

## Week 10 - Scoffers Are Gonna Scoff - 2Peter 3:1-7

### Scripture Reading: 1Thessalonians 4:13-18

#### Introduction

Perhaps you've noticed the troubling trend today where people no longer engage in reasoned argument or honestly discuss differences of opinion these days

Instead, we have largely replaced healthy, rational debate with mockery and personal attacks

If you want to see that in action, spend some time on Twitter, where you will find very little reasoned thought but plenty of put-downs meant to end debate before it even begins and then to claim victory through brute force and intimidation

One reason for this is that we live in an age of strong opinions that are weakly supported, and it's far easier to dismiss an opponent with mockery than it is to defend our position

Additionally, mockery can be pretty effective because no one wants to be thought of as foolish

In chapter 2, we saw Peter come out with guns blazing as he exposed the character of the false teachers he was warning his readers about

Now, as we begin our look at the final chapter of 2Peter, we see that Peter turns his attention to those he calls "scoffers," and we also see a distinct change of tone in Peter's writing

He begins this section of his letter by referring to his readers as "beloved" - a word he uses four times in chapter 3

There is affection and tenderness in this final chapter

In a word, Peter has become pastoral in his approach and softer in his tone as he focuses on teaching his readers what they need to know

He subtly praises his readers by telling them that he is only reminding them of what they already know and not presenting brand new information to them that they had never heard before

And he claims that their minds are "sincere," which means their thinking was presently stable and characterized by moral and ethical purity

But even the most sincere mind needs to be stirred up continually because we are so prone to forget even that which we know quite well

So a large part of a pastor's duty is to remind his flock of the truth they already know so that it is refreshed in their minds and they are awakened and impelled to appropriate action

Remember, Peter's original readers had been suffering attacks from outside the church as they tried to live God-honoring lives and now were suffering attacks from false teachers within the church

The temptation to capitulate and return to their former lifestyle had to be intense

And the siren song of the false teachers who came with high-sounding words telling them that they could do so without fear of judgment had to be alluring

Now we see that one of the tactics of the false teachers is scoffing at the truths of God's Word and, by extension, mocking those who believe those truths

So, having ripped back the covers to expose the character of the false teachers, Peter now softens his tone and encourages his readers not to be influenced by the scoffers but to remain firmly established on the Word of God

Let me encourage you to open your Bible to 2Peter 3 and follow along as I read verses 1-7 [**2Peter 3:1-7**]

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

If you are taking notes, we will first take a look at the practice of the scoffers, and then we will consider Peter's refutation of the scoffers

## **I. The practice of the scoffers**

Peter writes in verse 3 that in the last days, "scoffers will come," and he states that knowing this is a matter of first importance for his readers

His use of the term "will come" doesn't refer to some far-off future arrival but underscores the certainty of their presence in the church - scoffers *will come*, there is no doubt about it

The "last days" refers to the entire time between the two advents of Christ, and Peter's original readers were therefore in the last days as are we - they are not some future time

God's people have always had scoffers in her midst and will continue to have them until the Lord returns

### **A. They mock**

The first thing we see about the scoffers is that they will scoff or mock

Mockery is a supreme act of dishonor in an attempt to discredit an idea or bring shame to a person, and mockery is a marker that identifies who the scoffers are - it's yet another character trait that aids us in recognizing them

They will tend to avoid sound logical argument relying instead on derision and intimidation that paints orthodox Christ-followers as naïve or unenlightened

Their attitude is one of general disdain as their low estimation of others shows in their words, attitudes, and actions

And when the scoffers come with their scoffing, they are seeking to undermine the church's confidence - and in this case, they are seeking specifically to undermine the church's confidence in the Lord's return

### **B. They follow their own lust**

Notice, though, that Peter once again makes it clear that the root of their heresy isn't intellectual; it's moral

The doubts they express about the promise of the Lord's return to judge may well be framed by reason and experience

After all, even the disciples were expecting Jesus to return during their lifetime, as Paul seems to indicate with his verbiage in **1Thessalonians 4:17**, where he writes:

*Then **we who are alive, who are left**, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

With the passage of the years, the church's expectancy began to wane, and seeds of doubt began to spread, and the mockers came to exploit those fears

But Peter here makes clear that, whether or not they would admit it, the real reason that the mockers scoffed at the idea of Christ's return to judge was that they wanted to chase after their own sinful desires

Things haven't gotten any better in the roughly 2,000 years since Peter penned this letter

More and more people parrot the words of the scoffers of Peter's day, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? Things are going along just as they always have."

