

Honoring or Abusing the Promise of God

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



During the week of February 5th we read New Testament passages that describe contrasting groups of people: those who honor God's promise of salvation, and those who abuse it for their own purposes.

Mark 13:1 warns believers to "take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them."

But when they stand before hostile powers, believers should not be anxious beforehand about what to say. Instead they should "say whatever is given to you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." Those who do bear testimony, and preach the true Gospel, will be "hated by all for My name's sake." Yet even then there is no reason to turn away from Christ, because God's promise is that "he who endures to the end will be saved." Honoring that promise will lead to the Kingdom, even though the road is rough.

All Peter 2 and 3 describe those who abuse rather than honor God's promise. In the previous chapter, Peter has reiterated the assurance that the Holy Spirit inspires those who preach the Gospel in the right way: "...no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

But he goes on to warn that just as false prophets put forth their destructive teachings in earlier days, "there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled."

Peter says that these false teachers have "hearts trained in greed." They are exploiters of others who "despise authority." They are scoffers who cynically ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" So rather than honor the promise, they abuse it by their ridicule, encouraging others to doubt it. They "entice unsteady souls" to revere them instead of Christ.

What motivates these scoffers? Peter answers when he writes about their greedy hearts and their attitude toward authority. Christians must place God at the center of their lives. They can't be greedy for notoriety, trying to gather personal followers. They can't despise authority, because God asks His people to submit freely to His loving authority. For people greedy for acclaim and who despise authority, submission to God is impossible. It's equally impossible for them to believe God's promise, and honor it.

Peter warns us against these people who he says are like "waterless springs." He acknowledges that some things are hard to understand, including Paul's teaching. But knowing this, and knowing that some people will twist the teachings, we can leave their wrong ideas aside and concentrate on growing in the "grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."