

11,17,22 2 Pet. 3 vs. 1-9, The Deceptive Influence of False Teachers (Part 6)

In this next chapter of 2 Peter, he moves into a new type of deception. This time Peter focuses on those who are familiar with the promises in the scriptures (in their case, primarily the Old Testament), but have decided to listen to voices that question or even refute what God has said He will do.

This brings us closer to home because these are the deceptions that would be most likely to ensnare *us*, since many of the deceptions we've looked at earlier would only be effective on believers who are young or who are ruled by the flesh.

And as we've seen numerous times in the last few weeks, Peter's letter is prophetic and looks ahead to the last days - the time we are living in now; for example, (vs. 3) ". . . knowing this first: that scoffers will come in *the last days*. . ."

Deception always increases near the end of a dispensation. Both the Church Age and the final 7 years of the Age of Israel are characterized by intense, global deception.

Just because sometimes life seems to be similar to the past, or normal, doesn't mean there aren't dangers greater than we can imagine moving against us in ways that are hard to detect unless we are awake and alert – which is why there are so many exhortations in the New Testament to ramp up that alertness when you know we are near the end of our Age.

We have to remember that something has come into world; something that interferes and counters what God has created and purposed. All the wars, suffering, deception, and darkness are the result of this influence of the enemy which has come into the universe.

Whether we are conscious of this reality or not, it's here and at this time in history, it's more pervasive than ever. There is a darkness falling down and covering this world.

So, in addition to the exhortations we've seen in the epistles about being awake and seeing through the delusion of normalcy in the world, we also see commands like this from the Lord;

(Matt. 24:42) "Watch therefore: for you know not on what day your Lord comes."

Here's a brief comment from a lexicon on this;

“What is the significance of the word ‘watch’? The meaning of watching is not to be careless. How prone Christians are to be overly self-confident. Watchfulness is the very opposite of carelessness. He who sleeps must be so confident in himself that he reckons nothing is going to happen, whereas the watchful person puts no trust in his flesh at all. The self-confident one is prone to fall, for to boast in our confidence opens the way to failure. Only the person who deeply senses his own inadequacy will be watchful. Since the Lord has not told us the hour, let us ever be watchful and on guard.”

Since we are given the prophetic conditions of our generation, we should realize that ‘watchfulness’ is more important now than it’s ever been.

We’ve always known that study and prayer are our defenses against both deception and spiritual slumber. End time pressures alone, especially for those the enemy has specifically targeted, often contribute to a greater intensity in our prayer life.

And as to the issue of personal study, it’s been the lack of this that has put the Church, especially in the West, to sleep. The scriptures warn us that at the end of this age, during the Laodicean generation, most believers will be completely unprepared to effectively perceive or advance against the deceptions that are pulling the Church into increased darkness and that have created a Christianity that is mostly occupied with rearranging the chairs on the Titanic. We’ll see Peter’s explanation of that in a minute.

I want to share something by L.S. Chafer that I think can be a good reminder of what our priorities should be in relation to the study of God’s word. He’s addressing pastors, but the principles he communicates applies to all of us;

“Theology” is made up of two Greek words, “theos” (God) and “logos” (a word; the expression of thought – i.e. God’s thinking in spoken or written form). Theology is the study of God’s thoughts.

Theology, the greatest of the sciences, has fallen upon evil days. Between the rejection and ridicule of it by so-called progressives and the neglect and abridgment of it by the orthodox, it, as a potent influence, is approaching the point of extinction. . . The unchanging emphasis in the Scriptures upon doctrine, which subject is referred to in the New Testament more than forty times and is that to which a Christian is to ‘take heed’ stands as a silent rebuke, whether heeded or not, to all modern notions which belittle the

importance of dogmatic theology, and also stands as a corrective to those who neglect any part of it.

The present situation is not one of passing moment. As well might a medical doctor discard his books on anatomy as for a preacher to discard his books on theology; and since doctrine is the bone structure of the body of revealed truth, the neglect of it must result in a message characterized by uncertainties, inaccuracies, and immaturity. . . To the preacher is committed a responsibility of surpassing import. Men of other professions are tireless in their attempts to discover the truths and to perfect themselves in the use of the forces belonging to their various callings, though these are in the restricted field of material things. The preacher is called upon to deal with the things of God, the supernatural and eternal.

