

## 2 Peter 3:14-18: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ]     2 Peter 3, verses 14-18 These are the five concluding verses of the epistle of 2 Peter.

2 Peter, like so much of the New Testament, is written in the shadow of the imminent day of the Lord, anticipating the near coming of Christ in judgment. Considering the imminent coming of their Lord in judgment, the recipients of the letter are charged to ensure that when the time comes they will be found holy, without impurity, without moral spot or blemish, and at peace with God and each other.

The day of the Lord will be a day when the true character of things and of persons are exposed. And we are called to live our lives as those readied for a great unveiling. As Peter declares in verse 10, The earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

The patience of the Lord, his delay in bringing judgment upon the world, is an act of salvation. It ensures that all of his people can be gathered in. Peter has already spoken of this patience in verse 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.

[ 1 : 58 ]     God's intent in delay is salvation. Peter claims that his teaching on this point is also supported by the witness of Paul's writings, written according to the wisdom that was given to Paul by the Lord.

Perhaps he has in mind passages of Paul's letters such as Romans chapter 2 verses 3 to 4. Do you suppose, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Peter's concern in this passage is to help the people to whom he is writing to understand the approaching day of the Lord.

However, much of the significance of this passage is found in material that is mostly tangential to Peter's driving point here, in his remarks concerning Paul. The first thing that we ought to notice is the way that he speaks of Paul, as our beloved brother.

Who is the R here? Richard Borkham has argued that this is very unlikely to mean my. The most likely possibility is that the R refers to Peter with his fellow apostles.

[ 3 : 07 ]     The we in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 1 refers to the very core apostles, Peter, James and John. And as James has died by this time, one could perhaps even make a case that the we refers to Peter and John alone.

Paul is the beloved brother and the fellow witness of these apostles. In Galatians chapter 2, Peter and Paul had a great confrontation in Antioch. But here Peter expresses his union with Paul and appeals to him as a fellow witness.

Peter was the one entrusted with the gospel of the circumcised, and Paul with the gospel to the uncircumcised. Paul presents the fact of this mutual recognition in Galatians, and here Peter also expresses such a recognition of Paul.

The second thing that we ought to notice is that Paul's works seem to have been widely known to Peter. The leaders and teachers of the early church recognised and supported each other's ministries, seeing themselves as standing shoulder to shoulder in unity in their presentation of the gospel.

Paul's letters clearly were shared widely in the early church, beyond the churches and persons to whom they were directly addressed. The early church was tightly networked, with lots of movement around between the churches.

[ 4 : 23 ] Paul's employment of letters, for instance, was not accidental, and there was much to commend the writing of epistles over the writing of abstract theological treatises. As letters they formed personal bonds and exchanges between churches, especially as churches were expected to pass them on to other churches.

As the letters were passed around, servants of the churches would travel around with them, sharing news, encouragement, gifts and ministry. They would strengthen the unity of the church in the process.

Also, as the direct recipients of the letters shared them, they were ministering their particular gifts to others, and presenting themselves as examples from which other churches and Christians could learn.

By this point, it is not unlikely that collections of Paul's letters were already circulating among churches. The third and most startling thing here, however, is the way that Peter speaks of Paul's writings.

He talks of how they are difficult to understand, and how many twist them to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. The implication here is that Peter considered Paul's writings to be scripture, alongside the scriptures of the Old Testament.

[ 5 : 33 ] He mentions the wisdom given to Paul. This expression is similar to the expression that Paul uses to refer to the ministry with which he was commissioned, and for which he was equipped. Among other places, we see him speaking in this way in Romans chapter 12 verse 3, In Romans chapter 15 verses 15 to 17, In Galatians chapter 2 verses 7 to 9, Paul describes this grace given to him again as something that was recognized by Peter and the other apostles.

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.

Peter remarks on the fact that there are things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand, and that these elements have been twisted by the uninstructed and unstable to their destruction. This is most likely referring primarily, not to followers of false teachers, but to false teachers themselves.

Theirs is a culpable lack of instruction and ignorance. They have not desired to grow in their understanding of the truth, so have not properly instructed themselves in the faith. The condemned persons are also unstable.

[ 7 : 30 ] They are not rooted in a love for the truth, in moral integrity and consistency of life, and as a result, they are unstable. Their interpretation is not guided by a careful commitment to discovering the truth, but by ungoverned passions, by their desire to justify their sins, by the anger of those whose minds are not at peace, by the rebellion of those who do not want to submit to the clear instructions of the Lord, by the sectarianism of those who wish merely to win arguments for their own party against others.

Rather, they will constantly twist the truth to their own destruction. Their own destruction, this is something that they are bringing upon themselves. There is a spirit of lawlessness and hatred for the truth at work in the world, and the recipients of Peter's epistle must be on guard against it.

It is in looking to him that they will put down the roots that will hold them firm and secure when all others are overthrown. Ultimately, all of the glory belongs to him.

A question to consider. Where else in the New Testament do we get a sense of the close connections between the various writers of the New Testament books?