

LAST-DAYS SCOFFERS ?

"Scoffer" may not be a word you hear everyday, but most people scoff at something. Weather forecasts, economic statistics, media reports, cultural icons, whatever, someone will react with scoffing, a sort of skeptical ridicule with incredulity. You don't really believe it. Peter uses the word in 2Peter 3:1-7 in relation to the false teachers and prophets he's been warning against in chapter 2.

1- Scoffers are expected! Peter has addressed disturbing aspects of false teaching, "*indulging in defiling passions and despising the authority*" of God and His written Word. Because people want power and control without accountability and responsibility. In chapter 3, Peter extends the reach of their deceiving tentacles: "*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.*" Mine, not God's.

In 1Peter, the author writes about troubles from outside the church, and in 2Peter he warns of problems from within. Jesus and New Testament writers caution about being prepared. A common life-coach tool is the phrase "*I expected that*" as a way to guard against undue disappointment, as people and things don't cooperate with your script for the day. True prophets and apostles are agents of divine communication and revelation. As the Bible contrasts true versus false prophets, it notes the words of true prophets come true. Even one false statement disqualifies their claims. These scoffers Peter talks about were mockers, pretenders, false prophets and teachers, and false converts who fall prey to false teaching. Jude 1:18 echoes, "*it is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*" False, not true.

2- Stir up your minds! In contrast to gullibly falling for false teachers because they say what you want to hear, Peter seeks to "*stir up your sincere minds.*" He says, "think, people!" Plato used the term "sincere mind" to describe "pure reason uncontaminated by the seduction of the senses." MG Johnston notes that Peter was once an impetuous person more swayed by his heart than his head, noting that "false teachers were peddling a distorted view of the Christian life, which led to a distorted understanding of the gospel. False preaching bypasses the mind and focuses on feelings. The effect blunts the gospel and confuses people on the vital issue of what a Christian actually is." False teachers try to trick people into thinking they can simply profess some words, without a life being transformed by the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ. Thomas Wright observes how the church is being plagued with postmodern subjective thinking that focuses on "I feel" or I'm triggered or hurt or wounded - which the deluded suppose trumps moral reason from God's external absolute truth. Peter calls the church back to the authority of the Bible.

In 2Peter 1:13 the apostle seeks to "*stir you up by way of reminder*" about God's truth, so that you will trust it and obey it. In 1Peter 1:13 he advises, "*preparing your minds for action, being sober-minded*" so that you can think clearly about what God has written, and live it out, being holy as God is holy, as you "*set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" The apostle Paul agrees in Romans 12:2, Colossians 2:8, 2 Corinthians 3:5 and elsewhere. Think! Renew your minds according to God's written-down truth, so that you are not taken captive by the lies of the world, the flesh, the devil, and false teachers. Don't just accept what is easy to believe. Christianity is a robust intellectual faith, fueled by honest investigation of what God's Word actually says. As 1Peter 1:10 notes, God's true prophets "*searched and inquired carefully*" about what God said. And so should we!

3- Are we in the last days? The term last days is the Greek *eschaton*, and at the root of *eschatology* which means the study of final things. Used 52 times in the New Testament, "last days" refers technically to the time between the first and second comings of Christ. It's also known as the Messianic age, the New Covenant age, or age of the Spirit. Hebrews 1:2 says, "*in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son.*" In addition to 2Peter 3:3, the apostle uses the term in 1Peter 1:5 "*salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" and 1:20 "*Christ who was made manifest in the last times.*" In Isaiah 2:2, Hosea 3:5, Micah 4:1 etc it is "*the latter days*" when Christ comes. At Pentecost in Acts 2:17, Peter affirmed "*this is what*" the prophet in Joel 2:28 spoke of, the last days when God would pour out the Holy Spirit. But as 2Peter 3 unfolds, the apostle points to the finale, "the last day" or "Day of the Lord" - as we'll see next time! □