No substitute will ever be found for the knowledge of the Word of God. That Word alone deals with things eternal and infinite, and it alone has power to convert the soul and to develop a God-honoring spiritual life. There is a limitless yet hidden spiritual content within the Bible which contributes much to its supernatural character. . . Acquiring the knowledge of the spiritual content of the Bible is a life task. The great preachers who have moved the hearts of men with divine power have been saturated with the Bible truths secured through a first-hand, daily study of its text. General facts of human learning may be acquired by the usual means, but spiritual truths are apprehended only as taught to the individual heart by the Spirit through diligent study and prayer.”

Now, let’s move into 2 Pet. 3. Peter is going to address Christ’s return from several angles, showing both the absolute certainty of this event as well as some of the deceptions that will be prominent at that time. So, first let’s look at a few verses that can give us the context;

(2 Pet. 3:3-4 AMP) “To begin with, you must know and understand this, that scoffers (mockers) will come in the last days with scoffing, [people who] walk after their own fleshly desires. . . And say, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’”

At a time in history when the Church, and especially pastors, should be extremely excited about, and teaching about, the soon return of the Lord, the most we get from most 21st. century believers and pastors is essentially; “He might be coming

soon, but since we can't know, we just need to occupy till He comes and keep working our way through those parts of the Bible that help us do that."

This is the 2022 version of what Peter calls "scoffers" – "maybe yes, maybe no, but things are pretty much the same, so let's just focus on what we know for now." We'll break down the meaning of "scoffers" later.

Now, let's move to the top of ch. 3 and start with vs's 1 & 2;

"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 Savior."

Both of Peter's letters were meant to be reminders of information they had already received through the Old Testament prophets and the apostles of the Lord.

The word "pure" in vs. 1 means "sincere" and refers to the genuineness of their commitment to Christ and their openness to learn what Peter is communicating. But there is more to this word than simply their sincerity. This is from Kelly's Greek commentary;

"In *pure understanding* the noun does not denote the mind or intelligence in the intellectual sense but, as often in the New Testament and in Hellenistic Greek, its referring to the faculty of spiritual discernment as in unsullied spiritual sight."

The reason I wanted to stress this is because, as we saw in Chafer's comments on the supreme importance of studying theology rather than just devotional or topical life-application books, he closed his comments with this phrase; "spiritual truths are apprehended only as taught to the individual heart by the Spirit through diligent study and prayer."

Chafer recognized that the study of the Bible, especially when we go deeper into the doctrines presented in the scriptures, could move us into a very intellectual understanding and actually distance us from the spiritual realities we are meant to see in our study.

This is a huge danger or deception – thinking that because we can recite all the major doctrines of the Bible accurately, we must automatically have a spiritual understanding of God's Word.

One of the reasons Peter stresses this idea of “pure” as in “spiritual insight” is that he foresaw the time coming at the end of the Age when the Church would have doctrinally sound pastors who were out of sync with the spiritual reality of the time they are living in.

They could accurately and thoroughly disseminate theology, but would be either ambivalent or completely unaware of what the Lord was actually doing in their generation. They may or may not be openly scoffing those who say the time is near, but they wouldn’t join them in their enthusiasm either.

When Peter introduces these ‘scoffers’ in vs. 3, he starts with “knowing this first”. We’ve already seen in past studies that whatever a Jewish writer or speaker places first in his list of things he wants to communicate, is the highest priority of all that he’s trying to communicate.

(vs. 3) “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?’”

The way Peter words this is showing us that he considers this to be one of the “for” or “against” issues in the Bible. In other words, Peter is not allowing for any neutral ground. A person either knows his time in history or he doesn’t. He is either “for” the teaching related to the soon return of the Lord, or he is “against” it.

That’s why I said this earlier as an illustration;

“They may or may not be openly scoffing those who say the time is near, but they wouldn’t join them in their enthusiasm either.”

I’m sure you remember in Matt. 12:30 when the Lord told the crowd, “He that is not for Me, is against Me.”

