

Bible Study

Week commencing 18th October 2020

Study Six – 1 and 2 Peter

The patience of God

2 Peter 3: 1-18

John Birch

Opening prayer: -

We thank you for Scripture's words, and the privilege of being able to freely meet, discuss and learn from them. We remember those for whom this is more difficult, who meet in secret to avoid persecution or arrest, and ask that you protect and strengthen their faith. So be with us now, and teach us your way, dear Lord, we pray. Amen

Comment: -

After his talk of a dog returning to its vomit and pigs wallowing in the mud in chapter 2, Peter seems to take a deep breath or three before completing his message!

Now his thoughts turn to hope for the future, whilst continuing to address what he considers to be false teaching and opposition from outside the churches. This was pointing to the fact that the promised second coming of Christ had yet to come, despite all the teaching about the importance of Christians living in expectation of this great event.

Peter reminds those who will read this letter that they must remember that time is seen differently by God. Those who do not hold to a strict interpretation of the six days of Creation would no doubt agree with this. This is not a delay but a demonstration of God's patience in allowing those who have yet to hear the Good News to respond. God wants everyone to come to repentance, we are told. The Day of the Lord is a theme which runs through the whole of Scripture. We live in the present age which is reflected in the language used to describe those who are leading the believers astray. Then there is the age to come which is altogether different, being the golden age of God. The question was how one age could change into the other – through human effort or by the direct action of God?

For the Jews, there was only one way this change could happen, by divine intervention. The time of that intervention was called The Day of the Lord and it would come without warning. A time for judgement and a time when the whole universe would be shaken and spring-cleaned!

The New Testament writers took this Old Testament picture and into it placed Jesus Christ and his Second Coming.

So, believers are to be vigilant for any false doctrine that might lead them astray, but also to be strong should opposition cause them suffering, holding onto the teaching of the apostles. 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ' is the encouragement given in the final words of this letter.

Question: -

Are there particular circumstances you come across in your daily life that really try your patience?

Key Verse: -

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!' (2 Peter 3:18)

Some questions: -

1. Peter mentions in v.1 that this is his second letter, written as a reminder of his teaching. Paul also was not averse to repeating his message (Philippians 3:1). How helpful is it to periodically be reminded of words we've heard before from the pulpit?

2. We live in an age where information is at our fingertips, and perhaps there is less desire to commit knowledge to memory. It was not so when this letter was written, hence the words in v. 2. Would it be easier for us to articulate our faith if we were more familiar with the text of Scripture, rather than just referring to it via books or an online search?

3. The recipients of this letter only had the Jewish Scriptures and that which came to them via the apostles. The message of verse two is about the completeness of the message – the ancient prophets foretold about the Christ to come; the gospels tell us about the Christ who came; and the apostles take the story of Christ to the world. In other words, the message of the Bible is ultimately about Christ. Does this make sense, and if so, how does it affect your understanding of the Old Testament?

4. Who are today's scoffers, and what is their complaint about people of faith?
5. There are echoes of other parts of Scripture within this Chapter (v. 8ff). Comparing our understanding of the age of the earth with that of the readers of this letter, is time more, or less of an issue for us than it was for them?
6. The Day of the Lord is a theme which runs throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament – a sense of conflict between the present age which is beyond repair, and a golden age of God to come. The question was how one changed into the other, as it was obviously beyond human endeavour. The Jews envisaged a frightening time when the universe would be shaken to its core, whereas Peter and other New Testament writers identified it with Jesus' Second Coming. How do you deal personally with these huge ideas about God intervening in human history?
7. Peter goes on to talk about new heavens and a new earth in vv. 11-14. Are you able to see this picture he is painting, or do you think about this concept in a different way? Is it something that you can easily relate to at all?
8. Does Peter cut through any confusion perhaps, by saying in v. 15 that we could simply view God's patience as an opportunity to get our lives and faith in order, so that whatever might happen we are prepared?
9. Peter goes on in v. 17 to state that the Christian has been forewarned. What responsibility does that lay upon us?
10. This book was written into a situation where Christian teaching and values were being challenged by the world. Could a similar one be written today, and what would it focus on?

Something to think about: -

How does the image of a patient God compare to your own life and relationships?

Prayer: -

Pray for those in your own fellowship who might be struggling faith-wise at this moment for whatever reason, that they might find the assurance that they currently lack.

Some quotes: -

'The second coming of Christ will be so revolutionary that it will change every aspect of life on this planet. Disease will be eliminated. Death will be abolished. War will be eradicated. Nature will be transformed.' (Billy Graham)

'If we were to do the Second Coming of Christ in colour for a full hour, there would be a considerable number of stations which would decline to carry it on the grounds that a Western or a quiz show would be more profitable.'

(Edward R. Murrow)

'I'd like to see the Second Coming in every one of us. That we all be Jesus. That we all embody that consciousness.' (Jane Siberry)

'Nothing is more prominently brought forward in the New Testament than the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.' (John Nelson Darby)

'It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.'

(Aristotle Onassis)

'We are very near the final climactic events that end with the Second Coming of Christ.' (Hal Lindsey)