And even if they don't do it verbally, many in the church behave as if the Lord isn't coming again, and they mock his return to judge by their behavior

We live in a time of rampant individuality and denial of absolute truth

It's widely held that everyone gets to have their own truth so belief in future judgment where everyone will be held to a universal standard is considered ludicrous

And that idea has started to find its way into the church

Let's face it, it has to be that way in order to live that way - God's truth is stamped on every human heart and if you are going to go against God's truth you need something to ease your guilty conscience

Remember, two weeks ago we talked about how sinful behavior always leads to modifying one's doctrine and heresy typically springs from the root of disobedience

So the more we stray from God's Word, the more we have to determine that God's Word doesn't say what it says

### **C. They willfully ignore reality**

So the scoffers willfully ignore reality

Adam Savage, co-host of the popular television show, Mythbusters, made popular a line that first appeared in an episode of Dr. Who back in 1974 when he said, "I reject your reality and substitute my own."

Now, Mr. Savage said that with his tongue firmly planted in his cheek but that is the actual attitude of a scoffer

Look at verse 4 [**2Peter 3:4**] again:

*They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."*

Their contention is that God doesn't act to intervene in human history - that God is something like a toy-maker who wound up the universe at the time of creation, set it in motion, and is now just letting it run on its own

The term "the fathers" typically indicates ancient ancestors in the Bible so what they are saying is that as far back as anyone can remember, even all the way back to creation itself, things have been rolling along in the same way

So their deduction based on that empirical evidence is that things will always continue on in the same way

There is a principle in geology called Uniformitarianism that states that the present is the key to the past

The assumption is that the natural laws and processes that we observe today have always operated in exactly the same way and apply everywhere in the universe

I believe that has led to some seriously erroneous conclusions being widely held such as the age of creation being pegged at billions of years

And just like the Darwinian evolutionists who need the time that their belief system grants them to make their theory possible, the scoffers need for their worldview to be true in order to justify their behavior

It's unfortunate for science to go awry, but it's even more devastating when uniformitarianism becomes what I would call a "soft" doctrine of the church and people begin to believe that God is disinterested and they can do as they wish

To recap, the basis of the scoffers' belief is their desire to live as they wish

And the argument they make to justify it is that God has not intervened in human history in the past because their experience shows that things are simply continuing as they always have

Since there have been no changes, no divine intervention that they can point to in the past, and no judgment, that one should expect that pattern to continue and live accordingly

They are as Paul describes in **Romans 3:18** when he says: "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*"

Now, having reminded his readers of the certainty of scoffers in the church and the cause and support for their scoffing, Peter turns to refute their claims

## II. Peter's refutation of the scoffers

Look with me again at verses 1-2 [**2Peter 3:1-2**]

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles*

### A. Reminds that God's Word is our sure foundation

In those verses Peter states that he is reminding his readers of what they already have known and stirring up their sincere minds -

He is awakening them to action by reminding them that God's Word is our sure foundation

The best defense against falsehood is to know the truth so well that error stands out like a beacon

And looking back to **2Peter 1:16** we see that Peter has already taken on the false claim of the scoffers that there would be no second coming and no judgment

Let's look at that verse again to refresh our memory of it - he writes:

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

Peter is there referring to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration where he and John and James were eyewitnesses to Christ being glorified in his human body

What they saw was a preview of his future bodily return in glory as the prophets had predicted making the prophetic word clearer -

Peter says in 1:19 [**2Peter 1:19**] that the prophetic word was "more fully confirmed" which, as we saw when we looked at the passage some weeks ago, meant that they finally understood what the prophets had foretold

And then, back in the passage before us this morning, Peter refers to "*the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles*"

Precisely what commandment Peter had in mind is uncertain but it would seem natural to determine that he means the command to be ready for Christ to return at any moment

That would make sense in the context of the passage and would tie the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament apostles showing a consistency in the message

Did you know that only two of the 27 books of the New Testament don't mention the Lord's return?

