
♦ 2 Peter 3:3-7 ♦

Fostering Forgetfulness

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’ For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (3:3-7).

John Bunyan’s classic, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, speaks of a certain place named “Forgetful Green.” According to Greatheart, it is a most dreadful place, for there the Christian pilgrim meets with great calamity. The cause for the calamity is this: he forgets the greatness of God’s grace and love. Many battles have been fought on the plains of “Forgetful Green,” and often Satan is the victor because believers have fostered forgetfulness instead of godly memories.

In 2 Peter 3:3-7, you read of certain brethren who had lost valor and faith on the plains of “Forgetful Green.” These had become “mockers” who could not hold to their former conviction regarding the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. They had been found guilty of rejecting many things, but their crowning rejection, and that which summarizes the entire Christian system, was a total repudiation of the second coming of Christ.

The forgetfulness regarding this basic doctrine was both convenient and practical. Why?

Ask yourself: “If I wanted to be free to do whatever I desired—to live a pure libertine lifestyle, to nullify every restricting command of God—what would I do?” The most logical course would be to discard the doctrine of the second coming. If you succeeded in believing that the second coming was false, then three results would follow. *You would see restrictions as vain.* Why restrict yourself when all that comes after life is death? *You would view God’s Word as unstable and false.* Why believe in anything He says if He was wrong about the second coming? And, if you could toss aside God’s commands and convince yourself that godly conduct was useless, *you could then live according to the ungodly principles discussed in chapter 2!* This is the point Paul speaks of in his great chapter on the resurrection. How succinctly he exposes such a false position!” If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:32).

The scoffing at the second coming was a well planned attack by the false teachers which had to be answered. If it went without appropriate response, believers would continue to be in a real dilemma. To help understand the pressure that such an attack posed to the brethren, consider these comments which were likely made. “Whatever happened to Jesus? He promised He would return ‘quickly.’ Wouldn’t you be better off to just forget this silly stuff and enjoy life?” To a believer who was constantly battling false doctrine, this argument would present tremendous pressure. Evidently, some brethren were unable to stand the pressure and were on the verge of joining the doubters. It was

to this desperate predicament that 3:3-7 was addressed.

Let us observe the overall significance of the second coming in Scripture. Even a casual investigation with available Bible dictionaries, concordances, encyclopedias, and topical lists will verify that it is a most important doctrine.

In the New Testament, the second coming occupies a place of importance second only to faith. Believers are encouraged to be ready for the second coming over fifty times. Inspiration has devoted entire chapters to a discussion of the details of the second coming. Even with this weight of evidence scoffers continue to forget! With the facts clearly set before them, they refuse to accept them. They are guilty of fostering forgetfulness instead of godly memories. Their forgetfulness brings a harvest of disaster.

Peter's words now bring the advocates of this erroneous position face-to-face with their failings. By his efforts Peter hoped not only to turn the false teachers from their error but to shore up the faith of his beleaguered brethren. Peter does an excellent job. Notice how he accomplishes his objective.

THE FAILINGS OF FORGETFULNESS

First, *forgetfulness leads one to mockery* (3:3a). The word "mocker" literally means to be a "derider, skeptic, or scoffer," When it is used as a verb, it means "to play with." These mockers had been faithful believers, but now they had turned away from Christ. They had become so hardened that they were playing with the idea of the second coming. They had actually reached a point of laughing at and ridiculing the notion of its validity.

This mockery of God's Word was not a new reaction. Peter's brethren were not suffering anything that had not already been expressed many times before. Long before any of the brethren who received 2 Peter were born, this mocking reception of God's Word was present. Isaiah was told to condemn the ten northern tribes because they demonstrated this mockery toward God. In Isaiah 28:14-22, the pride and arrogance of the ten tribes is described. The rulers are described as "scoffing" at the idea of death, exile, and the Assyrian invasion. These rulers fostered the same forgetfulness that those in the present text did—they refused to believe the truth of God. They actually laughed at Isaiah's teachings as well as the other prophets. In John 3:19, we find refer-

ence once again to the attitude of mockery that refuses to accept the teachings of Christ, for "men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil."

It is terribly sad to remember that those addressed by Peter had once confessed and glorified the very one they now ridiculed! The sad predicament of these brethren is illustrated by those in the letter to the Hebrews. They had "once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:4, 5). Again, we find a fitting description in Hebrews 10:29. These are like those who trod underfoot the Son of God and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace. Can you think of a sadder ending to the life of one who had begun to run the Christian race?

We have already noticed how these mockers defied God by cynically questioning the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the apostles' authority, and God's morality (cf. 1:19-21). The sad state of the believer who becomes a "mocker" is alluded to by Paul in Philippians 3:18, 19. They have become enemies of the cross, and the very thought of them brings weeping and sorrow to the saint of God.

