You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

We do not have to guess about Peter’s motive in writing this epistle. Clearly, he is writing with two purposes in mind.

1. His strong desire is to remind the believers of who they are and what they have in Christ.
2. He knows that his departure is at hand. He wonders what will happen to the church after he is gone. He writes to state again some essentials of the faith hoping that the church will hear and heed his words.

It really appears in chapter 2 that Peter was all worked up in talking about false teachers. His words indicate that he was angry with righteous indignation. Undoubtedly, he was also disappointed with some believers with whom he had worked and shared fellowship who had now become enemies of the cross.

But, in chapter 3, he turns back to the church with this key thought, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness (v. 11)? Undoubtedly, this chapter is one of the highlights in the New Testament when referring to eschatological truth, but, in reality, there is more in this chapter about ethics than eschatology. Peter does not deal with all the details of Christ’s coming. He does not answer the “when,” “where,” or even exactly “how” questions. He states a fact. “The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (v. 10).

He does enter into detail about how we should live in the light of the truth about the Second Coming, and that is where we are going to place our focus in this study.

WE ACCEPT THE FACT OF THE SECOND COMING
Let’s look carefully to the references in this chapter regarding the Second Coming.

Peter presents the statements of the mockers of the Christian faith. They ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Here is Peter’s reply.

- The mockers themselves are a sign that we are in the “last days.” Now, considering that Peter wrote this letter nearly 2,000 years ago, “last days” does not refer to the last few 24-hour periods of time. I take him to mean that what happened at Calvary was the ultimate offer from God to humankind. Jesus was the supreme sacrifice for sin and His blood was the ultimate offer of redemption for us all. What Christ did at Calvary in His first coming initiated the last cycle of time that will end in His Second Coming. Therefore, the entire period between the Incarnation/Cross/Resurrection/Ascension of Christ until the Second Coming could appropriately be called the “last days.”

- “The present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (v. 7). The God who created the heavens and the earth has a plan for them. The God who created humankind has a plan for the just and the unjust. The Second Coming will be the fulfillment of that plan. When it is completed there will be a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness reigns (v. 13). The ungodly will be destroyed (v. 7). And the righteous look to the future as a promise of redemption that is rock-solid sure (v. 13).

- God is not bound by human time. “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (v. 8). God’s calendar does not resemble yours or mind. For us, for the Second Coming to be imminent, it has to be soon on our calendars. With God, imminence is translated differently. The Second Coming is imminent because He said it is going to happen, therefore it will happen. But it will happen in His time.

- God’s delay does not indicate slowness (v. 9). Rather it shows patience toward you and me. God’s will is clear. He does not wish “for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (v. 9). Thus, He pushes the time out a little further to give those who have not claimed His promise one more opportunity to do so.

- The Second Coming will be at an unexpected time. Peter compares it to the work of a thief stealing. If you have ever had your house or car pilfered by a thief you know that you feel violated. You are taken by surprise. The Second Coming will take the general population of men and women by total surprise.
When it is all over there will be a new heavens and a new earth. The God-mockers will be destroyed. The righteous will dwell with the Lord.

WE KNOW THAT THERE WILL BE OPPOSITION TO THE TRUTH

From the time Peter committed to Christ until the day he died he faced opposition to his faith. While walked with Jesus in Galilee and Judea, the Pharisees and Sadducees stalked them constantly. He watched Jesus be led away and crucified. Although the number of believers in Christ multiplied many times over during his tenure as an apostle, he always faced both religious and political opposition. When he wrote this letter he was facing death, crucifixion upside-down on an x-shaped cross.

Here is one key lesson that I have learned from Peter. We are to expect those outside the faith to oppose us. Our faith must be strong enough to withstand that kind of attack. But we must not create or feed the opposition by living loosely, immorally, or unscriptural lifestyles.

In our text at the beginning of this message Peter warns that we know beforehand that we are going to face opposition (v. 17). Thus, we put up our guard. If we do not, we will:
- Be carried away by the error of unprincipled men.
- Fall from our own steadfastness. “Fall from your secure position” (NIV). “Lose your balance” (CEV). “Fall from your firm grasp on the truth” (NET). “Lose your own secure footing” (NLT).

