

What Manners of Persons Ought We To Be?

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (v. 9) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (v. 10). Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness. (v. 11). Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:9-12.

The verses just cited are jam-packed with vital information which should capture the attention of all sober-minded people. Our comments in this article can but barely touch “the hem of the garment” with regards to what could appropriately be said regarding the overall message of these verses. Primarily, our intent is to mostly focus upon the words which appear in the middle of verse 11 — namely **“what manner of persons ought you to be.”**

But, first, it behooves us to consider the overall context of these verses. Peter, the inspired apostle who penned these verses, was writing to those who had *“obtained like precious faith”* with the apostles and other Christians of that time period, 2 Peter 1:1. In this book he had much to say regarding Christians, their conduct, and how they should live their lives (2 Pet. 1:5-11), the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Scriptures (2 Pe. 1:16-21), and the danger, doom, and deception of false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3:8).

Specifically, as it relates to false teachers, we note in 2 Peter 3:3,4 that Peter alluded to *“scoffers”* who will *“come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of His coming,”* and then falsely saying that *“since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”* Of course, he was referring to the Lord’s *“promise”* that He will return (cf. Matt. 16:28; 24:34; John 14:1-2, et.al.), a promise these *“scoffers”* obviously did not believe, and which they will try to refute by saying that *“all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation,”* 2 Pet. 3:4. Peter then showed the fallacy of that statement by stating that these *“scoffers”* *“willingly forget”* the facts concerning the Genesis flood, at which time *“the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water,”* (2 Pet. 3:6; Genesis 7). He then pointed his readers to the future by stating that *“the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men,”* 2 Pet. 3:7. Yes, *“the day of judgment”* is coming! The fact that it has not yet come does not mean that the Lord’s *“promise”* to return is false. On the one hand, God does not count time as we do, for with Him *“one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,”* 2 Pet. 3:8. After all, God is *“from everlasting to everlasting”* (Ps. 90:2); He is not affected by the time constraints which characterize our earthly lives. On the other hand, Peter stated that *“the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is **longsuffering** toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,”* 2 Pet. 3:9. Because God *“is not willing that any should perish,”* He therefore is *“longsuffering,”* and

is giving people time to “*come to repentance.*” For that reason, in verse 11 He stated that we need to “*consider that the longsuffering of God is salvation.*” After all, if Jesus had returned **yesterday** then all who waited until today to obey the gospel today would be eternally lost!

However, the fact that Jesus has not returned does not mean that He will not return! “*The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,*” v. 10, referring to the suddenness and unexpectedness of His return. And when Jesus returns, that will be the end of the material universe! Peter plainly said “*the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up,*” 2 Pet. 3:10). Yes, we tend to become too attached to this world and the material things thereof, but the day is coming when all these things “*will be burned up!*” This, of course, infers the greater importance of our laying up our “*treasures in heaven*” (Matt. 6:19-21), instead of being so focused on the transient things of the world.

And it is in this context, wherein we are told that “*all these things will be dissolved,*” that Peter posed the question “***what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,***” v. 11. This is a question of immense importance! Jesus is coming! The “*earth and the works that are in it will be burned up!*” Hence, in view of these sobering facts:

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1. We ought to be “*holy,*” v. 11. Even as God “*is holy,*” we must also “*be holy,*” I Peter 1:16; Lev. 11:44. In fact, we must be “*perfecting holiness in the fear of God,*” 2 Cor. 7:1. “*Holy*” is translated from *hagios* (Greek), and it denotes the idea of being “separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred” (**Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by Vine).

2. We ought to be “*looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God..,*” 2 Peter 3:12. For faithful Christians “*the coming*” of the Lord should be something to look forward to and even hasten, for then they shall be able to enter into their reward. If we dread the prospects of Jesus coming today, could it be that something is wrong with either our faith, or our conduct?

3. We ought to be godly. In this one verse Peter stressed the need for both “*holy conduct and godliness,*” v. 11. “*Godliness*” is translated from *eusebia* (Greek), which “denotes that piety which, characterized by a Godward attitude, does that which is well-pleasing to Him” (Vine). “In 2 Pet. 3:11, the word is in the plural, signifying acts of godliness” (*ibid*). Hence, as used here, it involves both “a Godward attitude” as well as the “acts of godliness” which such an attitude prompts.

4. We ought to “*be diligent,*” v. 14. Diligence denotes earnestness and zeal; “it signifies to hasten to do a thing, to exert ones self” (*ibid*). Specifically, Peter urged his readers to “***be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless,***” v. 14). Jesus is coming! We will stand before Him! (Matt. 25:31-33). Hence, we should “*be diligent*” to be at “*peace*” with the Lord, striving to be both “*without spot and blameless.*”

5. We ought to “*beware.*” Note verse 17: “*You therefore, beloved, since you know*

beforehand, **beware** lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.” “Beware” of what? Of falling “from your own steadfastness!” God’s people must be “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” being encouraged by the realization that their “labor is not in vain in the Lord,” I Cor. 15:58. Sadly, however, many start out well, but they allow themselves to fall from their “own steadfastness!” And we should also “beware” lest we be “led away with the error of the wicked,” 2 Pet. 3:17

6. We ought to be growing “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” 2 Peter 3:18. “Grace” denotes favor. With both “grace” and “knowledge” being linked together in this verse, it becomes evident that one way to grow in the **favor** of the Lord involves growing in the “knowledge” of the Lord. The greater our “knowledge” is of the Lord, the more likelihood that we will be able to resist being misled by false teachers, and the greater will be our ability to resist sin. Remember David said “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you,” Psalm 119:11. And Jesus, when He was tempted by the devil consistently responded to each temptation by stating “it is written,” and then quoting the Scripture which pertained to each temptation (Matt. 4:4,7,10).

Conclusion: Jesus is coming again!. He will come “as a thief in the night.” We will stand before Him, and be judged by His word, Matt. 25:31-33; John 12:48. In view of these things, in the inspired words of Peter, we should focus clearly on “what manner of persons” we “ought to be.” Friend, what is the “manner” of **your** “person?”

***** —B. Witherington