

West Valley Church
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On This Rock Part Fourteen *2 Peter 3, pt. 2¹*

If you've been with us for our series called "On This Rock," you might get the idea that 2 Peter is all about false teachers. But it's really not; if you look at the consistent, underlying message, 2 Peter is a manual for transformation, a how-to guide for holy living, a clear message for living like Jesus. 2 Peter begins with the promise that in Christ we have all we need for life and godliness—through Christ we can participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption of life caused by our sinful desires. Peter then tells us what behaviors and attitudes to *add* to our daily lives, and what type of teachers we need to *avoid*. So throughout, the focus is on *holiness*, or Christ-likeness, or living godly lives. Peter begins this final chapter – chapter three – by saying:

"Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking." (2 Peter 3:1, niv)

Wholesome *thinking*. That means the first stage of the battle for holiness takes place between our ears. We win the battle, first of all, by learning to *think right*. I want to emphasize, though, that "wholesome thinking" is not what self-help gurus call positive thinking. Neither is it what prosperity gospel and TV preachers would call "name it and claim it," or "declare it and snare it," or "demand it and cash-in-hand it" or whatever else they'll tickle your ears with. The phrase Peter used for "wholesome thinking" means something much different than that. It's a phrase that other writers and philosophers used— Plato among them—and it means, literally "pure reason." This wholesome thinking is reason that is unaffected by the seductive influence of our senses; reason that is *informed* by emotions and circumstance, but not *driven* by them. When Peter says "wholesome thinking," he's referring to *accurate thinking*: seeing the world objectively, as it really is, through God's perspective; not subjectively, as our emotions or circumstances might dictate. Remember that Scripture tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:16...

"But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:16, niv)

2 Peter 3 tells us how to think like Christ and how to develop wholesome thoughts. Wholesome thoughts—right thinking—lead ultimately to a wholesome (in other words, correct) world view, which leads to wholesome and just action in this world. In order to live in this world as God intends for us to, we need to understand the world—we need to have a wholesome world view.

That does not mean that we spend our time griping and complaining about how bad things are getting and how out of control our country is, or pining for the good old days.

¹ Steve May, *Wholesome Thinking*, 2009

Wholesome thinking does not mean we have to be all doom-and-gloom, nor does it mean that we walk through life with rose-colored glasses.

I don't know that any of us understands how much social media and the media in general influence our thinking, but for sure it is far more than we realize. This is why Peter challenges us to develop a pattern of wholesome thinking—to learn to think rightly about the world. Today we'll look at three ways to do this, and I want to thank Pastor Steve May for his teaching on this; I'm borrowing a lot from him.

So one of the things that Peter means by “wholesome thinking” is...

1. Allow God's Word to shape your thoughts.

2 Peter 3:2 says...

"I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles." (2 Peter 3:2, niv)

When Peter uses the phrase "holy prophets," he's referring to the Old Testament. When he says "The command given by our Lord and Savior," he refers to Jesus' teaching that was already circulated among believers, possibly through the gospel of Mark. The statement “your apostles” was Peter's letters as well as the letters of Paul, and the teachings of the other Apostles. Here's what Peter is saying: The Old Testament foretells of Christ, the Gospels tell of Christ, and the Apostles teach of Christ. That's the narrative of God's Word from Old Testament through the New Testament: God's love for us through Christ.

Peter is saying, in effect: "Do you want to develop wholesome thoughts? Then let these words shape your thoughts. Learn to think like the prophets thought. Look at life the way Jesus taught us to. Live the way the apostles teach us to live."

If you do that, you will quickly find that what the Word says about the world is different than what the world says about itself.

Just consider what the world says about religion. The world teaches that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere. The Word teaches that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). The world teaches that truth changes from culture to culture and generation to generation. The Word teaches that the truth of God is unchanging (Isaiah 40:8); it isn't swayed by popular opinion. The world teaches that what's true for you isn't necessarily true for me. The Word teaches that we will all equally be accountable to God by the same Word (Hebrews 9:27).

In other areas, the world teaches, "Don't get mad, get even." The Word teaches to forgive your enemies and do good to those who harm you (Mark 11:25; Luke 6:27-36). The world teaches "Look out for number one—in other words, yourself." The Word teaches us to look out for those who can't look out for themselves (Proverbs 19:17; Psalm 82:3).

The Word of God teaches us how to understand and view the world. Just like the Bible describes the Jewish men of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32...

“Men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” (1 Chronicles 12:32, niv)

So God’s Word shows us how to understand the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, truth and error. It teaches us how to become wholesome thinkers. We need to see the world as the Word sees it; we need to refuse to see the Word as the world sees it.

Another thing Peter tells us we need if we are going to have wholesome thinking is...