23 books mention it directly and two, Galatians and 2 John allude to it leaving the letters of Philemon and 3 John with no mention of the second coming

Here's another factoid for you, in the 260 chapters of the New Testament the apostles refer to the second coming around 300 times and someone has said that 1 out of 25 verses in the N.T. contain a reference to the Lord's return

I haven't verified that but it seems about right

In any event, we see that the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles are not ambiguous in the least regarding the certainty of the Lord's return

Scripture is clear and consistent regarding the second coming and the judgment that will follow and it's good to be reminded of it from time to time

## **B. Reminds that God created and sustains the world**

Next, Peter takes on the scoffers' claim that things are going to continue as they have forever as he reminds his reader's that it's God who created and sustains the world

Look with me at verse 5 [**2Peter 3:5**] –

*For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God*

Remember, when you see the word “for” in the Bible it means that an explanation or reason for something is coming

And what this “for” refers back to is the scoffers' claim found in verse 4

And Peter says that the only way the scoffers can make such a statement is that they are willfully choosing to ignore something - and what they are ignoring is that God created this world

Peter's meaning regarding the creation is easy to see by anyone who is familiar with the creation account from Genesis

In **Genesis 1:9** we read how God said:

*“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”*

So we can easily envision the land appearing to rise from the water in obedience to God's spoken command

What isn't quite so clear based on our English translation is that Peter also refers to the fact that God not only created the world; he also sustains it

Peter uses the Greek word *synestosa* which means “continue, endure, exist”

Paul uses the exact same word in **Colossians 1:17** where he writes about Christ:

*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Is there consistency in the world as the uniformitarians say?

Of course there is - there is no denying that there is order in the universe and Peter isn't denying it

The sun rises in the east and sets in the west every day and the tides rise and fall according to a known timetable

There are seemingly immutable laws of nature that we can rely on

However, there is order in the universe because God created the universe to have order and because God actively continues to sustain that order

Where the uniformitarians err is in viewing the universe as a closed system that is governed only by natural law

God stands outside the natural world and is not constrained by it even though he typically allows nature to function according to his design

But to say that since something isn't being observed presently it never happened in the past and can never happen in the future is pure foolishness

And in the case of the scoffers that Peter is describing it is willful, intentional foolishness that determines to ignore the truth of Scripture

## **C. Reminds that God has and will judge the world**

Next, in verses 6-7, we see Peter remind his readers that God has and will judge the world

Having discussed God's creation and sustaining of the world Peter writes [**2Peter 3:6-7**]

*And that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

God created the world out of water and by the waters of the flood God destroyed the world

Of course the destruction doesn't imply obliteration because the world is still here but it is likely radically different in many ways than it was before the flood

The scoffers also determined to ignore the historical fact of the Genesis flood when they claimed that everything was continuing on the same as it had since creation

God had directly intervened with judgment

Peter reminded his readers that God is Creator and Sustainer and now he reminds them that God is also Judge and that he has already judged the world in the past

Remember, Peter had already mentioned the flood in 2:5 [**2Peter 2:5**] where he spoke of God not sparing the ancient world

Peter's point is that God had already stepped in and judged the world in the past - God isn't absent or unconcerned

But not only that, in verse 7 Peter continues with the reminder that, just as he has judged in the past by means of water, God is going to judge again but this time with fire

Look with me at verse 7 [**2Peter 3:7**]

*But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

As cataclysmic as the universal flood of Genesis was it was merely a precursor that points to the greater judgment to come

In the flood, God reversed his creative act and used water to destroy and set the pattern for future judgment and the world that God spoke into existence he now sustains for that judgment and the eternal destruction of the ungodly

## Conclusion

The Bible has plenty to say about scoffers

First, we see that **Jude 18** reads much the same as 2Peter 3:3

And Paul describes scoffers in quoting the prophet Habakkuk in **Acts 13:41** when he says "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you."

Then **Proverbs 3:34** tells us that God scoffs at the scoffers even as he gives grace to the humble

And we read in **Proverbs 19:29** that "Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and beating for the backs of fools"

We tend to think of scoffing and mocking as verbal activities, and they often are

But we need to also realize that scoffing is also practiced when a person's lifestyle goes against truth

Because our actions often speak just as loudly, if not more loudly, than our words

And how we act quickly alters how we believe

**Psalms 1:1** tells us "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers."

And there we see a progression from thinking to behaving to belonging and the person who accepts bad counsel will soon do evil deeds and the one who continues to do evil will soon find that he is evil

The scoffers sing a siren song of permissiveness without consequence that is attractive

But if you are a follower of Jesus Christ you must always determine your beliefs and your steps by what God's Word says

And the Bible clearly testifies that God is not disinterested, that he created and sustains this world, that he judged once when he sent a universal flood, and that he will judge again when the Son returns according to the Father's timing

Let's pray

**1Thessalonians 4:13-18 (page 987)**

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.