

Holiness in the second Epistle of Peter

Part 1

Speaker	Ernest Brown
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[00:00:01] Peter 2, 1, 15 I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and cunning of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory. When there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. [00:01:08] And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy night. We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, and unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Verse 21 of chapter 2.

It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

[00:02:15] Chapter 3 and verse 1.

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you, in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts.

Verse 8.

Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [00:03:02] The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things have been

dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Looking afore, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. [00:04:02] Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless. I have no structured address to offer you tonight, but I would like to pursue the exercise commenced this afternoon, and looking at the incidents in the second epistle of this term holy, or holiness.

No need to repeat what was said this afternoon, but again in line with the exercise expressed at the beginning of our time together, that in the light of all that God has revealed of himself, in the light of all the blessing into which we have been brought, [00:05:11] what sensitivity have we, what responsibility have we to conform morally now to that which God shall establish and that which God will judge.

And I think this comes out very clearly in the second epistle. I suppose it's self-evident that Peter, second Peter, is a second letter.

Second Thessalonians, second Timothy, second Peter, all second epistles written towards the end of the active service on earth of those who were used to record the truth contained therein, [00:06:03] all relative to the days immediately prior to the heading of all things on earth, when God will necessarily come in in judgment against all that which God has brought in, and when God shall bring in in Christ that which is according to his heart.

And each of the second epistles paints a very dark picture of how things will have deteriorated, left to the responsible hands of man, and how only the personal, direct intervention of God shall bring about that which is according to his will. And this comes out very clearly in second Peter, as in the other second letters. Now if you will just turn to substantiate that, to chapter two, notice said there about the sweeping away of that which is obnoxious to God.

[00:07:07] We need to take account of the fact that we live in a world which is hastening onto judgment, and this needs to affect our moral judgment. Now, I will say at the beginning something which will come out in detail in chapter three, and it's this.

Very often, God, in this word, gives us information about the future. But he doesn't only give us information about the future in order that we might be clear in our minds.

That is part of his story. But a major aspect of prophecy is this, that if God gives us information about the future, it's in order that it might regulate the lives that we live at the present time. [00:08:04] To put it another way, God enlightens us as to what he is going to do in the future, giving us information as to how he will sweep away all unrighteousness from his presence, sweep it all away in absolute judgment.

And we are given information about that now, in order that we might come to that moral judgment now, against that which God shall finally and absolutely judge when the time is right. Now, we get instances in chapter two, if you turn to verses four, five, and six, which tell us that God has declared in advance that he will be completely unsparing when the time comes.

[00:09:01] God, who is holy, has revealed himself in holiness when things built up to the extent that they needed to be swept away in judgment.

Now, we learn in chapter two, verse four, God spared not the angels that sinned. When sin revealed itself amongst the highest level of intelligent creature, judgment was necessary.

God spared not the angels that sinned. Privilege, blessing, brings in responsibility.

Verse five, in the days of Noah. We learn from scripture that in the days of Noah, God looked down from heaven, and in his holiness, in his righteousness, he determined that every imagination of man was only evil continually.

[00:10:18] It built up until it had to be swept away in judgment. Verse five, God spared not the old world, but spared Noah the eighth, and so on. Then, again, man in blessing, man having privileges, and standing to him. God spared not Sodom and Gomorrah. Condemned them with an overflow, and judged them unsparingly.

And much is said about the judgment of the ungodly. Now, this is building up to the exposition of the truth, that the end of the Christian dispensation, the Spirit's day, when the break is taken off, [00:11:05] when, as another second epistle, Thessalonians tell us, when the restraining influence of the church is removed, when the restraining power of the Holy Spirit is removed, the break will be off, or that cesspool of iniquity, which is barely kept in check by this veneer of respectability at the moment, when the break is taken off, all that evil will bubble through, will manifest itself, and the ungodly world will hasten on unto destruction. Now, 2 Peter, being a second epistle, speaks of conditions in that day, and the challenge comes. How can there be any who are faithful to God, desire to live holy lives as God is holy?

How will they be maintained? What will their end be, amidst all the opposition of ungodly men? And this is developed in this epistle. The balance in the first epistle, about the Lord Jesus, the sufferings of the Christ, and the glory that shall follow, [00:12:21] God has seen fit, to be clear to us, to understand by the Spirit that all these sufferings of the Christ have had an answer commensurate with the sufferings.

All we read in the first epistle, God raised him from the dead and gave him glory. And here, we are given to understand once again, that there shall be glory commensurate with the sufferings. Not only heavenly blessing, but here in this dirty, murky world, there will be seen that display of the glory of God, covering the earth as the waters cover the sea, and that there shall be an answer even upon earth to the sufferings that have been endured, to the ungodliness which has manifested itself. [00:13:21] Now, having gone over that, let's look at some of the instances of the word. If suffering is one of the key words in the first epistle, before you get very far in the second epistle, we get the word knowledge, the word know, many, many times.

