

## Lives of Holiness and Godliness (2 Peter 3:10-14)

LEB	ESV	HCSB	NIV
<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will disappear with a rushing noise, and the celestial bodies will be destroyed <i>by</i> being burned up, and the earth and the deeds <i>done</i> on it will be disclosed.	<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. <sup>[b]</sup>	<sup>10</sup> But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; <sup>[a]</sup> on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.	<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.
<sup>11</sup> <i>Because</i> <sup>[i]</sup> all these things are being destroyed in this way, what sort of people must you be in holiness and godliness,	<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,	<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness	<sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives
<sup>12</sup> <i>while</i> <sup>[a]</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed <i>by</i> being burned up and the celestial bodies will melt <i>as they</i> are consumed by heat!	<sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt <i>as they</i> burn!	<sup>12</sup> as you wait for and earnestly desire the coming <sup>[a]</sup> of the day of God. The heavens will be on fire and be dissolved because of it, and the elements will melt with the heat.	<sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. <sup>[b]</sup> That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.
<sup>13</sup> But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness resides.	<sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.	<sup>13</sup> But based on His promise, we wait for the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell.	<sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.
<sup>14</sup> Therefore, dear friends, <i>because you</i> <sup>[a]</sup> are waiting for these <i>things</i> , make every effort to be found at peace, spotless and unblemished in him.	<sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.	<sup>14</sup> Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found at peace with Him without spot or blemish.	<sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Pursue holiness and godliness – for the Lord is coming

**The Reckoning**

Burning up of the natural universe

Exposure of all deeds (Rev 20:12-15)

**Our Response**

Holy and Godly lives

Waiting, waiting, waiting

Spotless and unblemished lives

**The Result**

Will we 'hasten' the coming of the Day of the Lord?

We will inherit the 'realm of righteousness' – the new heavens and new earth

A couple of months ago, the ABC ran a story about a woman who is not your typical prophet-of-doom. Caroline Orchiston is not warning of a world-ending catastrophe or societal collapse, nor is she promoting despair, hedonism or moral repentance as a course of action. Caroline travels to towns along the Alpine Fault in New Zealand to ensure that locals are aware they face an 80% chance of their region being devastated by a magnitude 8 earthquake sometime in the next 50 years. Of course, no one can predict when exactly such a seismic disaster will occur, but it is more or less a scientific certainty that it will happen within the lifetime of many of the area's current residents. Caroline's mission is to ensure that people along the fault lines know what is coming. She's giving them the chance to prepare their families, businesses and communities for life on the other side of large-scale destruction.

As he neared the end of his life and ministry, the apostle Peter also had a mission to warn people of an earth-shaking event and help them prepare for the kind of lives they'd live after it. But rather than a localised event that represents one country's worst disaster in modern history, Peter warns us of a global catastrophe that will mark the end of human history as we know it. And he wants to prepare us not for survival in a disaster-ravaged society, but for eternal flourishing in a completely new world.

Essentially, the message of 2 Peter 3:10-14 is: pursue holiness and godliness – for the Lord is coming! To unpack that this morning, we'll look at what this passage teaches us about the coming day of the Lord. We're also going to consider what holiness and godliness actually mean. And finally, I want to talk about the result. What happens if we do indeed live holy and godly lives while waiting for our Lord's return?

### **The Reckoning**

The Day of the Lord is an important part of our faith. However, just as Peter predicted in the earlier part of this chapter, many today doubt it or even mock the idea of it. Let me make two important observations in relation to this.

**Firstly**, even if our non-Christian neighbours don't take the idea of Christ returning very seriously, it's not as if they've escaped from having a sense of apocalyptic doom themselves. As Christian belief has been rejected by many in the West, people have simply adopted secular forms of doom and disaster that they fear will bring the end of civilization.

In the last century, fear of nuclear annihilation was popular from the end of the Second World War. Some of you would have had drills practicing evacuation to fallout shelters. These fears still lingered when I was growing up in the early nineties, even after the Cold War finished. Then, around twenty years ago, when I was in high school, I recall fears that a massive asteroid would hit the Earth in 2019 and wreak incredible havoc.

Lately, climate change has served as a major existential threat in the minds of many around the world. Billionaire Elon Musk has spent a fortune to protect us from the development of malicious artificial intelligence – which he reportedly sees as the biggest threat to human existence. It appears that the idea of a world-ending catastrophe just won't go away.

**Here's a second observation:** the widespread ignorance in society regarding the Day of the Lord, and even the de-emphasising of it amongst many Christians, should make us consider seriously how close at hand it might be.

Peter tells us in v. 10 that *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief."* **It will be unexpected.** The more people aren't thinking about it, the closer it might be. The coming of this day is stealthy and surprising. But its arrival will be anything but subtle. Peter describes it as noisy, scorching, terrifying. There's two aspects of it that demand attention: natural destruction & moral exposure.

