

## **“THINGS HARD TO UNDERSTAND.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: II Peter 3.14-18**

### **Introduction.**

As we come to this final passage of II Peter I want to approach it a bit differently and focus on four phrases that stand out to me in the text. Next week I will wrap up the whole letter with a focus on the last two verses.

### **What to do while you are waiting.**

While you are waiting for God to come in judgment to destroy the present world and then make a new heaven and a new earth, be diligent.

Be diligent to be ready to meet Jesus, have a plan, prepare for it.

Some of you will remember our dear friends Jack and Susannah Dabney, Jack preached here about 8 years ago, Susannah went to glory in January of this year. Jack is retired from being a pastor and a missionary in Albania. He is about 80 years old, his health isn't great.

I was talking to Jack a while ago and he was telling me about the books he is reading. He is constantly reading, he has several books going at once. And he doesn't just read, he takes notes and processes and thinks about what he reads and tells other people about what he has learned or what insight he has gained. It's not just paperback fiction, but meat, solid stuff.

I asked him why he keeps reading so much. He said he is preparing. He is preparing. Immediately in my spirit I felt I knew exactly what he meant. I didn't ask him, but I am certain he meant he is preparing for heaven. He is preparing to meet Jesus. He is learning about His heavenly Father with whom he will spend eternity. I thought of Paul's words to Timothy in his last letter before he died.

**II Timothy 2:15** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Jack may be retired from his calling to be a pastor, he may not be writing sermons anymore, but he is not retired from his calling to be a Christian, one who seeks to know God and love God with all his mind, as well as with all his heart, soul and strength.

Jack has been pursuing God for as long as I have known him which stretches back to about 1987. He is living the hope that is in him. As eternity draws every day a day

closer it should awaken and sharpen our spiritual interest and appetite for the things of God rather than the things of man.

One of the reasons I put that offer in your boxes to get three months of *Tabletalk* free was to give you a great tool for taking your growing in the faith to the next level. After decades of reading *Our Daily Bread* and *Today*, you can get in a rut, in a sameness, and *Tabletalk* would give you some fresh manna, some fresh perspective.

People who have used the devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* for years would be blessed to change to Charles Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening*.

I have a friend who reads through the Bible every year, but he does it with a different translation each year, just to keep his mind from slipping into neutral.

John Wesley wrote about the end of his life:

“I want to know one thing—the way to heaven . . . He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri (a man of one book).”

**Psalm 1:1-2** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

Are you taking your faith seriously? Would you characterize what you are doing for your soul as being diligent?

Do we think about the new heavens and the new earth, are we preparing ourselves for them with purposefulness?

What do we know more about, this present earth which for us will last only a few more years before we die, or the coming new heavens and new earth which will last for a few trillion years?

Don't plan on a retirement in which you retire from God and from knowing God more deeply. Do this before your eyes go bad and you can't read anymore?

To grow in grace and the knowledge of God requires disciplined, daily diligence.

### **Our beloved brother.**

That may not strike you as odd at first glance. It says something significant about Peter that he calls Paul his dear beloved brother because of what Paul did to Peter.

In Galatians 2 Paul writes that he saw Peter acting hypocritically toward the Gentiles and his sinful behavior was causing others to sin as well. So Paul opposed Peter to his face (Galatians 2:11-14).

If someone took you to task for some error or sin or hypocrisy in your life and they did it in a public manner because what you were doing was public, how would you feel about that person? Have you ever felt the sting of a rebuke or a correction or admonishment?

I remember like yesterday receiving a stinging rebuke. I could feel my face turning red, my adrenalin increasing. I was embarrassed and felt very small. I have no idea how I managed to not say anything in defense or anger or trying to get even.

Sin hates the light and we will always resist having our sin brought into the open. That's what getting defensive means, trying to defend ourselves, trying to cover up.

If someone did that to you, would you avoid them and never speak to them again? Would you say negative things about them? Have you ever experienced the faithful wounds of a friend?

**Proverbs 27:6-5** Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

**Proverbs 9:8-9** Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. 9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

A wise person receives instruction and correction. A wise person is teachable and humble enough to receive it.

A false friend is someone who talks to others about your faults and sins, a true friend is one who talks to you about your sins.

Which would you rather have, a friend who tells you what you want to hear or a friend who tells you what you need to hear? Do you have that kind of friend? Are you that kind of friend?

My best friend, who calls me his best friend, if you ask him, will tell you openly why he considers me his best friend. Over thirty years ago in a hotel room in Indianapolis where we were working together at a conference, I took him aside into another room and rebuked him for some behavior. He says from that day on he loved me. He calls me dear brother.

We are sinners; we need a real friend, who will watch over our soul and correct us when necessary.