A difficult problem in this area is that addressed by Peter in verse 16. There is such an effort on the part of the “untaught and unsteady” to distort the truth of God’s Word. For sure these people will be destroyed, but both Paul and Peter knew the problems caused by such distortions and the work that it took to correct the erroneous teaching promulgated by that crowd.

WE DETERMINE TO BE THE RIGHT KIND OF PEOPLE

Before we talk about what we should do, please allow me here to refer back to Peter’s first letter and talk about what kind of people we should be. Who we are should determine what we do. Here is what Peter says about who we are.
- “A chosen race” (1 Peter 2:9). “Race” could be translated “people,” or “generation.” There is no indicator here that Peter means Caucasian, Negro, or Asian. He is indicating that we are people out of all earthly races
who have been chosen by God to receive the glorious salvation offered through the finished work of Christ on Calvary.

- “A royal priesthood” (v. 9). We have been elevated to the position of sonship. We are sons and daughters of the King of Kings. There is now royal blood in our veins. God is our Father. Jesus is our elder Brother. We have access to the throne of God because of our Father-son relationship with Him.
- “A holy nation” (v. 9). Although our earthly citizenship may be in one of more than 200 countries, our faith in Christ gives us citizenship in a new kingdom, one that will not pass away. There we share a common language—the language of God’s love. We share a common heritage—Abraham in our faith-father, and Jesus is our savior. We share a common lifestyle—the Bible is our all-sufficient rule of faith and conduct. We share a common destination—heaven.
- “A people for God’s own possession” (v. 9). We have been set free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1-2). “So if the Son sets you free you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). But, we have done a peculiar thing in the eyes of the world. We have committed ourselves back to God as love-slaves. We have given back to God complete authority over our lives. We are indeed His unique possession.

WE DETERMINE TO DO THE RIGHT THINGS ALL THE WAY TO THE END

Hopefully what we do will flow out of who we are. But, obviously, that did not necessarily happen in Paul and Peter’s day. Will it happen in our day? What would happen if believers would really take to heart the questions, “What would Jesus do?” “How would Jesus conduct Himself?”

Our issues may be a little different than in the time of Peter. We will see. For sure, his list of concerns is a really good place to start in our efforts to do right things all the way to the end of our earthly existence.

1. We should look for and hasten the coming of the day of God (v. 12).
2. We should be continually looking forward to the new heavens and new earth (v. 13).
3. We should be found by Him in peace (v. 14). Living a peaceful life includes:
   - Harmonious relationships.
   - Friendliness.
4. We should be spotless and blameless (v. 14).
   - Spotless. Pure.
     - Unstained by our associations with the world’s systems.
     - Keeping the commands of God without alteration or amendments.
     - Free from defilement.
   - Blameless: without a charge that sticks. Note that the meaning is not unblamed. There are many charges leveled against, but our lives are lived in such a way that none of the charges have a basis in fact. Christ takes all those charges against us as charges against Him and His cross.

5. We should regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation (v. 15).
   - CEV: Don’t forget that the Lord is patient because He wants people to be saved.
   - GNT: Look on our Lord’s patience as the opportunity He is giving you to be saved.
   - Message: Interpret our Master’s restraint for what it is, salvation.
   - NLT: Our Lord’s patience gives people time to be saved.

6. We should be growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (v. 18).

**APPLICATION**

The key thing to note in this chapter is how Peter ties two great faith concepts together: 1) the Second Coming of Christ, and 2) ethical, pure and holy living. And truly that is where I want end this message today. I believe Jesus is coming. His coming and all the events that surround it, will happen at an unexpected time. There will not be time for course corrections or life changes at that moment. Now is the time to deal with issues of life.

Here is what the New Interpreter’s Bible commentary says: “Our eschatological expectation has a bearing on our ethics. Lack of any real expectation of the return of Christ in judgment can diminish our resolve to live a Christ-like life.”

And commentator William Barclay puts it this way: “When we have stripped the doctrine of the Second Coming of all its temporal and local imagery, the tremendous truth it conserves is that life is going somewhere—and without that conviction, there is nothing to live for.”
Life is going somewhere. And it is up to you and me to decide where. Accepting Christ—the living Christ who is coming back again to receive us unto Himself—is the choice of those who will spend eternity in heaven. Rejecting Christ is the choice of those who will miss heaven. Your choice! Eternity in view!