Oh, how tragic is this failing in the life of one fostering forgetfulness—he becomes a mocker. What a tragic toll is taken on the plains of "Forgetful Green"!

Second, *forgetfulness encourages the pursuit of immediate lusts instead of respect for God's eternal commands* (3:3b). Again, we are called to deal with the urgency of an absolute moral standard in life. Here is the sole reason that the second coming was denied: The people had become so enamored with fleshly desires that they had neither respect, the desire to obey, or serious reflection on spiritual truths. They had become intent on living for the moment. They wanted to grab the "gusto" in life and could care less about tomorrow. This pursuit for the immediate is condemned by Isaiah: "The Lord God of hosts, called you to weeping, to wailing, to shaving the head, and to wearing sackcloth. Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die' " (Isaiah 22:12, 13).

By supposing that they had made a sound case for rejecting the second coming, these people believed that a total freedom was allowed in morality. The words “their own” are emphatic and underscore their rejection of God’s standards for self-direction. Forgetfulness is quite suited to the one who wants to live for self. One who is determined to set up his own pattern and plan of morality will always refuse God’s will. He prefers to live life for the immediate gratification, enjoying selfish desires! Perhaps the following quote from a well-known author will help illustrate why some choose to foster forgetfulness.

I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning . . . and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption . . . the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation—sexual and political.¹

Do you now understand this great failing of forgetfulness? The scoffers attacked and ridiculed the second coming because they wanted to live differently than how the Scriptures commanded! Their accountability to God was such a bitter pill that they refused to take it! As the proverb says, “Fools mock at sin” (Proverbs 14:9a). The fool will ridicule the notion that any act is “sin.” He will laugh at anyone who advocates restrictions in morality. This is a simple explanation for the response of the taunts and ridicule of the godless upon all who fear God and strive to obey His will.

Third, *forgetfulness replaces faith, respect, and reverence with ridicule and arrogance* (3:4). Peter gives the basic argument of the mockers. The argument strongly implied that God’s promise of the second coming was a bold-faced lie. They suggested that it was far-fetched and without any real substance. The same caustic arrogance confronted Jeremiah. For years, the lonely prophet had been foretelling doom and disaster that would fall upon Israel, but it had not yet arrived. When Jeremiah spoke of the coming exile and destruction, his listeners would snicker and say, “Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now!” (Jeremiah 17:15). The same taunting and chuckling ridicule was being heard by Peter: “All right. If Christ is really coming back—let it happen right now!”

When the forgetful believers denied the reality of the second coming, they were placing a

dubious question mark over all who spoke of its reality in Scripture. We have already seen how prominent such a doctrine is in the New Testament. By claiming the second coming was a delusion, the readers were called to question the teachings of Christ, Paul, Peter, and a host of other inspired writers. The forgetful brethren called for others to follow them as they walked by sight. They had seen the seasons come and go; they had witnessed the persecutions and deaths of the righteous, and nothing dramatic had happened—no dramatic change had taken place. “Why worry about the future? It will be just as it always has been! The earth is stable and will remain as such!” These disrespectful and irreligious words were surely uttered with a sarcastic smirk.

Fourth, *forgetfulness maintains a dangerous course* (3:5-7). Peter turns his attention to answering these cynical claims. As he begins, he exposes the true attitude behind the mockers. They have “willfully” forgotten. This phrase refers to an attitude which deliberately refused to see the gross inconsistencies of their position and refused to know the truth. It was an act of their will—they chose such!

In his discussion of this willful ignorance, Peter reveals two points which clearly reveal the danger of fostering this kind of forgetfulness. In his first point, he shows that such is dangerous because it leads one to uphold and attempt to sustain unreasonable positions (3:5, 6). Once these had denied God, they were forced to “forget” that God had created all things. Now they had to explain how the world and all that is in it exists—a most undesirable predicament. Having eliminated God, how could they explain the world? Those who follow their course in our modern time have attempted to explain this unreasonable position with the theory of evolution. But those who fondly uphold evolution quickly encounter more problems than they explain. Another unreasonable position which has to be taken by these denying the second coming was that the earth has always remained stable and unchanging. But Peter points out that the world *has not* always remained the same. He points to the Genesis flood (Genesis 6—9) as evidence of his proof. Once again the advocates of the “No Second Coming” theory found themselves in a most uncomfortable position. It is interesting to note that even though centuries apart from those in Peter’s day, these two dilemmas still face all

who wish to deny the validity of the Bible. The question as to the origin of the universe and the preponderance of evidence for the Genesis flood befuddle all who seek to deny God. These two points stand just as firm today as they did when the ink from Peter's pen was still wet! One can rest assured that these two points will remain as a bulwark against any who desire to hinder God's Word. Those in Peter's day could not explain away the predicament resulting from their unreasonable positions, such is true in our day, and such will remain forever true!