The future reality of natural destruction is very stark. Twice we're told about the burning up of the heavens and the very elements of the natural world. It's no accident that Peter speaks about Noah's flood earlier in this chapter. You'll recall that God promised Noah never to flood the world again. But Peter points out that the final judgement is not one of water, but fire: v. 7 *"the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."*

We all saw images of the devastation that the 2020 fire season brought to many parts of our Australia. People lost their homes, valuables, animals. Some lost their lives. Much was made of the fact that the fires could be seen from the International Space Station and satellites in orbit. Peter is talking about an even greater inferno. One that consumes things above, around and beyond the earth. One which cannot be watched from a safe distance.

If people knew a bushfire was headed their way and didn't take every step they could to prepare for it, we'd call them fools. And yet, so many hear of the coming fires of judgement and dismiss it or get distracted by other things.

But we ignore this at our peril. Because there's something even more terrifying on that coming Day than the burning up of the elements. Peter tells us at the end of v. 10 that every deed done on the earth will be exposed, laid bare, found out. This is a chilling reality that echoes throughout the New Testament.

In His warning against hypocrisy, Jesus said, *"There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs."* (Luke 12:2-3).

Paul warns of a Day where each person's *"work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work."* (1 Cor 3:13) Because of grace we won't be condemned, but our works will still be exposed.

And John's Revelation tells us of a time when he saw, *"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened... The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done."* (Rev 20:12-13).

This Day of moral reckoning is crucial to the gospel message. It is the Day on which every human who ever lived will answer for every deed they've ever done. And of course, there will be enough guilt to convict everyone. That's what the cross of Jesus saves us from. From having to stand alone before God on that great and terrible day and hear the record of our every hour on earth read out in the presence of the universe, with each line adding to our eternal condemnation.

That's what Paul is talking about in Romans 5, when he says, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Knowing that Christ has borne the penalty for all of our misdeeds on the cross means that we don't have to be filled with hopeless dread about the day we meet our Maker. We can come to Him today as our loving Father. And when we do appear before the bench of His supreme justice, we can rest assured that He will not condemn us for the sins that Jesus has already willingly suffered for.

If you're a Christian here this morning, God wants you to know that your sins are forgiven. You do not have to fear condemnation. But He doesn't want you to be complacent about your moral conduct as you wait for the Day of the Lord. Quite the opposite. He wants us to be diligent in preparing ourselves for the eternal lives we'll live as citizens in the realm of righteousness.

Peter has been emphasizing this message throughout this letter. Back in the first chapter, he said “[God’s] *divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, **having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.***”

Peter urges believers to continue cultivating godly spiritual qualities that will confirm their calling and election and supply an entry for them into the eternal kingdom. In chapter 2 he warns of people being seduced by false teaching and becoming slaves of corruption – dooming themselves to a worse spiritual state than they were in before they came to know of Christ. And in chapter 3, before we get to our passage today, Peter has already warned of people who “follow their own sinful desires” and stressed the need for repentance.

And so, he tells us in v. 11 that if the physical universe is going to be dissolved, we can't live like people that take our salvation for granted. We need to be people characterised by holiness and godliness. People who are preparing to live in a new world where righteousness dwells.

A few years ago, the most popular program being aired on *National Geographic* channel, was *Doomsday Preppers*. Most episodes featured families, groups or individuals who were making practical preparations to help them survive a national or global disaster or societal collapse. Perhaps what made it work as a series is the fact that there is such variety in the threats people are anticipating, yet such a consistent and solemn determination to be ready for disaster when it comes.

Terrorist attacks with biological weapons or radioactive “dirty bombs;” volcanic explosions; polar shifts; solar flares; economic collapse; civil uprisings or global pandemics are all major threats that have some people concerned enough to invest significant time, money and energy to mitigating the hypothetical impact of these events on their lives.

One guy who got his own spin-off series, conscripted his family to help build a medieval castle in the South Carolina forest, which can withstand an electromagnetic pulse attack that could cripple the North American power grid. He puts his kids through rigorous training to equip them for the kind of scenario he imagines them having to survive in. One where they have to hunt for their own food, function without outside assistance and fend off malicious looters desperate to get their hands on the family's supplies.

In a sense, Peter is trying to instruct us in a similar way. If we know the Day of the Lord is coming that needs to define our identity and attitude every day. And if you know the kind of world you're going to inhabit after that fearful event, you ought to be preparing yourself to live in it.

The main words Peter uses to describe our preparedness are holiness and godliness. You've heard them both before, but what do they really mean? Are they the same thing? If not, what's the difference?

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this – I wrote a book in which godliness is one of the key themes. Here's the understanding I've arrived at – five years of contemplating - in a nutshell. Holiness and godliness overlap significantly in meaning, but they are distinctive ideas.

