

## The Theme of Fire in Second Peter

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Purification as a Literary Theme: Starting Point	
<p><sup>1:1</sup> Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; <sup>3</sup> seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup> For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become <b>partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.</b></p>	
Fire as Purifying Light	Fire as Destroying Darkness
<p><sup>5</sup> Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, <sup>7</sup> and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup> For if these <b>qualities</b> are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these <b>qualities</b> is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his <b>purification from his former sins.</b> <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of <b>His majesty.</b> <sup>17</sup> For when He received <b>honor and glory from God the Father</b>, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’ -- <sup>18</sup> and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup> So we have the prophetic word made more</p>	<p><sup>2:1</sup> But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift <i>destruction</i> upon themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their <b>sensuality</b>, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; <sup>3</sup> and in their <b>greed</b> they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their <i>destruction</i> is not asleep.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; <sup>7</sup> and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the <b>sensual conduct</b> of unprincipled men <sup>8</sup> (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), <sup>9</sup> then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from <i>temptation</i>, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the <i>day of judgment</i>, <sup>10</sup> and especially those who indulge <b>the flesh in its corrupt desires</b> and despise authority.</p> <p><sup>12</sup> But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the <i>destruction of those creatures also be destroyed</i>, <sup>13</sup> <i>suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.</i> They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, <sup>14</sup> having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; <sup>15</sup> forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; <sup>16</sup> but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. <sup>17</sup> These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. <sup>18</sup> For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, <sup>19</sup> <b>promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.</b> <sup>20</sup> For if, after they</p>

<p>sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to <b>a lamp shining in a dark place</b>, until the day dawns and the <b>morning star</b> arises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.</p>	<p>have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again <b>entangled in them and are overcome</b>, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. <sup>22</sup> It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'</p>
<p><sup>3:10</sup> But 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 <i>destroyed with intense heat</i>, and the earth and its works will be [burned up / discovered]. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things are to be <i>destroyed</i> in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be <i>destroyed by burning</i>, and the elements will <i>melt with intense heat</i>! <sup>13</sup> But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him <b>in peace, spotless and blameless</b>, <sup>15</sup> and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. <sup>17</sup> You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, <sup>18</sup> 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.</p>	

#### Historical and Cultural Background

- *Fire as Refining*: The Greek word for 'destruction' (*luo*) does not mean 'annihilation,' but rather 'being undone.'<sup>1</sup> Note that the new heavens and new earth (v.13) emerges from, and is disclosed by, the refining divine fire burning through the old. This is made more apparent because several ancient manuscripts of 2 Peter say that 'the earth and its works will be discovered/disclosed' rather than 'burned up' (3:10).

<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Nature in the New Creation*, p.468 – 469

## Leader's Notes

1. What is Peter's language for 'choices have consequences'?
  - a. True Christians are escaping the corruption and partaking of the divine nature (1:4), by applying godly qualities of character (1:5 – 7) in increasing measure (1:8) to do what?
  - b. Participate in Jesus' transfiguration of his own humanity (1:16 – 18), and to anticipate his transfiguration of theirs.
  - c. Peter's phrase 'if these qualities are yours and are increasing' is very significant to me because directionality is indicative of desire. The phrase shows the impact of one's own choices upon one's human nature. It's the positive flip side of the false teachers.
  - d. The false teachers' choices make an impact on their human nature. How? His language for describing that impact invokes permanence.
    - i. Peter says that the false teachers who indulge 'fleshly desires' (2:18) become 'slaves of corruption' (2:19).
    - ii. What does it mean to be slaves? Explaining his use of the word 'slaves,' Peter says, 'by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved,' and 'they are...entangled in them and are overcome.'
    - iii. What is the 'last state' for them? (2:20). He doesn't seem to foresee a future repentance for those who demonstrate this downward decline into more and more corruption.
2. Why does Peter bring up Jesus' transfiguration?
  - a. Because he is the one who cleansed himself of all corruption!! The transfiguration was something God did to Jesus so that the disciples could see where he was headed in his death and resurrection. He was going to finally and decisively purify his human nature. He'd put to death the corruption of sin and the disorder it causes in human nature.
  - b. In eternity, if I want Jesus to shine through me, unadulterated by blemishes, then he will be who he is: light and fire. Thus, Peter recalls Jesus' transfiguration as both paradigm and source of our cleansing (2 Pet.1:16 – 18).
  - c. But if I want to do something he forbids, or hold onto the very thing that he resists, or if I otherwise want him out of me, then he will still be who he is: light. But, in the context of being against the corruption for which I grasp and long, he will be fire. My state doesn't change who he is. It just changes how I experience him. That fire can be described as 'restorative' in the sense that Jesus' intention is not to cause me pain. Jesus' intention is still to love me the only way he can. Pain is simply the byproduct of how I experience him, given the posture I chose. But that is different from saying that Jesus' intention is to cause me pain.
3. What does Peter say about the 'destruction' (2:3, 6, 12; 3:7, 16) these false teachers will face?
  - a. It's both present and future
  - b. 'Enslaved and entangled in corruption' (2:19 – 20)
  - c. 'The last state' (2:20) Will it really be the last state?
    - i. When is repentance possible? Peter mentions that it is this present age that reflects God's patience for people's repentance (3:9), but not the next age. Peter identifies this present age as the age where repentance is possible in 3:3 – 9.
    - ii. In 3:10, he uses the contrasting word 'but' to indicate that he's making a contrast with the age to come, precisely concerning the possibility of repentance.
    - iii. If Peter had meant to communicate that repentance was possible after the day of judgment, wouldn't he have explained the connection between this present age and the day of judgment using a term of continuity ('and') rather than contrast ('but') at 3:10?
4. What will the 'day of judgment' be like? What does it mean?
  - a. Somehow, that our choices to shape our desires will become fixed.
  - b. Why will the earth and its works be 'discovered'?
    - i. Things will be revealed for what they are
5. Is it fair to say that we are 'human becomings'?
  - a. Logically, for a finite being to experience the infinite being is to constantly become something more. But more of what? Becoming is a directional thing.
  - b. The choice of what we become on judgment day will be permanent.
  - c. On judgment day, each person's true self is revealed. That's what Jesus means by 'judgment' in John's Gospel: His presence results in a person's self-judgment and self-revelation (Jn.9:39 – 41).

That dynamic will come to a decisive turning point, with finality in regards to receiving or resisting Jesus. Which is why the day of judgment will be a day of *self-revelation*.

- d. Application: Are you convinced that we are all going to face Jesus? And that Jesus is cultivating qualities in us that are his own, meaning explicitly from him, which will be revealed? Name one thing you'd like to do differently to cultivate Jesus' character and life in yourself.