The second point discussed by Peter, as he shows the dangerous course of forgetfulness, is found in verse 7. It prepares one for eternal tragedy. The very God who created this world by a word has stored up fire by which it is to be forever destroyed by the same word! (Cf. Matthew 24:38, 39; Isaiah 29:6; 30:30; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 1:10, 11.) In our modern age we are often reminded of the destructive force contained in a single nuclear warhead. We are reminded that the "superpowers" possess hundreds of these destructive warheads—enough to blow our frail world into oblivion! Whether this earth is destroyed by a bomb or by the "word" of God, it is destined to perish. Those who remain on it will suffer destruction for eternity. Peter reminds his readers that this is the tragic destiny ahead for those who foster forgetfulness in spiritual matters.

The dangerous course maintained by all who foster forgetfulness in spiritual matters is well illustrated with a conversation between the recognized skeptic Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell. Mr. Owen was visiting Alexander Campbell at Bethany, West Virginia, and went to view the family cemetery. Mr. Owen remarked, "There is one advantage I have over the Christian. I am not afraid to die. Most Christians have fear in death, but if some few items of my business were settled, I should be perfectly willing to die at any moment." Mr. Campbell responded, "You say you have no fear in death. Have you any hope?" After a solemn pause, he answered, "No." "Then," rejoined Campbell, pointing to an ox standing at a distance, "you are on a level with that brute. He has fed until he is satisfied, and stands in the shade, whisking off the flies, and has neither hope nor fear in death."

For the fourth time, we are able to see that a tragic failing is evident in the life of one fostering

forgetfulness. He maintains a dangerous course that leads to destruction and eternal misery! Is there a greater toll ever exacted on the stern plains of "Forgetful Green"?

THE PRACTICAL POINTS

Although our study has focused on four vital points, several more considerations arise from studying the text. These present some practical devotional thoughts that should stir our minds to the responsibility of fostering memories instead of forgetfulness.

First, *one may try to forget spiritual matters, and may even succeed to some degree, but such forgetfulness does not void the reality of spiritual matters!* Those addressed by Peter had convinced themselves that the second coming was a myth. But Peter forcefully challenged their position and assured them of the certainty of Christ's return. Sinners today may convince themselves that certain spiritual truths are not realities (i.e., the existence of God; the brevity of life; the urgency of baptism; the wrath of God; etc.), but their willful forgetfulness of these matters does not eliminate their certainty!

Charles Spurgeon tried to illustrate this fact with the following account. We must not be like the foolish drunk who, staggering home one night, saw his candle lit for him. "Two candles!" he exclaimed, for his drunkenness made him see double. "I will blow one out," he said, and as he blew it out, he was in the dark. Many a man sees double through the drunkenness of sin. He has but one life, but he expects another life in which he can turn to God. Like a fool, he blows out the only candle he has, and in the dark he will have to lie down forever! He has convinced himself that he really has two lives, but he is deceived. The reality of spiritual truths persists in the face of self-deception.

Second, *one can be assured of God's interest in mankind.* At key times in history, God has directly intervened for the good of man—the creation, the flood, the virgin birth, etc. These interventions of God are certain. This being the case, who can deny His interest in our well-being now? Who can honestly doubt that He will act again and with the resounding trumpet come to gather His saints and punish the sinners? (Cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-12.)

Third, *those who rest in Christ can gain tremendous comfort from this* (cf. James 5:8). Imagine the

joy that abides in the heart of the believer resting in the assurances of the second coming (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:18). Let each reader be certain that he has this abiding joy. Be ready to meet the returning Lord in the air. Do not allow the modern scoffers to move you from this resolve!

Fourth, *if the wayward believer finds comfort in this paragraph, then the unbeliever and wayward child of God ought to find terror.* The “last days” are here. Christ’s return is immediate (cf. Matthew 24:44). God has revealed Himself so that you can believe in Him and be saved. It is tragic to witness multitudes blindly live in the greatness of God and never come to appreciate the great God Himself.

Years ago, I heard a story about Sir Isaac Newton that remains etched in my memory. As a great scientist, Newton was associated with others of renown in that field. Newton had one close friend who was an avowed infidel while Newton was a firm believer. In conversation, the two would often become involved in heated discussions regarding the existence of God. Newton contracted a designer to put together an exact replica of our solar system. It was so fashioned that when a lever was turned each planet would revolve around the sun in perfect harmony. After the project was finished, Newton placed it on a table in his study. When the friend saw it the first time, he walked carefully around it, turning the crank, and admiring the intricate details of design. He then asked, “Who made it?” Newton simply responded, “Nobody.” The friend turned, thinking his question had been misunderstood. “No, I mean who designed and constructed this marvelous thing?” Newton responded again in a casual tone that no one had made it, it just “happened.” The friend replied, “You must think I am a fool. Of course someone made it, and he is a genius. I would like to know just who he is.” Newton’s response was classic. “This thing is but a puny imitation of a much greater system whose laws you know. I am not able to convince you that this mere toy is without a designer and maker. Yet you profess to believe that the great original from which the design was taken has come into being without either design or maker. Now tell me, by what logic of reasoning have you reached such incongruous conclusions?” It is reported that the infidel was convinced and became a firm believer.

