

is considered right in its own way. 'Tolerance' is the buzz word. To be intolerant of anything is to be narrow and bigoted.

But sometimes you have to be intolerant. I am intolerant of my daughter playing with sharp knives. Society is intolerant of drunk drivers. Sometimes being intolerant is the most loving thing you can be. We should be intolerant of people who teach a false knowledge of Jesus. The truth is that some things are false.



Think it through

1. Do you think this chapter is too severe and uncompromising? Why or why not?
2. How can we guard ourselves against falling victim to false teachers?
3. How can we help others whom we think are being influenced by false teachers?

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2 Peter 3:1-10

Does God wear a wristwatch?

Several years ago a leading news magazine ran a story about the second coming of Jesus. The magazine gathered a team of marketing experts to plan how Jesus should be promoted when he does come back. Public relations directors were asked what advice they would give to Jesus in order to ensure that his return visit would be a success. This advice included:

The new Jesus must come across as action orientated. He must be perceived as a Leader, able to deliver. Therefore, He should participate in a sport that helps profile those qualities... I think tennis is just right for Jesus.

He can still dress in white, television coverage is guaranteed and the corporate sector will really identify with Him. Tennis also gives Jesus a chance to perform some miracles. Twenty aces in a row, that sort of thing.

The Bulletin, September 12, 1989

In the final chapter of 2 Peter, God explains what Jesus' return *will* be like and it's interesting to note the different perspective. Whereas the magazine article was full of ideas about what *Jesus* will have to do when he comes back, God is much more interested in telling us what *we* have to do in order to get ready for Jesus.

That's a big difference. Jesus is the important one, not us! When Jesus comes back it won't be a matter of him changing to suit us—it'll be a matter of whether or not we have changed to suit him. This perspective dominates the last chapter of 2 Peter.

Before Peter can get to the specifics, there are some initial problems that need to be cleared up.



Investigate

Read 2 Peter 3:1-4

1. What specific problem is Peter now addressing in his letter?

2. Why do the scoffers think that Jesus will not be back?

3. Do you think this is still a problem today? Have you encountered it?

A denial

In the last study we saw that Peter was angry with the presence of false teachers who were secretly introducing lies about Jesus. As Peter now turns to deal with one of those lies, we can almost hear their voices: "It's been years since Jesus died. If he was coming back he'd be back by now. Life just goes on. He won't be back!".

You can still see this same scoffing in things like the magazine article mentioned above. Certainly, the article was intended as a bit of fun, but underlying it all is the idea that it will never happen. The whole notion of Jesus coming back is just not taken seriously. It's been 2000 years since Jesus' birth and his return is so unlikely that the topic can be treated with contempt. Peter responds to this scoffing with two main arguments.



Investigate

Read 2 Peter 3:5-7

1. What is Peter's point here?

2. How effective an argument do you think this is against the scoffers?

Argument 1: God is faithful

Peter affirms that Jesus will return because of the certainty of God's Word. If God says he's going to do something, he will do it. So powerful is God that he made the world with just a word. More than that, God has already judged the world once before in the time of Noah and nothing can stop him from judging the world again.

This argument gathers great force when we consider that, unlike us, God is completely sovereign. When I go out to a meeting, many things can prevent me from returning home at the time I promised my wife. The meeting might run over time, the car can break down or my train can be delayed. That sort of thing happens to us all the time, because much of life is outside our control.

Nothing is outside God's control. He made the world and nothing can make God late for an appointment. God has said that Jesus will come back and God doesn't make promises he can't keep.

But this raises a question. If nothing can stop Jesus from coming back, why hasn't he? What's the hold up? Could it have slipped God's mind? Peter answers that question in verses 8-9.



Investigate

Read 2 Peter 3:8-10

1. What do you think is Peter's main point in verse 8?
2. What reason does Peter give for Jesus not yet coming back?
3. Jesus' return will come like a thief (v.10). What does this mean?
4. What will happen when Jesus does come back?

Argument 2: God is merciful

To us, two thousand years seems a long time. It's not to God. All the way through this letter, Peter has been broadening our perspective to take in God's eternal perspective. Within an eternal time frame, two thousand years is the blink of an eye.

Indeed, God isn't very interested in time. God doesn't wear a wristwatch—time is not the thing that matters to him. What does matter to God is people. God is merciful. He is holding off Jesus' return so that people might repent.

God isn't interested in getting Jesus back as fast as possible so as to punish as many people as possible. It's not like one of those

games of hide and seek where the person counts as fast as they possibly can, so that no-one has time to hide! No—God is concerned for people and he is patiently holding back judgement to give people a chance to get ready.

This brings us to the next logical step. If God is delaying his return in order to give people a chance to respond to the gospel, what do you think God would like us to be doing during this time of delay?

God doesn't want anyone to perish and neither should we. Perhaps there is someone you need to talk to about Jesus before it's too late. For we must not forget, even though God is merciful in delaying his judgement, he nevertheless has appointed a day when we will all have to give account. The day of the Lord *will* come like a thief in the night.



Think it through

1. How much do you think about Jesus' return? Do you believe he will come back? How does this show in your life?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. What insights do these verses add concerning Jesus' return?
3. Jesus really is going to return: how should this affect our evangelism?

4. Make a short list of people whom you want to tell about Jesus. Pray specifically for them and ask for opportunities to share the gospel with them before Jesus comes back!

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2 Peter 3:11-18

*Go ahead,
make God's day*

A few years ago, Queen Elizabeth II came to visit the country town where I live. It was the second time she had come to the town and a huge fuss was made. Flowers suddenly appeared along the route she was to take. Trees were pruned to look all nice and neat. Lawns were mown, streets resurfaced, buildings were cleaned and painted. A lot of people went to a lot of trouble so that the town was ready for the Queen's second visit.

How will we get ready for Jesus' return on his second visit? It will be a day when the entire fabric of creation will be dissolved and a whole new order of creation, a new heaven and a new earth will be ushered in. What do we need to do to get ready for that? How can we be prepared?

Investigate

Read 2 Peter 3:11-18

1. What should we be doing to get ready for Jesus' return?

