his letter 1 Peter 1:5–7: *"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."* We are also to grow in knowledge. This is not just any knowledge; this is the knowledge of knowing about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and about the knowledge of having a personal, intimate, eternal relationship with Jesus.

The antidote to the deception and destruction of the false teaching of false teachers is growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The contrast between verses 17 and 18 is between, on the one hand (v. 17), a tree which does not grow and so loses its stability in the earth and is blown over by the wind of false teaching and dies - and, on the other hand (v. 18), a tree which keeps its roots planted in the grace and knowledge of Jesus – and grows and stays healthy and stable and does not get blown over by false teaching. This is the diligent perseverance in light of eternity that we are called to live out for the glory of God through Jesus Christ. *"To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen!"*

*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 3-4*

*It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage. Jude 14-16*

*But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. Jude 17-23*

*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 24-25*

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