

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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New Heavens and New Earth

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. (2 Peter 3:13–14, KJV 1900)

I have heard quite convincing arguments that Peter in this passage is teaching that God will recreate His material universe after the final "Meltdown" and incorporate it into the eternal heaven that the elect shall enjoy with Him throughout eternity. If God chose this option for us in glory, praise Him. Although I at one time embraced this idea, I cannot do so with complete comfort at the present time. Consider one obvious point that tends to rule against this view. Peter does anticipate a new heavens and new earth, but the new heavens and new earth that he here describes as a present real place.

1. It presently exists; "...wherein **dwelleth**...." "...dwelleth" is a present tense verb. Whatever this place is, it presently exists. It is not something that God shall create at the Second Coming.
2. Presently righteousness dwells in this new heavens and new earth. Although our present world obviously exists, we cannot describe it as wholly characterized by righteousness dwelling in it. It is broken and twisted by sin. No serious Bible student would defend the idea that this present natural world shall exist in its present state in heaven. Peter's point that righteousness presently dwells in—characterizes—this new heavens and new earth affirms simply and convincingly that there is presently a literal place wherein righteousness dwells. Consider. Enoch and Elijah were translated, their bodies taken to heaven by God's intervening grace before Jesus came. Jesus bodily ascended back to heaven where He was before the Incarnation. However, based on Acts 1 and other supportive passages, He took His earthly, then glorified literal human body with Him when He ascended. Thus, we have clear Scriptural affirmation of at least three literal human bodies in heaven today. That fact requires that there be a physical or literal place where they presently dwell. I suggest that Peter identifies that place in our study passage.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise.... Once again in this context we notice the singular "promise," contextually, a reference to the Lord's

promise of His return at the Second Coming. In keeping with His faithful promise to return and complete the process of redemption by raising the bodies of His chosen and redeemed children, His children who live here now and believe Him—and believe in Him—look for the time when He shall fulfill that final glorious promise just as faithfully as He has fulfilled every other promise that He made to His children throughout time. Think of His promise to Abraham.

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:13-20)

If God was so sensitive and caring to give Abraham His personal oath as assurance of the faithfulness of His promise, we cannot imagine that He is less serious or faithful when He promises repeatedly in Scripture that He shall return and complete the work that He began. (Ephesians 1:14; "...until the redemption of the purchased possession")

...look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. To look as Peter frames the thought means to expect, long for, and anticipate the arrival of that day. His promise forms the basis for our "Looking." An old hymn contains the line, "Where Jesus is will be heaven for me." True enough. As we study Scripture and learn its teachings about heaven, we have no anxiety about what heaven shall be. Whatever it is will far and away exceed anything we could possibly imagine.

In our carnal thinking, believers occasionally diminish heaven as an endless church service where all the redeemed shall sing every verse of every godly hymn ever written—and then just sing it all again. Typically this thinking complains that such an eternity might be dreadfully boring. Think! Do we really think that our God who created this whole universe did it all just to bore His redeemed children to tears for eternity? Whatever we do in eternity after the Second Coming shall gloriously and perfectly please our God and Savior. Do you really think something that bores you to tears will please Him? That the Framer and Creator of this whole universe has such a tedious eternity planned for you?

Two thoughts. First, unthinking believers will occasionally say that the Bible says nothing whatever about heaven, so they either cannot know anything at all about it, or they feel justified to ignore Scripture and let their human fancy take flight with vain imaginations about heaven. Did you ever have a conversation with someone about whether their pets will be in heaven or not? They may believe so from their wishful fantasy, but they cannot produce a Biblical passage to support the idea. (Ecclesiastes 3:21; notice that the spirit of man at death goes up, and the spirit of the beast goes down. There is a difference) Second, read your Bible. It says a lot about heaven if you will take the time to think as you read. No, it does not give extensive details. Human language and human thought cannot describe or comprehend the glory that Scripture intimates awaits us there. But Scripture fully provides sufficient information that we have abundant grounds on which to look for and long for that day with great joy.

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. Once again we see Scripture's firm link between our looking and longing for heaven with how we live our life in the here and now. "...*be diligent*" requires careful attention and steady devotion to the work. Nothing about this word allows a casual "Ho-hum, pie in the sky bye and bye" attitude.

...*be found of him*.... Peter keeps his basis of measurement on the Lord, not on self or on other believers. When we compare ourselves with ourselves, Scripture warns us that we are not wise. (2 Corinthians 10:12) Whether we make self our yardstick or any other believer, we have chosen a flawed, fickle, and deficient basis for our assessment of our faith. If you make yourself the basis for your faith, you will think that you are always right, that you know more about Scripture and God than any other believer you know, especially those pathetic believers whom you see every Sunday, so you dare not submit to them (Even though Scripture commands this behavior; Ephesians 5:21; carefully note that this command appears in the context of the assembled church where godly believers sing songs of praise to God

and admonition to each other, and manifest their service to God by serving and—yes—submitting to each other), much less live as one of them. You'll adopt the Roman Catholic idea of "Ex Cathedra" through the back door, but, front or back door, this idea puts infallible knowledge and authority in man (Whether you vest such idolatry in yourself or some other human matters not) and not in God. (2 Corinthians 10:12)

Brother—Sister, you may convince a believer here and there that you are a good yardstick of flawless faith, but you will not convince God. Paul reminds us that our goal is to be found of Him, not of self that we are living the faith authentically in every aspect of our conduct.

