

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF SECOND PETER

NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH!

Read 2 Peter 3:1-18

Introduction

Second Peter 3 focuses on dismantling the arguments of the false teachers. Peter's purpose is urging Christians not to waver in their beliefs, but to continue to live out what they know to be true.

One specific claim being made by false teachers is that that Christ would never return. In some cases, it was also rejecting the idea that God would judge the sins of humanity. These deceivers mocked those ideas by asking, "Where is the coming of Jesus?" According to their challenge, it had been too long. Since time—too much time, in their opinion—has passed, but the world seems to be going along as it always has, they think nothing will change. This is a suggestion that God would never alter the course of the natural, physical world to enforce His will.

Reminders to Stimulate Your Minds

“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder) that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour...” (vv1-2)

He mentions that this is a second letter. The first letter probably isn't 1 Peter, but a letter that is now lost to us. 1 Peter is a general letter intended for a number of churches. But 2 Peter is a more personal epistle in which he knows the recipients and has spoken to them before and now writes mainly by way of reminder.

It's interesting how many times in this short letter that the themes of remembering and reminding are found – 1:12-13, 15, 19; and 3:1-2. Peter says he wants to *"stir up your pure minds by way of reminder."* "stir up" translate the Greek verb *diegeirō*, "wake up, arouse someone who is asleep." Figuratively, "arouse, stir up." Peter isn't questioning their devotion to Christ. He is building on their "sincere intention" (NRSV) or "pure minds" (KJV).

Peter knew the importance of reminding his readers of the Scriptural message, both received from the Old Testament (spoken before) and contemporary to his own day (and of the commandment of us). By placing the messengers of the new covenant on the same level as the messengers of the old covenant, Peter understood the authority of the New Testament, even as it was being formed.

Peter understood that Jesus gave His apostles the inspired authority to bring forth God's message to the new covenant community. He understood this from passages such as Matthew 16:19, where Jesus gave the apostles authority to bind and loose, much as the authoritative rabbis of their day. Significantly, Peter saw this authority invested in the apostles, not in him alone. He would think it strange for supposed papal **authority to be credited to him.**

False Teachers Scoff at Christ's Coming

“... knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”” (vv3-4)

Christians should not be surprised to find that there are those who scoff at the idea of Jesus coming again. Peter told us that the scoffers will come. This is the first thing to know. In a sense, the last days

began when Jesus ascended into heaven. Since that time, we haven't rushed towards the precipice of the consummation of all things; but we have run alongside that edge — ready to go anytime at God's good pleasure.

Jesus himself said to anticipate a delay in his return (Luke 12:45). He said to expect him to return when everything seems normal -- in the midst of "marrying and giving in marriage" (Matthew 24:37-44). "The Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:44). Yes, the disciples expected Jesus to return "soon" (1 Corinthians 7:29; Revelation 1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 22:6-7; James 5:8-9). But as the apostolic age came towards its end, impatience began to develop (1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; Hebrews 10:36-37; James 5:7-9). However, the subject of Christ's Second Coming isn't a little doctrine tucked away in an obscure place. It is taught or referred to in every book in the New Testament! A belief in Christ's coming is central to the Christian hope.

The scoffers base their message on the idea that things have always been the way they are right now, and that God has not and will not do anything new in His plan for creation.

The Power of God's Word

“For this they wilfully forget that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (vv5-7)

The scoffers presume upon the mercy and longsuffering of God, insisting that because they have never seen a widespread judgment of God, that there will never be one. But they wilfully forget God's creation and the judgment God poured out on the earth in the days of Noah. A literal belief in Creation, in Adam and Eve, and in Noah's Flood are essential for a true understanding of God's working both then and now. To deny these things undermines the very foundations of our faith. Sadly, today it is many Christians who wilfully forget these things, thereby putting themselves in the place of scoffers.

The Bible clearly teaches that the active agent in creation was God's word. He spoke and creation came into being. Peter's point is that things on this earth have not always continued the way they are now. The earth was different when God first created it and then it was different again after the flood. Therefore no one should scoff at God's promise that He will make it different once again, judging it not with water but with fire. The same word of God that created all matter and judged the world in the flood will one day bring a judgment of fire upon the earth.

God's Different Time Scale

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (vv8-9)

What seems like forever for us is but a short time for God, just as an hour may seem to be an eternity for a child but a moment for an adult. Peter quoted this idea from Psalm 90:4: *“For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.”* All time is as nothing before him, because in the presence as in the nature of God all is eternity; therefore, nothing is long, nothing short, before him; no lapse of ages impairs his purposes.