2. Be skeptical about the skeptics.

A second way to develop a wholesome world view is found in verses 3 and 4:

"First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the Earth was formed out of water and by water." (2 Peter 3:3-4)

We already spent time last week going over this, so I’m not going to repeat myself. Let me just say a couple of new things about this.

Peter said there will be those who scoff at the claims of Christianity, particularly the claim of the Second Coming. That way they can excuse their sinful actions. We need to recognize the scoffers for what they are.

One of the problems is that, according to the world's way of thinking, skeptics, by nature of being skeptical, seem to know what they're talking about. We tend to believe skeptics and cynics and critics. For example, have you ever noticed how some political pundit seems so much more credible if he or she is speaking *against* the other side? It’s like they seem so much more credible when they attack a political policy rather than supporting one? Or think about what catches peoples’ attention on social media; for many people it is not positive stories or pictures; it is statements or memes about what “the other side” is doing wrong. What gets into many people’s logarithms are posts against the other side of the reader. Facebook and twitter want to keep you in an endless loop of that kind of negativity. I wonder what would happen if we were to total the amount of time we spend on social media each day (your iPhone can tell you this!), and then commit to spending the same amount of time reading God’s Word. What do you think would happen? For sure, we’d quickly see a huge disparity between the two, and I bet our attitudes and our posts would change for the better! How can we call ourselves Christians and spend more time on social media than we spend in God’s Word (if ANY time at all)?

Something else: Peter uses an interesting phrase here in verse 4. He says they "deliberately forget" that some things are true. The two Greek words literally mean, “They take pleasure in ignoring the truth.” They deliberately ignore the small voice that is calling them to a personal relationship with God. They deliberately resist his voice. Their rejection is not the result of honest intellectual inquiry but, as Peter states, of "following their own evil desires."

So how do we make sure we have a healthy skepticism of the sceptics? Maybe this will help: a big part of our theology is something called the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." It's from the work of John Wesley. Here's what it means: that our theology, our understanding of God, is based on four important factors, with the first being primary: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Some have described it as more like a three-legged stool: Scripture is the main part, and the three others help us balance it in our thinking. By *tradition*, he didn't mean music styles or old rules, he means the teachings of the Church down through the ages. But then we also apply *reason* – right thinking, which can be affirmed by our *experience*; there should be evidence of it in our actions. The Quadrilateral doesn't mean all four are equally important; Scripture is supremely important. But we understand it and live it out with the other three.

To develop a wholesome world view, we need to avoid the scoffers and know the difference between their claims and the truth of God's Word.

Finally, wholesome thinking means we...

3. See every day as a gift of mercy.

In 2 Peter 3:8, 9, and 15, Peter reminds us:

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance... Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation..." (2 Peter 3:8, 9, 15, niv)

The promise Peter refers to is the Second of Coming of Christ. He's saying God isn't slow; he's patient. He's giving us one more day.

Have you ever wondered how many people in the world become Christians every day? According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are approximately 2.7 million conversions to Christianity every year. Over a third of those are in China alone. Over the last 70 years in China there have been approximately 63 million new Christians. That's over 955,000 each year.² In *China alone*, every day that Jesus waits changes the eternal destiny of more than 2,600 souls. Every *hour* changes the destiny of 109 people in China.

Every single day is a gift of mercy, not just for them, but for us as well. God has given us all one more day so that we might have one more chance to repent and come to him. He's given us one more day so that we will have one more chance to introduce someone to Jesus, one more chance to love God and love others, one more chance to accomplish good for the purpose of his kingdom and the glory of his name.

Think about it. We have *today*. We can do something great for God. Some of you might say, "But I have squandered a lifetime. I have wasted every good opportunity that came my way." Maybe that's true, but you have *today*. Yesterday's gone, but you can do something good for his kingdom *today*.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_converters_to_Christianity

Keep this in mind, too: since God is patient with the human race, so we need to be also. He keeps extending the calendar one more day to give everyone one more chance to make things right. Let's do the same. No matter how bad you think things are getting each day, each day is another day of mercy. No matter how lost or how hopeless you think another person is, extend the calendar of mercy one more day for her or him. No matter how many times someone has disappointed you in the past, keep the door open one more day. Every day that you're alive is a gift of mercy from God to you. Share that gift with others. Extend mercy to the rest of the world in each new day.

Peter wrote this letter so that believers could learn to think wholesomely, so that they could develop pure reason. This purity of thought, this right way of thinking, is necessary in order for us to act and react in real life. In order to live in the world, we need to understand it. We need to see the world as God sees it and as he has revealed it in his Word. We need to see the world as the Word sees it; we need to refuse to see the Word as the world sees it. What is our source of truth? The Word of God. It shapes our thoughts. Let the skeptics say what they will; we stand on the Word of God. And we celebrate every single day as a gift of mercy from our loving Father in heaven so we can share that mercy with the world around us.

Prayer