God wants us to be intelligent about what he's doing, what he has done, what he is doing, what he's going to do. And against this terribly dark background, there are things that we need to know. [00:14:03] And it's this epistle where we have the exhortation to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. And these elements and facets and aspects of knowledge shine through very clearly. Commencing then where we read in verse 15 of chapter 1, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. And he says, we

haven't followed fables, myths, fairy stories, fantasies of human imagination. And he says, you know, we apostles, we are absolutely sure of the truth of what we have been given to communicate to you Christians. He says, we have the word of God. And he says, the word of God has been displayed in a wonderful way.

[00:15:06] God has revealed himself. As Paul says elsewhere, the truth of God has been revealed by the Holy Spirit. It has been communicated by the Holy Spirit. It is received by the Holy Spirit. It is apprehended by the Holy Spirit.

And he says here, at the end of chapter 1, that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Again, against this background of ungodliness and ungodly men. [00:16:08] Called by God, yes. True, faithful in themselves, determined, set for God in a contrary world, and set that God's word might be communicated to men.

And such men are called holy men. Of course, however much they were set for God, however much they were determined to be true to God, they couldn't possibly do it in their own power. And because of that, we read that what they did do, what they spake, was in the energy, in the power of the Holy Ghost. They were moved. They were borne along. They were carried along by a power greater than they could muster. And because of this, the word of God has been revealed to us. But, against that, he says, you know, some of us had an extra special privilege. [00:17:09] We had the word of God, and that's sufficient. But he says, you know, there was a time when some of us were privileged to be present. When a guarantee was given that the word of God will surely be fulfilled.

When glory shall be manifested.

When all these sufferings that the Christ of God endured shall be given due answer. When the rites of God will be established. When every claim of God will be met. When there shall be that display of the glory of God even upon earth. And he said, we were given a preview of this. We were given a sight of the kingdom in miniature embryo form. [00:18:03] And it happened on what we speak of as the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all bear testimony that even before the Lord Jesus Christ endured the sufferings of the cross, even before he was finally rejected and cast out by cruel, wicked men, that this preview was given of the glory commensurate with the sufferings that the glory shall be seen. Matthew, Mark, and Luke quite probably attest that the kingdom will come.

That the Lord Jesus Christ shall be supreme. Of course, in reading the Gospels, we would note that there's no need for the transfiguration scene in John. [00:19:08] No transfiguration, no exaltation is possible against a background of the personal glory of the Son of God who is ever in the bosom of the Father.

But looking at the one who is the rightful king, looking at God's perfect servant, looking at the one who personified perfect dependent manhood, we can see in the Synoptic Gospels how proper it was that the transfiguration scene should be included by the Holy Ghost. And here Peter, from his own personal experience, can say we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

There was error at the time, I suppose most of us are aware, towards the end of the first century, [00:20:03] where there were teachers who said, you know, this Christianity, it's all very well in basics,

but you know, if you want to become an advanced student, they used to say, there are many secret mysteries into which you need to be initiated. And really this is on a far higher level than anything the new Christians have ever experienced. And the philosophers of the day used to try and encourage the Christians to say, right, this is the first form, but you know, there's something better, there's something more advanced. And Peter, by the Holy Spirit, one of the holy men, moved by the Holy Ghost, says there can be nothing more advanced, there can be nothing more glorious, there can be nothing more edifying, that to consider this, that Christ will be seen to be supreme, that all this ungodliness only tells us that if things get worse, that it is hastening on towards the day [00:21:10] when the claims of God shall be asserted. And he said, we have the secret, we Christians, particularly we apostles, who were with him on the glory mount. The glory mount, and oh again, that privilege, that blessing, is conditioned by the way in which the mount is spoken of, the holy mount, where the glory of God was manifested.

When God gave his single approval to the man of sorrows, the one who was despised, the one who was ultimately to be rejected and crucified, God said, this is he who's going to be supreme, or what is rightly called the holy mount, [00:22:03] the mount where he was transfigured, where he was changed, where he was altered before then, when there was this preview of the glory that should follow. It was proper, it was appropriate, it was suitable, that on that mount he received, as verse 17 says, he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him, the preposition I understand literally, by the excellent glory. There were others who were revealed at that time. Moses and Elias.