Peter did not give some prophetic formula, saying that a prophetic day somehow equals a thousand years. He instead communicated a general principle regarding how we see time and how God sees time. When people use this verse as a rigid prophetic key it opens the door for great error.

The truth is that God will keep His promise, and without delay according to His timing. Any perceived delay from our perspective is due to the longsuffering of God, who allows man as much time as possible to repent. Many of those who are Christians today are happy that Jesus didn't return ten years, or five years, or two years, or one year, or even two months ago. There is a compassionate purpose in God's timing.

Peter here revealed some of God's glorious heart. The reason why Jesus' return isn't sooner is so that all should "come to repentance" because God is "not willing that any should perish". We understand that God is not willing that any should perish not in the sense of a divine decree, as if God has declared that no sinners will perish. Rather, Peter's statement reflects God's heart of love for the world (John 3:16), and His compassionate sorrow even in the righteous judgment of the wicked. It is the same thought as expressed in Ezekiel 33:11: "*As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*".

Sudden Destruction at Christ's Coming

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (v10)

Though the Lord's longsuffering love to the lost makes it seem that perhaps He delays His coming, the truth is that He will indeed come. And when Jesus does return, He will come at a time that will surprise many (as a thief in the night). The ultimate result of His coming will be a total transformation of this present world (in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat).

Living Holy and Godly Lives

"Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (vv11-13)

He's saying, if you don't want to be judged and destroyed along with the world, then you need to live holy and godly lives, lives that anticipate and look forward to Christ's coming and judgment. "Holy" means "set apart to God" and from sin, while "godly" refers to "devoutness, piety, godliness." Don't mistake this for a works-based salvation. Rather, Peter is underscoring the truth that the way we live our lives reflects our faith much more accurately than do our words.

But look at this! Peter teaches that our holy and godly lives actually speed up or hasten Christ's coming! "Speed" (NIV), "hasting unto" (KJV), and "hastening" (NRSV) translate the Greek verb *speudō*, "to hurry, hasten," here, "to cause something to happen or come into being by exercising special effort, hasten." In other words, the timing of the advent is to some extent dependent upon the state of the church and of society.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Peter tells us that the very elements of this world order will be dissolved. God will genuinely make new heavens and a new earth, even as Isaiah promised: *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind (Isaiah 65:17)*. The most glorious characteristic of this new heaven and new earth is that it is a place in which righteousness dwells. In God's plan of the ages, this happens after the millennial earth ruled by Jesus Christ. It is the re-creation of this world order as

described in Revelation 21:1: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

Don't Presume on God's Patience

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” (vv14-16)

If our hearts are really set on the glory of the new heaven and new earth, we will endeavour to walk godly in regard to our brothers and sisters (in peace) and in regard to God (without spot and blameless). It is easy for Christians to sometimes resent the longsuffering of God; after all, it in some sense delays His coming. Yet, the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation for others, and it is salvation for us.

It is fashionable for some critics to say that the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul aren't in agreement. These same critics also often say that Peter and Paul aren't in agreement with Jesus. Yet here Peter affirmed Paul's teaching in the warmest terms. He called Paul beloved and said that Paul wrote with wisdom. This praise from Peter is even more wonderful when we remember that at one time Paul publicly rebuked Peter for public compromise (Galatians 2:11-21).

Though Peter praised Paul's ministry, he admitted that some things in Paul's writings were hard to understand, and those who were untaught and unstable could use some of the difficulties to their own ends, twisting Scripture. Peter reminds us that the Scriptures can be twisted. Just because someone quotes the Bible doesn't mean that they teach Biblical truth. It's possible that they twist ... the Scriptures. That is why we should be like the Bereans, who *“searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11)*.

Conclusion

“You, therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.” (vv17-18)

We, who know of the Day of the Lord and await it with patient expectation, must persevere lest we fall from your own steadfastness. We must take care to keep abiding in Jesus. We prevent a fall from your own steadfastness by a continual growth in grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Grace is not merely the way God draws us to Him in the beginning. It is also the way we grow and stay in our steadfastness. We can never grow apart from the grace and knowledge of our Lord, and we never grow out of God's grace. We must also grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. This means knowing more about Jesus, but more importantly, knowing Jesus in a personal relationship. When we are this ready and this steadfast in the grace and knowledge of our Lord, it gives God glory.

Peter ends on “two trumpet blasts.” One is from heaven to earth: grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The other is from earth to heaven: To Him be the glory both now and forever.

