

Church! Don't Forget!

2 Peter 3:1-13

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The Christian Standard Bible opens chapter 3 with the words, “Dear friends.” *The New King James* and the *Amplified Bible* open with, “Beloved.” I don’t know about you, but after chapter two, Peter’s words are comforting. Listen to his words again from the ESV, “*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved.*”

After scorching the false teachers, Peter comes back to his encouraging language of chapter one. *His aim is to continue to give tough love to the believers by reminding them to hold fast to God’s word and true doctrine.* As Peter prepares to close his letter to the churches, *he sets six truth reminders* for us in these thirteen verses.

I. Truth Reminder Number One: Dear Friends Remember To Have Confidence In God’s Eternal Word (vv. 1-2)

Peter was continually reminding us to hold fast to the gospel in chapter 1. Then in chapter 2, he warned us of false teachers. Now he resumes his ministry of reminding. Let’s pick up in the middle of v. 1:

I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Peter is reminding the church to have confidence in God’s word. The Greek phrase, “*predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,*” is in perfect tense Greek. What Peter is saying is that what God said to His people in the Old Testament which was not only for them but also for us today. God’s word is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Lloyd Douglas, author of *The Robe* and many other books, tells the story of when he lived in a boarding house in college. He said a retired, wheelchair-bound music professor lived on the first floor. Each morning when Douglas would leave for class, he would tap on the old professor’s door, stick his head in and ask the same question, “*Well, what’s the good news today?*” The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair, and say, “*That’s middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The man who sings tenor upstairs sings flat. The piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, that is middle C, and it will always be middle C.*”

Dear friends, God’s word is our middle C. In our culture where politicians, news anchors, and university professors and instructors can’t make up their mind what is true or are scared to say what is true, we desperately need the middle C of God’s word to tell us what truth is. We need the middle C of God’s word when false teaching tries to invade the church. We need the middle C of God’s word when culture turns against Christianity. We need the middle C of God’s word when the political climate is volatile and hostile. We need the middle C of God’s word when our health begins to decline. We need the middle C of God’s word when we lose our jobs. We need the middle C of God’s word when our families are in chaos. We need the middle C of God’s word during this pandemic to calm our hearts.

Dear friends, tune your heart to God’s word each morning, during the day, and in the evening. Jesus told us that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. We need to eat the word of God as our daily bread.

II. Truth Reminder Number Two: Dear Friends Remember Scoffers Will Come (vv. 3-4)

For the second truth reminder, Peter looks back at chapter 2:

³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? Forever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

Peter reminds us that scoffers and false teachers are inevitable. Yet, now he clearly identifies their messages. Notice he says they *follow their own sinful desires, and they say, “Where is the promise of his [Jesus] coming?”*

These scoffers committed two sins. *They held holiness in contempt, and they questioned the promise of Jesus’ return.*

Dr. Jim Shaddix says we should not be surprised because these two characteristics go together. False teachers often preach cheap grace, which leads to following sinful desires. In addition, they do believe Jesus will hold them accountable for their sin, so they are not concerned with His return.¹ As a result, they teach that the gospel is irrelevant, the word of God is insufficient, Jesus’ atonement is insufficient, and therefore God promises are not dependable.

Just in case you think these kinds of ideas are far out in left field, let me give you an example of just how mainstream they are. The renowned German Lutheran theologian, missionary, and philosopher Albert Schweitzer held to similar teaching. Although Schweitzer received the Nobel Prize in 1953 for his altruistic work, he was a self-righteous scoffer. Dr. R.C. Sproul said Schweitzer believed that Jesus was a remarkably wonderful, loving human being who nevertheless suffered from delusions of grandeur. He said that when Jesus began His ministry, He thought that He would provoke God to usher in the Kingdom. So, Jesus began to preach that the Kingdom of God was at hand, but that did not work. Then toward the end of His life, Jesus concluded that the Kingdom of God must be an eschatological kingdom that would be brought in by His suffering. At this point, Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross. But when He realized that there would be no last-minute deliverance, He cried out, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*²

Dear friends, ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have bad consequences. Schweitzer’s teaching has had profoundly bad consequences. Schweitzer was a false teacher who served in a mainline denomination. He wore academic robes and gave his life to missions, yet the *“Jesus”* Schweitzer proclaimed was not the Jesus of the Bible. He uses the same *vocabulary* of orthodox Christianity, but he uses a different *dictionary*. This is often the case with false teachers and their doctrine. They use the same words, but they mean very different things.

Dear friends, not all false teachers live unrighteous lives. Those who live for sinful desires are easier to spot, but those like Schweitzer, who live self-righteous lives, are harder to identify. These kinds of false teachers do lots of damage to the church.

Let me show you one more error of false teachers in v. 4, *“They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?”* The Greek word for *“coming”* is *“parousia.”*

¹ Jim Shaddix and Daniel L. Akin, *Christ-centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 2 Peter and Jude*, 103.

² R.C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter: An Expository Commentary*, 247.

Parousia is one of those double-edged Greek words. *Parousia* means the *promise of His return*, but it also means *the presence of Jesus will be with us until He returns*.

Dear friends, we need constant reminders that Jesus has *promised* He will return. However, while we wait for His return, He has promised not to leave us alone. He is with us through the *presence* of the Holy Spirit. It is so easy in this pandemic to feel isolated and disconnected, but *dear friends, beloved ones* who belong to Jesus—you are not alone.

III. Truth Reminder Number Three: Dear Friends Remember The Power of God's Word (vv. 5-7)

Next, Peter reminds us that God's word is powerful and always accomplishes everything it is intended to accomplish in the time it is purposed to accomplish it.

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, ⁶ and that by means of these [the word of God] the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 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.

Scoffers *intentionally overlook* the power of God's word. They have been scoffing at the promises of God, the presence of Jesus, the return of Jesus, and now Peter says they don't know the power of God's word.

So, Peter reminds us that it was by the word of God that creation was spoken into existence. It was by God's word that God judged sinners in Noah's day and flooded the earth. Finally, he reminds us that judgment will come again, but this time it will be by fire, and yes, it will be by the power of God's word. His warning is for us not to make the same mistake the scoffers make and to reject the clear teaching of God's word intentionally.

Jesus told us that heaven and earth would pass away, but God's word will not pass away until everything in it has been fulfilled. We can depend on God's word. It is the bread of life by which we live. It is the foundation on which we build the houses of our lives. It is the life-giving water. It is light for our paths when life is dark. It is strength when we are weak. Those who take refuge in God's word find that it restores the weary soul.

When the Lord Jesus Christ came the first time, He fulfilled every jot and tittle of God's word. Then He died our death on the cross to pay for our sin of disobeying God's word. Jesus is the Living Word of God who died in our place and for our sin of breaking God's word. He was buried in a tomb, and three days later, He was raised to life by the Word of God. Dear friends, when the world is falling apart, you can have faith that God's word will not be destroyed, and it will not pass away.

We need constant reminders of the everlasting nature of God's word. During WWII the Germans bombed Poland and did their best to level the city of Warsaw. After relentless bombing, only one skeletal structure remained on the city's main street. It was the Polish headquarter of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The sign on the remaining wall was clearly visible, and it read: "*Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away.*"

Dear friends, if your life is in ruins, you need to know that you can turn from your sin of living life by your own rules, laws, philosophies, and godless worldviews and turn to the word of God and find life in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is always hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. Truth Reminder Number Four: Dear Friends Remember The Timeless Mercy of God to Save Sinners (vv. 8-9)

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

When he says, “*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved,*” the first thing he is calling us to remember Psalm 90:4 that says:

*For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.*

It is clearly taught in Scripture that God’s ways are not our ways. God is the Creator of time, and time for Him is different than our experience of time. Dr. Shaddix says the false teachers may have been accusing Peter of appealing to the relativity of time in order to justify why Jesus had not returned. However, Peter’s was the biblical view of time. God is the Creator of time, and therefore He is outside of time. Time for our Infinite Creator is not the same as it is for the finite, created creatures.

At the heart of v. 8 is God’s eternal nature. God does not mark time like we do. Time is irrelevant to Him because He transcends time. God is not affected by time. God is not the “*Old Man Upstairs.*” Time does not diminish His power, His character, His nature, His memory, His plan, or His purpose.

Grass withers, the flower fades, our bodies decay, and time marches on, but the power of God and His word does not decline. God’s word is as living and active as it was at creation. His mercies are new every morning and powerful to save.

Now look back at v. 9:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The scoffers were saying that God can’t be trusted. They were saying something to the effect, “*See Jesus has not returned. How can you trust Him? Why would you trust Him?*”

Peter’s reply is to take their logic and turn it inside out. While the false teacher saw God’s slowness, Peter said it is because God gives sinners time to repent.

To make his point, Peter pointed us to Habakkuk 2:3 says,

*For still the vision awaits its appointed time;
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.
If it seems slow, wait for it;
it will surely come; it will not delay.*

Dear friends, there is no delay in Jesus’ return. Everything is moving toward Jesus’ appointed time of stepping out of the clouds and bring time to an end.

Jesus’ delay is good news for hard-hearted sinners who continually reject the gospel of Jesus Christ. Numbers 14:18 says, “*The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty.*”

The prophet Jonah learned that Yahweh is long-suffering. Jonah wanted God's hammer of judgment to fall on the wicked Ninevites, but Yahweh called Jonah to preach and call the Ninevites to repent. Then by the sovereign work of God the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah.

Dear friends, let's keep proclaiming the good news of the gospel. We must warn people that judgment is coming, but there is salvation in the Lord Jesus.

Finally, the last part of v. 9 causes problems for some people. In v. 9, we read that God is long-suffering and is not willing that *any should perish but that all should reach repentance*. The word *perish* means to *perish eternally in hell under the just wrath of God*. What this means is that the stakes are incredibly high. Eternity is at stake. We understand this part.

Where people get stuck is when Peter says that *God is not slow to fulfill His promise but is patient toward you, not wishing or wanting or willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance?*

The Greek word for *wishing* is sometimes translated *wanting* or *willing*. The question is, what does it mean for God not to be *willing* that ANY should perish but that ALL should repent of their sin and place their faith in Christ? Does it mean that God wishes that every person who has ever lived will eventually repent and turn to Jesus? Perhaps He does, but we know that many people do not repent of their sin, and because they did not repent of their sin, they will spend eternity in hell under God's wrath. Does this mean God is unable to accomplish His will? We know this is not true. God always accomplishes His will. *So, what does Peter mean?*

R.C. Sproul says that the key to understanding this text is not the word "*wish*" or "*willing*" but in words "*any*" and "*all*." Dr. Sproul says that these two words point us to the identity of those to whom Peter wrote. He wrote to the elect.

Notice what v. 9 says, God is "*patient toward you*." So, what this means is that God is patient toward the elect. God will eventually turn them from their sin and cause them to place their faith in Christ.³

Dr. John Piper says that Romans 11:25 helps us with v. 9. Romans 11:25 teaches us that God's plan is to save the full number of the Gentiles before Jesus will return.⁴ What this means is that God is showing timeless mercy to His people to bring them to repentance of their sin, and for them to place their faith in Jesus.

I was talking with a young man this past week, and he said, "*Why doesn't God just go ahead and kill us all?*" I looked at him and, with great confidence in God's word, said, "*It is because God is waiting for you to repent of your sin and trust Jesus. That is why He has not killed any of us. You need to trust Christ.*"

Beloved, I have no problem saying that to a lost person. It does not matter whether *I think or know that the person* is elect or not. That is God's business. I don't have to know the mind of God. All I have to do is share the good news that God saves sinners. You and I can call anyone and everyone to repent of their sin and trust Jesus with faith that Jesus will save His people.

V. Truth Reminder Number Five: Dear Friends Remember Jesus Will Return and Judge All People (v. 10)

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Peter then reminds us that Jesus will return, and He will judge everyone who has ever lived on this planet. Peter draws on what Jesus had taught him and the disciples about the day He would return in Matthew 24:43-44 and Luke 12:39, "*But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of*

³ Ibid, 250.

⁴ John Piper, *2 Peter 3:1-10: Where Is the Promise of His Appearing?*, June 6, 1982.

the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

⁴⁴ *Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

Then Peter describes what the Day will look like. First, *the heavens will pass away with a roar*. I try to imagine what that will be like, and I yearn to comprehend what kind of *roar* it will be. Since the imagery Peter is going to give us next is one of burning, the roaring most likely is one of a roaring fire, and then it will pass away. I have seen fires that frighten me but never a fire like that.⁵

Second, the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolve. Peter describes the entire cosmos being *dissolved*. The Greek word *dissolved* means to be reduced by a violent act of *intense heat*.

Finally, after the heavens passing away and the cosmos being burned up, judgment will come. At this point, every action, every thought, every desire, every imagination, and everything we should have done, thought, or dreamed that we didn't do will be laid bare before the throne of King Jesus.

The imagery in these verses can be terrifying if you are not a Christian. There is a reason for this. It is meant to get your attention and to awaken the gravity of your situation. It should make you ask yourself if you are saved. Have you repented of your sin and trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior?

It is also meant to lead Christians to ask the rhetorical question Peter asks in vv. 11-13.

VI. Truth Reminder Number Six: Dear Friends Remember To Pursue Holiness (vv. 11-13)

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Peter is not trying to scare God's people into holiness and righteousness. He is not teaching salvation by works. He IS teaching us that God in His grace saves His people to a glorious salvation that He will give to us on the last day. He is preparing us to see the majestic, incredible, stunning, beyond comprehension revelation of the glory of God on the last day. When we see the perfections of the beauty and glory of God, we are going to look at God and think—I should have pursued holiness and righteousness with much more seriousness.

On that Day, we will finally and fully understand the beauty of the salvation that Christ has purchased for them. We will fully understand the riches of His grace that worked in their lives. We will understand the reason for Jesus' waiting. When our faith becomes sight, our salvation will bring tears of regret and then tears of joy. We will be sorrowful for all that we could have done for the glory of God but did not do. We will be sorrowful for the sins that we have committed. Then we will fully taste the riches of His grace that covers those sins and fills us with everlasting joy.

The Apostle Peter calls us to live with this Day in view. He calls us to live lives of holiness and godliness to the end. He calls us to finish strong.

Beloved, these are our six truth reminders. May the Lord grant us grace to pursue holiness and godliness until our final days. May we pursue it not in an effort to earn grace but because we understand much grace has been given to us through Jesus.

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New International Version: The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: 1, 2, Peter, Jude*, Vol. 37, 383.