Holiness refers mainly to our status and identity as people set apart for God. Godliness refers mainly to our attitude and affections towards God as our awesome and amazing King.

To show that the two aren't completely interchangeable words, consider this... The Old Testament speaks of holy objects, like vessels in the Temple. But we never hear of *godly* objects. The most sacred place in the Jewish Temple was referred to as the Holy of Holies. But never "the Godly of Godlies."

Even God Himself is regularly described as holy, but never as godly. We kind of know it isn't proper to call the third Person of the Trinity the "Godly Spirit" – even if we're not sure why.

Some might think that's because "godly" means being "like God" – similar to how we use "Christlike." But that's not it. The reason we don't call God "godly" is because godliness is a worship word. The Greek word in this passage, *eusebeia* means "right reverence" or appropriate worship. It's a word that describes the response that creatures should have in their hearts towards their glorious Creator.

God is jealous for His own glory and defends it against impostors. But He doesn't worship Himself. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to speak of His godliness.

But God's holiness sums up both the perfect moral purity of His nature and His uniqueness as a Being without compare. He's unlike any other thing in existence – both with respect to His perfect love of everything good and hatred of all evil and the infinite glory of His Being.

And so, being “holy” or “set apart to God” means being categorically different to all other people and things in the world. And it means being morally different to those around us. We increasingly love what is right and hate what is evil, in accordance with God's will: revealed to us in His Word, by His Spirit and through His Son. Holiness means we reflect what we have come to see and know of our Holy God.

So here's my attempt at explaining how the two go together – how we live lives of holiness and godliness. God reveals Himself to us and we behold His glory and holiness. Our hearts respond with awe and affection towards Him – this is the core of our godliness or worship of God from the heart. But we also come to see ourselves as belonging to God and that leads to a desire to emulate His character and represent Him to the world. That's the life of holiness.

And so, if we're to live lives of holy conduct and godliness, as Peter calls us to here, we must ensure that we continually gaze upon the glory and holiness of our God. The God who in the Old Testament descended upon Mt Sinai in fire and spoke with roaring thunder to the Israelites – who feared for their lives at the sight and sound of His presence – that God is soon going to visibly burst onto the scene of global history and manifest His glory to all humanity. The God who in the New Testament is described as a Consuming Fire is coming to incinerate all wickedness and ungodliness.

But despite the terrifying nature of our Lord's return – it is something we can wholeheartedly look forward to. We know that we're supposed to look forward to that Day, because Peter says so repeatedly in this passage. Do you see it there in vv. 12, 13 and 14?



While the Day of His Coming is a fearful thing, God does not intend for us to move away from Him in terror, but rather to move towards Him in faith. To constantly anticipate and eagerly desire the Day when we see Him in His glory and are made like Him. For, if you are trusting in Christ, this will be the most wonderful day of your life.

This brings us to the result of our response to the reality of Christ's return. If we live holy and godly lives in reverent anticipation of His coming what will the outcome be?

Well, there's a very interesting possibility raised in v. 12. Most of our English translations include a phrase which suggests that by living lives of godliness and holiness we'll actual hasten the coming of the Day of the Lord. There is evidence in favour of this interpretation. The very end of the Bible encourages us to pray for Christ's swift return, in accordance with His own promise.

We could even say that it's natural to suppose Peter might be talking about the godly speeding up the Day of the Lord, since he begins this chapter condemning those who mock God's supposed slowness in keeping His promise.

As appealing as this possibility might be, I'm more inclined to go with the minority report on this verse and agree with the way the Holman Christian Standard Bible puts it. I'll read from v. 11 so you get the full sentence. *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness as you wait for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God.*

Rather than suggesting that our motivation for holiness and godliness is that we'll make Jesus come back faster if we are sanctified enough – I am more persuaded that Peter is using two Greek words to intensify the idea of waiting. That is, we shouldn't just be waiting around for the Lord to return. It should be the case that we really really really can't wait for Him to come back.

Think a child looking forward to Christmas or a birthday party; a bride and groom looking forward to their wedding day and wedding night – multiply the intensity of that and I think that's how eager Peter wants us to be for Christ's appearing.

So instead of the result of our holiness and godliness being that we make Jesus return quicker, it's actually our earnest and constant desire for Jesus to return that helps us grow godlier and live holier lives.

So let's return to the question – what is the result of us living holy and godly lives in anticipation of the Second Coming?

The doomsday preppers we mentioned earlier are people who are determined to adapt for survival after an event that alters the world in a radical way. They think about what daily life might be like in their scary new world and seek to prepare their loved ones to live in it effectively.

We too have had forewarning of the great destruction that is coming. And we know what kind of world we'll live in and have some clues as to what our roles in it might be. But our preparation for it looks a lot different to that of a doomsday prepper. Because we're not headed for a hopeless dystopia. Our destination, our future home is *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*.

