

[c. 1940s. From a collection of tracts likely written by Gordon Clark]

Not willing!

In II Peter 3:9 the apostle says something to the effect that God “is not willing that any should perish.” With a number of people this is a favorite verse, and a hymn or sacred song has been based on these words.

The reason people like this verse is that it shows the mercy of God; and without God's mercy we are all undone. But if the verse teaches a precious truth, it ought to be quoted correctly and fully. When the devil tempted Christ, he quoted Psalm 91, but he changed its meaning by omitting part of a sentence and misapplying the remainder.

Similarly, many people who quote II Peter 3:9 omit the main part of the verse and misapply the remainder. They quote it as saying, “God is not willing that any should perish.” Then since Psalm 135:6 says, “Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he,” and since Isa. 46:10 says, “I will do all my pleasure,” it follows that no one is lost and everyone is saved. God is not willing that any should perish; he does whatever he pleases; therefore he saves everyone.

However the Bible is clear that not everyone is saved. The Bible is also clear that God is omnipotent and does whatsoever he pleases. Hence there must be a misinterpretation involved in the omission of the main part of the verse from Peter.

It would be best to read carefully the whole chapter and omit nothing. Peter is answering an objection to the second coming of Christ. The unbelievers argue: All things have happened normally from the beginning of the creation; they will continue their natural course; and no catastrophic intervention to climax history will occur.

Peter replies that things have not always followed a natural course. On one occasion God flooded the world to destroy the wicked. The naturalistic interpretation of history is, therefore, wrong.

This reply raises another question. Why does not God send Christ now and destroy the wicked? This question may have been asked by Christians who were suffering under persecution. At any rate, Peter definitely addresses Christians and says, the Lord “is long-suffering to you-ward (A.V.: to us-ward), not willing that any (of you, or, of us) should perish.

The word **any** in this passage does not refer to any in general, but to any of the Christians. Drawing from other places in the Bible, we may say that Peter teaches that the world will continue, and Christ will not return, until all whom the Father gave the Son in eternity shall have come to him in time. Should the world end too soon, someone chosen in the Beloved from the foundation of the world

would be lost. This calamity, God will not allow, for he is not willing that any of the elect should perish.

Let us, therefore, praise the undeserved mercy of God, who delays the catastrophic climax of history in order that the last of the elect may be saved.

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