

## **God's Love in the face of Sin and Injustice**

### **2 Peter 3**

First, a brief review of 2 Peter chapters 1 & 2:

In Chapter 1 of the apostle Peter's second letter he begins by challenging Jesus' followers to never stop growing.

In chapter 2, Peter warns us about the growing number of corrupt teachers who are leading Christians astray through their distorted theology.

Chapter 3 is a reminder of God's justice, righteousness and patience.

God loves this world and is determined to rescue it through Jesus. This means that God's love will confront and deal with sin and injustice.

In 2 Peter 3:3, the apostle says:

*Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.*

These words remind us that scoffers do not only have an intellectual problem with God and His word. They also have a clear *moral* problem. Scoffers want to reject the Lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives because they want to follow "their own evil desires".

The Miriam-Webster dictionary defines an atheist as: "someone who does not believe in the existence of a God or any gods."

An agnostic, on the other hand, is "someone who is not committed to believing in either the existence or nonexistence of God or a god."

If you have a friend who claims to be an atheist, you might like to try this little exercise with them.

Remember, an atheist "does not believe in the existence of a god or any gods."

If you have a Church bulletin or your Bible, with your finger draw a circle on that surface. If nothing else, just draw a circle in the air. Now that circle encompasses the entirety of all possible knowledge about...

music, art, chemistry, mathematics, physics, astronomy, psychology, sociology, history, nature, and any other sphere of knowledge you might like to mention.

Next, out of all that possible knowledge draw a wedge indicating how much you know.

After your atheist friend has drawn the wedge, then suggest to him or her, "So out of this vast area where you admit to lacking knowledge, how can you be absolutely certain that there is no God. You simply haven't experienced Him in your life as yet."

Now then, an agnostic is a much more humble and honest person than an atheist. He or she is "not committed to believing in either the existence or nonexistence of God or a god."

And in my experience, there are mainly two types of agnostics.

(a) The intellectual agnostic, who genuinely admits his or her deficit in knowledge, and is keen to search for answers.

C S Lewis, Nicky Gumbel, Malcolm Muggeridge are but three well-known such people who moved from agnosticism to a full faith in Christ.

(b) Then there is the moral agnostic. This person is not willing to categorically deny the existence of God; but at the same time the person is unwilling to search for answers because he or

she is aware that to recognise the existence of God has moral implications that will demand a change of life.

The on-line encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, offers a long list of atheists and agnostics who became believers. You may like to look up “List of converts to Christianity from nontheism”

Professor Antony Flew was a British Philosopher and life-long proponent of atheism. Late in life he made this statement:

...By the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved... I have been persuaded that it is simply out of the question that the first living matter evolved out of dead matter and then developed into an extraordinarily complicated creature.

In verses 4-7 of chapter 3, Peter moves on from talking about scoffers and addresses the reasoning behind some people’s denial of the final reckoning.

2 Peter 3:4-7 says:

*<sup>4</sup>They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’<sup>5</sup> But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.*

Sceptics say that “generations of God’s people keep passing away without seeing the fulfilment of their hopes. Where is this promised return of Jesus?”

Peter counters by showing how shortsighted this objection is. “Look around you” the apostle says. “Look at this remarkable universe we inhabit”.

The fact that we exist at all means that, at some moment in the past, God intervened in a dramatic way to bring something out of nothing, order out of chaos, and He can do so again.

But as to the question: “Why is God taking so long?” Peter reminds us that our human conception of time is extremely limited.

In 2 Peter 3:8-9 we read:

*<sup>8</sup>But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

The long expanses of time through which God works don’t fit neatly within the framework of our very short lives.

**The fact that God hasn’t wrapped everything up in a final judgement is actually a sign of God’s love, patience and grace.**

I thank God for the privilege He granted to Christine and me to live among the Sochiapam Chinantec people of Southern Mexico and see the transformation of their lives as they put their faith in Jesus. Because of the way their society was structured, most of the men were alcoholics. People have shared with me how, as children, they dreaded the late-night arrival of their drunken father who would often beat them or their mother.

As God’s love and saving grace began to move through their society, these men found in Christ the power to break free from their alcoholism, and little by little became loving and caring husbands and fathers.

And there are approximately another 1000 language groups around this world where not a single Christian is working to learn the language and translate the Scriptures for them.

As Jesus said in Luke 10:2

*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*

Praise God for his patience, that He is **“not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”**

In Romans 2:4, the apostle Paul says a very similar thing. Paul makes it so very personal by saying... *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that **God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?***

You see, God is magnanimous. He is generous. He is patient.

I find it interesting that there are people who have no time for God in their lives. But then, when things go bad for them, they shake their fist at God and say, “If God is a God of love, why is this happening to me?” Yet during that time when things were going well, was there any thought to thank God?

**Remember:** God’s **kindness** is intended to lead you to repentance.

In Matt 5:43-45 Jesus illustrates the breadth of God’s kindness, saying...

*“You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.”<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. **He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.***

Each generation is offered the chance to recognize their selfishness, and to humble themselves and repent, and experience God’s generous grace.

What Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 seems to echo and underscore what Peter has written in 2 Peter 3.

*Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,<sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.<sup>3</sup> While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety’, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

When God decides the time is right, He **will** act!

The ultimate purpose of God’s consuming justice is **not to scrap the universe** but rather to expose evil and injustice **and remove it** so that a new kind of Heaven and Earth can emerge.

The apostle Paul declares in Romans 8:19-22

*<sup>19</sup>For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

*<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

This new creation will be permeated with righteousness. People will know and love God and therefore love their neighbour as themselves.

Paul concludes by saying that this is the real Christian hope that Jesus and the apostles have been announcing.

The apostle John in the book of Revelation 21:1-4 declares:

*Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’*

In 2 Peter 3, Peter expresses the firm conviction that God loves this world and is determined to rescue it through Jesus. This means that God’s love **must** confront and deal with the sin and injustice that ruins His beloved creation.

In God’s own time, He will do just that, opening up a new future for humanity and all creation. I think it is really interesting that, in the midst of the apostle Peter’s admonitions, warnings and promises he makes the point of validating the apostle Paul’s writings, saying in 2 Peter 3:15-16 **<sup>15</sup> Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. <sup>16</sup> He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.**

Here, Peter once again underscores God’s patience because God wants people to experience salvation and new life. And, at the same time, Peter gives us the assurance that Paul’s writings have the same authority as the OT scriptures, written “*with the wisdom that God gave him.*”

Peter began this, his second letter, with the admonition to keep growing spiritually. And his concluding admonition to all believers is:

2 Peter 3:18

*<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen.*

## CONCLUSION

Although 2 Peter 3 paints a picture of aching or yearning over the length of time it is taking for God to deal with sin and evil, it also underscores God’s incredible patience.

**God does not want anyone to perish, but that all should come to repentance!**

My friend, have you acknowledged your sin before God? Have you repented and asked for His forgiveness? Have you asked Jesus to be the Lord of your life?

In the Gospel of John, 3:16-17, Jesus states:

*<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.*

And in John 10:10 Jesus declares:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

If you have never prayed and told Jesus that you want Him to forgive your sin and become Lord of your life, right now, today, would be the time to do that.