The second flawed yardstick for the faith is some other believer. Most of us have met or read after some godly and faithful servant whose life strikes a cord of encouragement in our own pilgrimage. Thank the Lord for such men and women in the faith. However, we should be cautious that we do not magnify any believer, however exemplary their life, to the point that we strive to be found faithful to them. Peter's reminder, based on our joyful looking for the Lord's return, is that we strive to be found of Him in faithful continuance. If we make any man our god, we are guilty of idolatry, not faithfulness.

...*in peace*. If we live so as to be found of Him in peace, we must be at peace with ourselves, having what Scripture describes as a good conscience that we have been faithful. A good conscience in New Testament terms refers to our measuring our conduct by Scripture, not by our private interpretation or our private self-assessment of our life and conduct. Conscience in Scripture is never depicted as a floating, relativistic, or gnostic measure of self by self. A Biblical good conscience is our thoughts and actions measured by Scripture with Scripture bearing witness to us that we have been faithful. In addition to Scripture's witness, Scripture teaches that the indwelling Holy Spirit also bears witness with our spirit of our relationship to God, as well as of our conduct. (Romans 2:15)

More to the point of being at peace is the Lord's measure, not our own private opinion, of how we get along with other believers in the faith. The more we maintain conflict with other believers the more we fail this commandment and compromise our witness of looking for His return. Scripture affirms that thinking we love (A Bible word for conduct, not sentimentality or feelings) God while hating (Also a Bible word for conduct, the opposite of the action of love) our brother or sister in the faith, we deceive ourselves. (1 John 4:7-8, 12, 20) My personal observation through sixty years in the faith consistently affirms this faithful testimony of Scripture. If you quietly observe how a person speaks to and otherwise treats his brother or sister in the faith, you are an eyewitness to how they view God. The believer who constantly engages his/her brother or sister in the faith in emotional combat or

judges others constantly as inferior in the faith, often if not always thinks of God as cold and arrogant, and highly—harshly—judgmental. As other believers cannot please Brother Accuser-Judge-and Jury, this brother or sister often doubts that he/she can ever possibly please God. We typically imitate our belief about God, becoming like the image of God that we hold dear in our minds. Thus, to ignore Scripture and form a flawed view of God is a dangerous state of mind. Our divine assignment that will witness to others whether we truly do look for the Lord or only pretend to do so begins with our striving to be found of Him in peace with our own conscience and with our brothers and sisters in the faith. Fail to live in peace with the indwelling Holy Spirit and with your brothers and sisters in the faith, and you equally fail to convincingly witness to anyone that you truly believe in the Lord and longingly look for His appearing.

...without spot... I long for the day when neckties are no longer expected protocol for men's clothing. How does this point relate to "without spot"? Most men who wear a tie will readily understand. How often, when eating or working at the desk, do men who wear ties spill something on their tie? You have a beautiful and fairly costly tie that is very nicely decorated and hopefully color coordinated with your suit, but right there below your face, prominently displayed for all to see, you show the tell-tale signs of what you ate at lunch today. No matter how pretty the design or how costly the tie, that grease spot ruins the effect and leaves you looking out of date and cheaply dressed. Friends, the moral and spiritual "Spots" that we allow or even rationalize in our lives cause great damage to our faith-reputation. Our "Spots" devalue our faith, both in the eyes of other believers and more so in the eyes of the Lord than any stain on your necktie. Scripture doesn't warn us merely to avoid rolling in the pigpen in moral filth, although Peter does cover that point in the second chapter, but Scripture more directly warns us to avoid even the spot of sin. (Jude 1:23) As noted repeatedly in our study, a sound and Biblical belief in and longing for the Lord's return is the single most powerful motive and empowerment to our godly faith-walk.

...and blameless. Blameless goes deeper into our personal conduct than avoidance of moral sin. When Peter visited Antioch Church and fell under the fear of man because Gentile believers (Perhaps he also) did not observe Jewish traditions, Paul writes that he withstood Peter to his face, "...for he was to be blamed." (Galatians 2:11-14; actually Paul's words to Peter likely continue to the end of the chapter) So much for Peter living a sinless life after his conversion, he showed the same fear-of-man weakness that tripped him when he vowed faithfulness to Jesus, even to death, but quickly denied knowing his Lord when challenged.

No believer is immune from any form of sin, so we should never think too smugly about our own

conduct. However, behaviors that compromise our peace, little things that leave the "spot" of sin, and those attitudes and behaviors that so compromise our faith-walk in a way that leaves us, like Peter, deserving of blame, all combine in Peter's exhortation. It is not sufficient that we merely look and long for the Lord's coming. Peter exhorts us also to exercise diligence that we are "found" of Him living according to these three principles of Biblical "Resurrection, Second Coming ethics."

Forget your words. If a fellow-believer merely observed your attitude and conduct, especially toward other believers, based on Peter's exhortation in this lesson, would they conclude that you truly believe in His return? That you look and long for it? Be a faithful witness. Transform your life to show by these measures that you truly do long and look for Him.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor