

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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His Promise 2 Peter 3:9

The Apostle Peter wrote his second epistle primarily to stir up his readers, and to remind them of the promises of God (3:1, 2). In this, he is like the prophets of old, and like His Master, the Lord Jesus. There is nothing more soul-stabilizing than the promises of God. There is nothing more God-honoring and Christ-exalting than to focus on what God has said, and then to believe it, simply because God has said it. This is the way of faith. This is how Abraham lived before God. He trusted in God. He believed what God said. God has said many things in His Word. Do we believe them because God said them?

There are those who mock the Word of God. They mock and they scoff at the Word of God because they see no visible or tangible proof that God has spoken. In other words like the Pharisees at the Cross, they want visible proof of Jesus coming down off the Cross before they will believe in Him. Like Thomas, these scoffers want the visible before they say they will believe. Fortunately, for Thomas, the Lord dealt very gently with him, but there are those who reject Christ who will experience the judgment of God.

2 Peter 3:9 is regarded generally as being notoriously difficult to interpret. This is often due to a complete disregard of the context of the chapter and the theology of the Bible as a whole. The first and most important aspect to note is to whom Peter is writing. He calls his readers "beloved" in verse 1. These are the same readers that he wrote to in his first epistle (3:1; see 1 Peter 1:1; also 2 Peter 1:1). He is writing to them to remind them (3:1) of certain predictions made by the prophets and according to the commands of the Lord Jesus given to them through the apostles (3:2).

In verse 3, Peter introduces us to his first point in response to what the prophets, the Lord and the apostles have told and were telling them. This is, that in the last days (Peter recognizes that he was living in the last days) scoffers were going to come and were going scoff (3:3) at the idea that the Lord had promised to come again (3:4). They would point out that there was no such thing as a Second Coming because there was the evidence for it. According to these scoffers, everything was continuing as it had always done. Nothing was changing and there had been no change (3:4). These unbelievers went back to Creation and said that everything was the same since then. Peter points out that they deliberately have forgotten that there was a time when God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 – 3) simply by His Word. God also poured out judgment upon the world in the form of Noah's Flood simply because God said that He was going to judge sinful mankind. God has also said that He will destroy these present heavens and earth (the same word). They are being kept at present for that future fiery judgment (3:5 – 7).

Notice that Peter is emphasizing the Word of God, and associating God's actions with His promises. God spoke the heavens and earth into existence. God pronounced condemnation on Noah's generation and the Flood destroyed them all. God has promised to destroy this present earth and heavens, and since He has promised this, in view of His keeping His Word in the past, Peter's readers (and the scoffers) may rest assured that God will bring about this future destruction. His Word stands fixed. Peter points out to his readers (these Christians to whom he is writing) that as far as God is concerned, one day is the same as a thousand years and a thousand years is the same as one day (3:8). Time is not an issue with God. Time was a major issue for the scoffers. It was to time that they pointed as their authority for saying that God does not intervene in human history. Peter's readers should not be worried about time. Time is in God's

hands. Whilst the scoffers looked to a long period of history as indicative of the fact that God did nothing or was doing nothing, Peter points out, that a long period of time (one thousand years) is like one day to God. The scoffers have got time all wrong. They also ignore God's previous direct involvement and intervention into human affairs (Creation & the Flood). Their actions are simply a fulfillment of what Paul speaks of in Romans 1:18 - 33).

In verse 9, Peter directs his readers to the fact that God is not delaying keeping his promise (this is supported by the one thousand years = one day remark in verse 8). God is not slow to fulfill His Word as some count slowness (the scoffers). God will keep His promise and will perform it in His perfect time. The time aspect is short as far as the eternal God is concerned. Notice in verse 9, that Peter comforts his readers (those who are called beloved) by assuring them that God will keep His Word. What is His Word or promise? It is that Christ will come again (see verse 4). Jesus will come back because He promised that He would (John 14).

The question is then, why has He not returned? He has not returned because He "is patient toward you." Please note that the "you" here, refers to Peter's readers who are called beloved" and therefore are believers. Peter is not addressing unbelievers. He is writing to Christians. It is this very point that is completely disregarded in the interpretation of the remainder of verse 9. God is not slack or slow with respect to His promise, but is patient toward them (you), not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. It is clear that Peter is referring in the remainder of this verse again to his readers. God is not willing (wishing) that any of them (the beloved) should perish, but that they all (you) should come to repentance. It is possible that Peter has future believers in mind simply because Jesus has not come back yet. This verse does not teach a universal atonement. Nor does it teach a hypothetical universalism. Not all will be saved because God has not determined to save all. If Jesus died to save all, there is no question that all would be saved. To deny this is to place the responsibility for salvation in the final analysis with man and not with God.

No man can will himself to be saved (John 1:12, 13), because only God saves. Man's heart has to be changed first before he can respond savingly in faith, and faith itself is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). The ability to believe the Gospel comes from God alone. Saving faith is from God. Faith does not save anyone – it is only the instrument given by God. It is Christ who saves sinners. Justification comes through faith. God is not wringing His hands hoping that sinners will come to Him. He has chosen individuals from all eternity to be saved, and they can never run the hazard ever of not being saved. In time, they will come to Christ. They are His sheep, and they hear their Shepherd's voice and they follow Him and they will never perish (notice John 10:27 – 30 & notice the similarity with "perish" in 2 Pet. 3:9). In John 10, Jesus points out that the Pharisees could not believe because they were not His sheep (John 10:26). This point must not be ignored. Of what value is a hypothetical atonement? It is of absolutely no value. It is false. It deigns to make God love the reprobate in the same way that He loves the sheep, but not enough to save Him. What kind of love is this? A love offered but does not save. Remember the ability to believe can only come from God. So for hypothetical universalists who feel they will do damage to God's character if they limit His electing love, they ultimately concede that only the Sheep are saved. In fact, in this inconsistent theology of theirs (predominant among evangelicals), the same individuals are still saved with the same names as under a particular atonement. In fact, all who believe under an unlimited atonement are the same sheep that Jesus says are mine from eternity. Those who are not His sheep can never be saved because they are rebels and scoffers who will not come to Christ. Christ will not come until all the lost Sheep have been found. Since none of us know the Sheep save the Lord, our mandate is to proclaim Christ freely to all, for it is only through this Gospel proclamation that individuals are saved. Why does Peter stress this to his readers? It is because he wants them to be a particular kind of people – a holy patient people since Christ has saved them by His grace (3:11 – 14). You can trust God's promise for salvation and with respect to Christ's coming for His Bride.