The outcome of taking the second coming seriously here and now and cultivating holiness and godliness in our lives is that, when Jesus returns, we'll be ready to live our eternal lives in the realms of righteousness.

Because, if godliness is beholding God and responding with adoration and awe – that's a description of the eternal society we're headed for that revolves completely around God. If holiness is expressing our identity as people who belong to God and reflecting His glory back to Him before others – we have our eternal job description.

We pursue these things now in anticipation of the hope that from that Day forward we will do perfectly what we can now only manage in part.

So our job, from this day forward, is to remind ourselves of the Day that is soon coming. To focus on the glory of Christ's appearing so our hearts are filled with affection and anticipation. To live day-by-day in a way that demonstrates that we know what kind of world we're going to live in after Christ comes and we're getting ready for it.

A few quick points on how you might do this, before we close.

1) Don't avoid the passages of Scripture that emphasise Christ's return, or the Day of Judgement. You need them. Make them a regular part of your devotional diet. I didn't check with Ben how far through Matthew your sermon series is going, but if he's preaching on chapters 24-25 in a few weeks time, make sure you're here! We need frequent reminders.

If you find these passages scary or confusing, talk to an older Christian about what you've read. When you are challenged or encouraged, tell other believers about it, so they can be affected by the reality of Christ's coming too.

2) If we want to grow in godliness and holiness, we must regularly meditate on the glory and holiness of God. Your affection for God will only grow if you've spent time admiring His beauty and perfections. Your reflection of His glory in your lifestyle and behaviour will only increase if you've been giving serious thought to His character. A brother from Grace Bible Church Logan summed this up memorably at a recent men's fellowship lunch: "[If you] have an obedience problem, you have an adoration problem. If you have an adoration problem, you probably have a meditation problem."

3) Take stock of your life by asking the question, "Do my plans for today reflect that I'm eagerly awaiting the Lord's return?" "Do my plans for the coming weeks, months and years suggest that I'm doing my utmost to prepare for Christ's coming?" The answer will most likely be no, so what might you need to do differently?

Augustine is reputed to have wished that when Jesus came, He would find him either praying or preaching. Speaking to God or speaking for God – as Spurgeon paraphrased him. Have you given much thought to what you would want to be found doing when Christ returns? And whatever your answer is: do you practice it regularly enough that it wouldn't just be a fluke if He found you doing it?

4) Which brings me to my final point from the passage: take Peter's words in v. 14 to heart. *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

While you pursue holiness and godliness, beware of anything that may corrupt your way of life. Earlier in 2 Peter, those who are spotted and blemished by sin are people who have believed lies that grant them permission to live however they want and follow their fleshly desires.

Sexual immorality: pornography, dirty thoughts or filthy talk can defile us as we wait for Christ's return. Greed might tarnish your integrity by feeding your self-indulgent appetite. If you're older, perhaps you indulge by foregoing good works and charitable giving. You've contributed a lot over the years – now it's time to enjoy the comforts of retirement. If you're younger, maybe you're downloading or streaming stuff you know you should be paying for.

Maybe you've been pinching stuff from work. Maybe you compromise your holiness in the workplace by doing things you know are unethical or illegal because it keeps you in with your colleagues and supervisors and helps you get ahead.

This is the other side of the coin to what we considered a moment ago. When you're faced with these kind of temptations - ask yourself: would I want to be found doing these things at the moment that Christ appears in His glory?

If you're tempted to corrupt your way of life, because you envy unbelieving friends, colleagues and neighbours, remember: things they live for are going to burn. And the way they lived to get them is about to be judged by God.

Brothers, sister, the Day of the Lord is at hand. May God grant each of us the grace to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him when the King comes.

*Let's Pray.*

1. Since becoming a Christian, how much time would you say you've spent thinking about Christ's return? [Maybe get them to rate from 1-10 or hardly ever - very often]

2. a) In 2 Peter 3:10, what are the main aspects of the second coming that Peter highlights? [Sudden/expected; natural destruction; moral judgement]

b) Which of these aspects strikes you the most?

3. V. 11 tells us to pursue lives of holiness and godliness as we await the Lord's coming.

a) If you had to explain 'holiness' and 'godliness' in your own words to a new Christian, a child or a non-Christian friend - what would you say?

b) If you heard this week's sermon, was there anything about the distinction between being 'holy' and 'godly' that you found helpful?

4. Which phrase keeps recurring in vv. 12, 13 and 14?

5. a) How much would you say that you are personally looking forward to Christ's return?

b) What do you think might need to change in order for this desire to increase?

6. Read v. 14.

a) What would you identify as the sinful tendencies or temptations which might hinder you from being found spotless, unblemished and at peace with the Lord at His coming?

b) What would you say is the most practical thing that your brothers and sisters in Christ can do to help you overcome these things in preparation for the Day of the Lord?