Godly men are anxious to have their faults pointed out, and they are very grateful when another will perform the selfless act (Ps 141:5).

**Psalm 141:5** Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.

Above all don't despise the rebuke or correction of God in Scripture. He shows His great love for us when He does.

**Hebrews 12:5-6, 11** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.”

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

To grow in grace and knowledge of God requires truth. Is there someone in our life who speaks truth to you? Would you ever consider praying and asking for that kind of friend?

### **Things hard to understand.**

When you read the Bible do you find it easy to read? Are you able to understand all of it or do you find some parts hard to make sense of?

Does it help you to hear that the apostle Peter says some parts of Paul's letters are hard to understand? Can you imagine being in a Bible Study on the book of Romans and hearing Peter say he is having trouble with chapter 9, can someone help give some clarity and insight?

Of course, some parts are hard to understand. It is the divinely inspired revelation of God. This is the mind of God and God's thoughts are as far above ours as the heavens are above the earth. God's mind is vastly more complex than ours. If there weren't parts hard to understand we would question what kind of God wrote it.

Scripture is not even, it's not all at one grade level like Readers Digest. It has easier to understand parts and harder to understand parts. There are stories and history and parables and pithy proverbs that we can figure out and then there are deep theological sections that are challenging.

There is 101 level stuff and 401 stuff. There are passages that give up their meaning quickly and passages that take real digging and extra effort. Passages that expose our ignorance and finiteness, that remind us that we are dealing with an infinite and all wise God, whose thoughts are above our thoughts.

The basic message of the Bible is very plain, the Gospel of Jesus Christ comes through loud and clear, there is no mistaking it and there is no excuse for anyone who doesn't get it.

The Bible from Genesis to Revelation reveals one story with one plot that is unraveled before our eyes in all the twists and turns of human history. Jesus Christ is the central character to whom all the OT anticipates and point, and about whom all the NT speaks. We must interpret everything in the Bible in the light of Jesus and God's unfolding plan of redemption.

What God requires of us all is stated very clearly. The essential message is clear even though not every part is equally clear.

As Mark Twain once quipped, "Some people are troubled by the things in the Bible they can't understand. It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

It annoys me to no end when people take some hard passage or hard truth in Scripture and then throw it in the face of some poor unsuspecting Christian to try to derail or tear down their faith.

They are being completely dishonest, they have made no honest effort to find out if there is a reasonable explanation for the difficult passage. They aren't really asking for an answer and if you gave a good one, then would quickly move on to another hard passage until they stump you.

They never take their own ignorance seriously. There are passages in the Bible I don't understand, but I never come to the conclusion that the problem is with the Bible or God.

Show me a person who is teachable, who approaches God's Word humbly and open, and I will show you a person who is wise and becoming wiser.

There is a terrible tragedy Peter exposes here. Certain people take what has been given to them by God for their eternal spiritual benefit and turn it into an instrument for their own destruction. That ought not to be.

The errors of Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism are of one kind, but the errors of Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses are even greater, because they have taken the very Word of God and twisted it to their own destruction. The book God has given to us to save our souls, they make deadly.

Notice what Peter doesn't say. He doesn't dismiss the hard parts, he doesn't say skip over them, he doesn't take issue with them or disagree with them.

What do you do with the Scriptures you can't understand? Read it carefully. Read all of it, the whole of Scripture, let Scripture interpret Scripture. Set aside preconceived notions, let it change you, and come with humility and a teachable spirit.

Those who seek and rely on the Holy Spirit and are diligent in prayer and reading of Scripture and other godly saints who fear God and honor His Word, will find all Scripture to be profitable and a blessing and a light unto their path.

To grow in grace and in the knowledge of God means being diligent in wrestling with hard truth.

### **The other Scriptures.**

Do you hear the implication of these words of Peter? They are stunning. If they aren't true, then he has made a serious error.

Peter puts Paul's letters on the same level as the uniquely and divinely inspired OT.

I had a Muslim business man in my study a few months ago and I showed him my big copy of the Koran. He told me that in a Muslim home the Koran would never be on the same level as any other books, always on the highest shelf and never with any other books on top of it or next to it.

Here is Peter putting Paul's books right there with the Book, with Moses's books and David's book and Isaiah's book.

Paul believed what he wrote was from God.

**I Corinthians 1:13** We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Paul wrote according to the wisdom given to him by God. In other words, Paul's letters are inspired revelation, they are the Word of God.

Therefore, since you are waiting for the new heaven and the new earth, be diligent to grow in grace and the knowledge of God in Scripture, with the help of faithful friends. Take advantage of God's patience and His delay in coming, it is for the sake of your salvation and your souls.