Jesus was doing the same thing as we see in Peter. Ambivalence in spiritual matters is completely rejected and is seen as a combination of cowardice, ignorance and trying to rationalize what is essentially a deliberate denial of something that’s true; and in Peter’s mind, something that is of the highest priority of importance.

Since its possible to know the time of the end and the soon coming of the Lord, those who downplay this and use words like “maybe” aren’t, in God’s eyes, seen as

open but just uncertain – they are seen as “willfully ignorant.” They *could* know, *with certainty*, and they could take a stand for this, but they refuse to go there.

(vs. 5) “For this they *willfully* forget.”

People get very frustrated with me when I criticize pastors who won’t place prophetic instruction in the place of highest priority in their ministry. But you can’t get more ‘criticized’ than to be called “willfully ignorant” of what Peter says unequivocally is the one of the greatest deceptions at the end – people who scoff at those who are adamant about the generation of the Lord’s return.

There is “for” and there is “against”; there is “proclaiming” and there is “willfully forgetting” – there is no “maybe” in Peter’s position on this.

Like Chafer and Kelly pointed out – an intellectual understanding of the rapture and coming of our Lord is radically different than a *spiritual* understanding which is based on knowing not only the doctrine of the second coming, but also the signs that confirm the proximity of this event.

Ambivalence or uncertainty at this time in history isn’t a sign of humble transparency or honesty, it’s evidence of being spiritually out of step with what the Spirit is saying to the Churches - it’s the opposite of having ears to hear; it’s a willful closing of those ears in order to safely perpetuate the Christian machine and not offend anyone with controversial topics like “the promise of His coming”.

I know this may seem like it’s a hobby horse for me – and it is. But there’s much more involved than just one guy grabbing a pet doctrine and running with it. Whether a believer is a pastor or not, the governing principle behind this ties directly into the issue of inheritance.

I’m going to read some comments by Sparks to show what I mean;

“What is Christ’s inheritance in the saints? What are the riches of the glory of Christ’s inheritance in the saints? It is that the saints are to provide Him with the means of the universal manifestation of Himself as God has purposed Him to be. It is a part of the arrangement in those counsels of the Godhead, that He shall be the central fullness.

The Lord Jesus let go in order to bring others in. The apostle says, ‘Let this mind be in you.’ If any of you are inclined to stand for your own rights, on your own ground, to hold things for yourself, you are violating the very spirit of Christ who let go His own rights in order that others might come into

them and get the benefit. So, the inheritance of Christ is this: that He is shown as heir of all things through and in the saints. It is a part of the arrangement, the agreement. The Lord is not satisfied with His people just being saved, and the Lord is not satisfied that people should just remain spiritual infants. The Lord has fixed this as His goal: the full knowledge of Him in relationship. Relationship is based on communication of what *is*, not just of what has been. It is indispensable to the Lord. Inheritance is bound up with it. The need today is that the Lord's own people should come into a knowledge of Himself which they do not possess, into a position in relation to Himself which they do not occupy; in a word: into a full, relational, communicative, knowledge of Himself."

He's saying that for Christ to have His inheritance in and through us we have to know the Lord beyond the limitation that ministries which do not present the full counsel of God provide His people.

There has to be a knowledge of Christ that is full rather than partial. If major sections of God's word are ignored or only touched on in a shallow way, the Christian's relationship with the Lord will also have gaps and be shallow.

And if all that's taught excludes the Lord's *present* speaking or communication to His people, they may know Him in principle, but they will not be able to provide a means for a current manifestation of the Lord's thought or mind for them in each unique generation, including ours. And that manifestation of His mind in the "now" is part of what *His* inheritance is meant to be in each generation of this Age, all the way from Pentecost to the end.

It has always been, a minority who stands for Christ *in the present*. The majority always wants to talk about what everyone already knows because that's safe and non-controversial. But to see what the Lord is really after at any given time in history comes with a price that most are unwilling to pay.

I'll share something about that in a minute, but I hope you can see how this ties into our chapter in 2 Peter. The majority doesn't want to talk about or even deal with what Peter calls "the promise of His coming." They question both its importance and even in some cases, its validity. 2 Pet. 3:4 is as far as they are willing to go; which is essentially a denial of any concept the Lord's soon return.

"Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

So, what about those who are dogmatic about the Lord's soon coming, and are critical of those who refuse to take a stand? What's the price they will have to pay if they won't back down? These are some further comments by Sparks on Acts 7:56-58 which says,

“Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand! Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.”

“You and I, on the broadest basis of the Christian life, are here... to represent a check; and because we are here for that, we shall be called ‘troublemakers’, ‘judgmental’, ‘critical’. In a very real sense, we *shall* be troublemakers. The trouble will focus itself upon us, and we shall have to suffer for it. The very fact that you are jealous for the Lord will bring you into conflict with that trend that there is in this world, in man.... When there is the fullest expression of what is of God, what He is after, the heavenly over against the earthly, the spiritual over against the carnal or the natural, the enemy gives a turn to things, a twist to things, and lays the responsibility at the door of a spiritual and a heavenly ministry. He says: ‘You are the cause of all the trouble – you are the troubler!’ But no; the trouble lies deeper than that, and in another realm. The truth is, there is something here that, in its very nature, must create trouble, must be a source of trouble, so long as God's known will, His revealed mind, is being violated; while the full expression of God's purpose is being withheld. To bring in something that stands for that, there is going to be trouble. It is a costly thing to have seen God's full purpose and thought concerning His people. It is always a costly thing. The Lord Jesus set a very vivid example and object lesson of this truth right in the foreground, in the incident of the man born blind (John 9). There is no doubt that the Lord intended that man to represent Israel and Israel's condition at the time. He gave that man sight – and what happened to the man? ‘They cast him out,’ they excommunicated him. That is an object lesson, an instance of this very thing.

If eyes have been opened; if, in any sense you have seen what the Lord wants, it is going to cost you, it will involve you in a lot of trouble. This matter of 'seeing' does that. It was Elijah the Seer, over against the blindness of Israel. It is a costly thing to be a spiritual man or a spiritual woman at this time in history. It is a costly thing, yes, very costly, to hold to a heavenly and

spiritual position. It is a costly thing to hold for Christ's full place; it involves you in trouble. It is costly to have light."

Now, let's quickly review our passage in 2 Pet.3 and see if this makes more sense based on what we've seen so far.

(2 Pet. 3:1-5a) "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 Savior, 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.' For this they willfully forget . . ."

We stopped at "willfully forget". Here's what the scoffers don't want to remember;

(vs. 5b-7) "For this they willfully 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."

Both in Peter's time and in our time, most Christians are fully aware that God created all things with a specific purpose and that when that purpose was undermined by the enemy and humanity took sides with him, judgment came.

The Day of the Lord will involve seven years of intense judgment of earth, of the nations, following by the Lord's 1000-year reign over a restored earth, which ends with the destruction of the heavens and earth and the consignment of all ungodly men to the Lake of Fire.

We also all know that the next judgment is just as inevitable as the first. The second coming of Christ will happen; there is no stopping it.

People can ignore the signs, they can scoff at those who believe these things, they can turn their backs on what they've been taught, and they can live as though we have all the time in the world to live in our Christian bubble.

What the Lord did through Noah in warning the world, what John the Baptist did in warning Israel and what remnant believers in our generation are doing in warning the Church are all based on the signs God has given – signs that most ignore.

(Matt. 16:2-3) “He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘The weather will be fair, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but not the signs of the times.”

(1 Thess. 5:6) “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be alert.”

(2 Pet. 3:5) “For this, they willfully forget. . . “

The body of Christ globally is rapidly dividing into two camps – those who know we are the final generation and those who believe “things continue as they were from the beginning . . . “.

Some realize the urgency of our time and the intensity of the growing spiritual conflict and others who are living as though we are on a Royal Caribbean cruise, not on the Titanic.

The Lord is with the first group, because they are with Him. The other group will be “spewed out of His mouth” in judgment (Rev. 3:16).

If anyone thinks this is just one of countless doctrinal debates or theological discussions that good men from all sides can consider and share their opinions on, they are wrong. This is life and death, for or against, standing with Christ or turning our backs on Him.

Those who can’t see that, can’t see the reality of our time in history and what’s at stake both for us and for the honor and glory of the Lord.