I believe Peter’s point is just as shocking to unbelievers and wayward saints today—if you

have succeeded in rationalizing God’s commands so they do not restrict your life, how can you explain the contradictions that arise? All who are unprepared for the Lord’s return should find Peter’s passage a shocking lesson!

CONCLUSION

Do you see the danger Greatheart warned us about regarding “Forgetful Green”? It is indeed a terrible place where Christians meet great harm. If you have fallen prey to Satan on the “Forgetful Green,” you have paid a heavy toll.

Peter’s words urge each reader to remember. Do not forsake godly memories by fostering forgetfulness. When forgetfulness reigns, we suffer at least four devastating calamities: We become mockers; we follow the desires and dictates of the immediate; we ridicule God’s promises; and we maintain a disastrous course.

I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, . . . (John 14:2, 3).

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven. . . . (Acts 1:11).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. . . . (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

So Christ also . . . shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him. . . . (Hebrews 9:28).

Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour (Matthew 25:13).

—John Kachelman

ENDNOTE

¹Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937).

There Is a Great Day Coming (2 Peter 3:7)

1. It is a day appointed by God—when the earth and heaven will be destroyed by fire.
2. It is a day of judgment for the ungodly.
3. It is a day of destruction for the ungodly.

The Deliberate Kind of Forgetfulness **(2 Peter 3:7)**

1. Who demonstrates deliberate forgetfulness? “Mockers” (3:3).
2. What is deliberately forgotten? The manner of God’s working (3:5-7).
3. What causes this forgetfulness? Basic attitude problems.
 - They are full of “mockings” (3:4). They ridicule God’s Word.
 - They follow a self-serving discipline rather than a God-serving one (3:3b).
 - They focus on the immediate, not the future (3:4b).
 - They fail to “remember” (3:5), thus becoming servants of a foolish direction in life which identifies them with the “ungodly.”
4. What is the destination of one who deliberately forgets these things?
 - They will live self-deluded about their eternal fate (2 Thessalonians 2:11).
 - They will stand before the harsh judgment of God (3:7).
 - They will experience destruction with all others who are ungodly (3:7).



A Fact, a Philosophy, and a Destiny **(2 Peter 3:3-7)**

1. *A Fact to Remember.* The second coming will come but only after mockers arise (3:3).
2. *A Philosophy to Shun.* Remain firm in hope. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that because He has not come He is not coming. Some will not remain firm and will lose sight of the promise (3:4-6).
3. *A Destiny to Avoid.* Those who fail to remember the blessed hope of the second coming will face a tragic eternity (3:7).



Forgetting One Thing **(2 Peter 3:3-7)**

Those described by Peter are guilty of forgetting one obvious fact: God is in control. Once this fact is forgotten, the following tragedies occur:

1. Instead of praise and obedience, one displays “mocking” (3:3).
2. Instead of looking for the blessed hope of Christ’s return, one ridicules the notion (3:4a; cf. Titus 2:13).
3. Instead of acknowledging God as the Sovereign Governor of all the world, one accepts the foolish position of deism (3:4b-6).
4. Instead of living to be among the godly eternally, one lives to suffer among the godless eternally (3:7).



What Do Scoffers Want to Forget? **(2 Peter 3:3-7)**

1. The fact that Christ will “come” again (3:4).
2. The fact that God has demonstrated His presence on earth (3:4b-6).
3. The fact that this earth is destined for destruction (3:7a).
4. The fact that since there is a God, there is a judgment and an eternity (3:7b).



The Power of God’s Word **(2 Peter 3:5-7)**

1. It had the power to create the heavens and the earth (3:5).
2. It had the power to destroy the earth by the flood (3:6).
3. It has the power to destroy the earth and the heavens with fire (3:7a).
4. It has the power to sentence a soul to eternal destruction (3:7b).



The Mighty Power of God **(2 Peter 3:5-7)**

1. God has the power to intervene in the affairs of this world—He has done so by a flood and will do so when the world ends. He sent His Son and still works providentially to guide, guard, and assure His children.
2. God has the power to create. Through Him and by Him all things exist.
3. God has the power to absolutely judge. Some He will comfort with eternal peace; others will suffer His wrath in eternal hell.