And Peter, one of those there, perhaps with his enthusiasm, with his thought-rightness, wished to perpetuate that scene by making, as we would understand it, I suppose shrines. [00:23:05] Wanting to perpetuate that scene of earthly majesty and splendour. Not so, something much more glorious than the picture was to be brought in. And this turn here by the excellent glory gives us to see that the glory that shall be manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of the kingdom shall be beyond compare.

None can rank with him. As in all other things, he shall have a pre-eminence. And it is seen, even in this picture form, that there was that which was true of him, which could never be matched in the experience or the trophies, the rewards, the crowns, which might be rightly given to Moses and Elijah and those companies that they might well represent. [00:24:03] So here, matchless, incomparable, completely worthy, the Christ of God is seen.

In advance of the day, when he shall show himself to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and Peter, who was an eyewitness on that majestic, glorious occasion, said, oh how this has confirmed to us the word of prophecy. He had realized it in advance of the day when it should be publicly seen, how right then it should be termed a holy mount. This little spot here upon earth set apart just for the moment for the service of God, sanctified by who was there, sanctified because of that which it foretold in picture, sanctified because of what the remembrance of it would bring to the pure mind of the apostle [00:25:02] and through him to us. And rightly, those who have been used from time to time to put pen to paper, to leave on record the word of holy scripture, are rightly termed holy men moved by the Holy Ghost. Now, if we move on to chapter 2, a very sorry picture again.

If there's anything more obnoxious to God than those who have no thought of himself, spurn every opportunity of mercy, set themselves in principle and in action to please themselves, acting in self-will, self-seeking, self-assertion. If there's anything more obnoxious to God than blatant, unshielded

sinning, [00:26:10] it is for those who have been brought right to the very brink, those who have been brought consciously to the crossroads, those who have been brought into the intelligent realisation of all that's at stake, and then, not merely as a natural man pursuing his own course, but rather being brought right to the brink in knowing all the issues involved, making an intelligent decision to turn one's back on that which God has revealed to you, and to turn your back upon God and all that has been shown. Now, there are some of the issues involved in what scripture calls apostasy. [00:27:06] This is not intended in any of the scriptures that refer to it to suggest that any real believer is in any danger of apostatising.

What it is saying is, it is possible to be brought right to the very brink and then knowingly, deliberately, turning away from God. Oh, when God has shown us the way, when God has made us aware of the way we should go, and then to deliberately say, not for me, is a very serious thing before God. Especially having been identified in a superficial way with those who were for God.

Now, in the epistle to the Hebrews, again, much is said about those who seem superficially to be people of God, [00:28:04] and yet by their later activities demonstrated that their hearts have never been right with God. They've never been turned to God. All this is not to discourage any of us who are real believers.

It is rather to bring the power and the weight of the Word of God to bear as to the terrible nature of willful disobedience to the revelation of God granted to us. And there are those who are spoken of in 2 Peter. There will be those in the last days who especially deserve judgment from God because they were acquainted with the truth of God. They kept company with the people of God, but then consciously turned away. And terrible is the judgment which shall be meted out to them. [00:29:03] This is why stark things, dark things are said. No shades of grey, black and white. And then, in the midst of this, verse 21, as we read, Speaking of such, it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. Oh, the Word of God is quick and powerful. The Word of God is holy.

In being privileged to handle the Word of God, we have been privileged to handle holy things. Some of us from childhood have known the holy scriptures.

As real believers, as true Christians, we need to bear in mind the responsibility that is ours [00:30:09] as having the Word of God made freely available to us, that it is a holy word from a holy God and produces holy sensibilities.

Now, here, again, without elaborating more, to have been brought into touch with this in an outward, professed way, to have known the way, it doesn't say to have received it, to have known the way and to have turned away, meets only the judgment of a holy God.

Now, in the light of that, the apostle says, Better it would have been not to have been born than to have known the way and to have turned. [00:31:03] Now, in the light of that, chapter 3, he says now then, Very like the writer to the epistle to the Hebrews, I am persuaded better things of you. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews saying, well, you're a mixed bunch. Some of you, I'm absolutely certain, are true believers. Some of you, I have my doubts about. Well, the Lord knows better than I is. And he speaks to the real ones and he says, Now, look, some are going astray, but I'm persuaded better things of you. And Peter here, after showing the terrible end that shall come upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, He turns with these final exhortations and words of

encouragement to those who are true. It's worthwhile noticing in passing that what he has to say in the last chapter, [00:32:04] his last words can be summed up in the four exhortations, putting verses 1 and 2 together, Beloved, be mindful. Verse 8, Beloved, be not ignorant. Verse 14, Beloved, be diligent.

Verse 17, Beloved, beware.