Whether people want to take sides or not, the passages I read in Matt. 16 and 1 Thess. 5 are only two examples showing that in this issue, God has rejected all neutral ground. This is one of those Biblical realities that force a decision, and that decision will determine the outcome for us personally of our Lord’s warning in Matt. 12:30, “He who is not with Me, is against Me”.

I think we tend to believe that the ‘scoffers’ Peter is talking about are either unbelievers who mock the rapture fantasy, or Christians who are in churches that characteristically teach false doctrines and that we would never attend a church like that.

But when I was doing a word study on the meaning of ‘scoffer’, something different than those misconceptions came out.

The Greek word is “empaizo” – in addition to what we think of when we think of people mocking and ridiculing others, there are additional meanings of this word that most commentators tend to overlook. It also means;

“To play with, trifle with, deride, to play like children, to trifle with solemn truth. Homer uses this word in classic Greek for games and dancing and in a lack of seriousness. Scoffers treat lightly that which ought to be taken seriously and with holy awe. They have no desire to search out the truth.”

So, scoffing can definitely mean what we normally think of when we think about people in Noah’s day scoffing at the idea of judgment; but it can also apply to believers and pastors who simply “treat lightly that which ought to be taken seriously” because they have “no desire to search out the truth”.

These are the Christians and pastors who say, “Maybe He’s coming soon, that would be awesome, I certainly hope so, but for now, we need to focus on other things.”

When you hear a believer or pastor use words like “maybe” or “I hope so” or “it might be soon, but it might be 20 or 30 years from now” – you are face-to-face with what Peter calls an “empaizo” – a “scoffer” and what Paul in 1 Thess. 5 calls a believer that is asleep. They’re undecided because even though they *could* know, they’ve chosen not to know; and God has honored their choice.

So, to wrap up tonight, let’s look at vs’s 8-9;

“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 does not delay and is not tardy or slow about what He promises, according to some people’s conception of slowness, but He is long-suffering (extraordinarily patient) toward you (hold on to that phrase) not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance.”

What we might consider to be ‘delay’ or ‘slowness’ on God’s part is because we are extremely limited our view of things. We don’t have God’s eternal overview and shouldn’t accuse Him of something based on what we don’t understand.

Here’s how Wiersbe puts it;

“Not only were the scoffers ignorant of what God had done in the past, they were also ignorant of what God was like. They were making God in their own image and ignoring the fact that God is eternal.”

First, “toward you” is literally “into us or you” Peter is addressing believers as his audience.

What the verse does *not* say is this; “He is long-suffering toward the lost, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance.”

So, first, we need to note that God’s patience in delaying His coming is directed at believers, not unbelievers. And based on Paul’s prediction of most believers being in a state of apostasy just before His coming, completely unprepared for the rapture, the Lord is desiring that His people repent of their ambivalence about the promise of His coming.

The word “perish” (apol’lymi) (a pol’ i, mee), could be translated in any of the following ways depending on context. In this case, it would be based who is threatened with “perishing”. Here’s a breakdown of the various meanings of this word;

“To put out of the way, to abolish, put an end to, ruin, render useless, to kill, to declare that one must be put to death, to be destroyed.”

If, in the context of this passage Peter was referring to the lost, this word would mean “destroy” as in hell, but we’ve already seen that Peter is talking to believers (“God is patient toward *you*, not desiring that any should perish”).

So, here’s a paraphrase of this warning in context;

“The Lord is not slow about what He promises, but He is patient toward you, not desiring that any should be ruined or rendered useless, but that all should turn to repentance.”

This is not a passage that’s discussing God’s patience with the lost. There are a large number of passages that *do* show His patience with the unsaved, this just isn’t one of them.

I don’t know why commentators skip over the word “you” in this passage. But it should be a good reminder to all of us that every word in the scriptures is important. Sometimes one word can totally change the meaning of what the author intended to communicate to us.

I realize that was a lengthy explanation, but it was the only way to show how Peter's warning aligns with Jesus' "I will spew you out" warning to the Laodiceans.

Ok, next time we'll move into Peter's description of the Lord's coming, the details of how earth and heaven will be destroyed and the implications for us of all these events.