Oh, how clear the apostle is. And in the first one, Beloved, be mindful. He says, you know, he says, if you're really gods, and you are, he says, you've been given a wonderful thing because you are partakers of the divine nature. Because you are partakers of the divine nature, we're back to this again. He says, you have pure minds. You have pure minds which you can take in the holy word of God. Furthermore, by the Holy Spirit, you can understand the implications of it. [00:33:05] And by the Holy Spirit, you can live in the knowledge and in the power of it. And he says, you have the pure minds. And he says, you may be mindful of the words spoken by the holy prophets. It is both an encouragement and a challenge to me to know that God has seen fit to endow me with the capacity to take in what he has communicated and left on record in his holy word, spoken by the holy prophets. But that brings with it an increased sense of responsibility, doesn't it? If I've been given, constitutionally, a pure mind which can discern what God wants me to know from the scriptures, [00:34:01] I need to act in the light of it. Be loved, be mindful.

Especially as the days get worse. The opposition will get worse. However feeble I might think my light might be, if I set myself to be true to God, true to the Absent Lord, true to the One who shall be manifested, King of kings and Lord of lords, if my light stays the same power, it will shine increasingly clearly as the days get darker. We were saying in conversation at the interval, one or two of us together, we are sometimes deluded into thinking that as long as our lives are 10% more righteous than our neighbours or our unconverted relatives or people that we know in the world, we think we are not doing so badly. But when we consider the gross, base deterioration [00:35:05] in the standards that society permit condone and increasingly encourage, it cannot be sufficient to stay a little bit better than something which is on an ever downward spiral. The Word of God, the standard that God demands is absolute. What is the standard? John tells us in his epistle. To be pure as he is pure.

He is pure. God doesn't reduce his standards to accommodate our frailty or weakness. And certainly there's no loophole to allow for any sinning on our part. Well, the apostle says, bearing in mind what the holy prophets have said, be mindful of what they say and against this dark background [00:36:03] of things getting worse and worse. I read from verse 8 merely to get the context. Speaking of the heading up of all things, God will eventually establish a pattern on earth which is well pleasing to him. And 2 Peter 3 is one of the very, very few scriptures which speak of God's eternal day when righteousness will dwell. Now again, let us return to where we began. Here is information about the future. The evil will be swept away.

Righteousness will be established. Jesus Christ, the righteous one, will be in full authority. And this is revealed.

This is revealed to Christians now. [00:37:04] So that having this information about God's future judgment, that I, that we, might come to that moral judgment now that God shall eventually execute upon all things. We have the opportunity. We have the facilities. We have the resources of allowing ourselves to be brought in line with God's will, God's thoughts. And we have the opportunity not only having this in a mental, intellectual way, that's good, but that in a practical way we can give evidence

in the way that we live now that we are morally in line with God's thoughts now. In anticipation of the day when God's thoughts shall be manifest in a universal way here upon earth. Now, can we substantiate that in Scripture? [00:38:03] Verse 11.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, in the light of the information that God has given us about the future, what are we going to do now? What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation in God's conversation? Conversation, citizenship, commonwealth, manner of life, our whole way of life, in thought, in word, in deed.

The Lord takes account of it.

Angelic hosts take account of it. The unbelieving world has the opportunity of seeing in our lives things they refuse to accept in direct testimony. Oh, if the word of God as a written way of appealing to men [00:39:03] is largely thrown overboard, men can read in the lives of those who belong to God, belong to Christ, that which they refuse to accept from the written Scriptures. And this is how things go on at the last. And so it says, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. Now, the day of God will come when God decrees. There's a few interesting Scriptures amongst this line. I'll only mention this one. There are others. It is determined in the will of God. The purpose of God, the counsel of God, the will of God, the pleasure of God have been at work. And when the time is right, evil will be dealt with, blessing will be brought in. But I have the opportunity of looking at it in this way. If there is any way [00:40:03] in which I can contribute to the hastening of the implementation of the will of God here upon earth, by the way I live now, let me see to it that I do. Oh, there are several Scriptures on this line. Let me swat that if it were within my power, I am furthering the way of God, the will of God here upon earth by my manner of life, my conversation, my commonwealth, my citizenship. Some people are deluded into thinking that prophecy is merely informative, merely academic, merely intellectual. But if you show me a Scripture where information is given to me about what God is going to do in the future, I will find in that same context I am convinced [00:41:01] something which shows the present effect of a right appreciation of the prophecy that has been revealed. And I'm sure that's why much of prophecy comes into 2 Peter, in order that those who live in the last days, we may well be in them now, are given the information, the incentive, the desire, and the power to be true to the Lord until He comes. Now let's see how that goes in here. Number 48.

All taint of sin shall be removed, all evil done away, and we shall dwell with God's beloved through God's eternal day. Number 48.