

2 Peter

2 Peter 2:1-22

April 23, 2007

III. Warnings from THE PAST (2 Peter 2:1-22).

A. False teachers past and present (2:1-3)

2:1 As we move from chapter 1 to chapter 2 we are faced with an entirely different situation. After all that Peter has said for the benefit and strengthening of the Lord's people in chapter 1, encouraging them to pursue holiness of character and life, we come into an entirely different situation in chapter 2. How wonderful it would have been if Peter could have continued with the acceptance of the truth, but instead he reminds his readers that this world has become the scene of warfare and constant conflict against the truth. We can understand more fully why he said what he said in chapter 1. Even though he could say that they were "established in the present truth," yet he strongly reminded them of the need to persevere in the truth.

We can see how he spoke of the ministry of the apostles, beginning with verse 16 of chapter 1, moved on to speak of those OT prophets who were responsible for giving us the Word of God in verses 19 through 21, and with the word "but" introduced chapter 2 to remind us that just as there were true, faithful, godly prophets in OT times, so there were false prophets, and they needed to know that there were false teachers among them who would spread what he called, their "damnable heresies." So this emphasized even more the need to be well grounded in the truth of the Word of God.

"But there were false prophets also among the people" is a statement that is backed up by the OT. The words "false prophets" are the translation of one word in the Greek which can be transliterated into English as *pseudo-prophets*. "The people" were the people of Israel. And the word "among" means that to some degree they had identified themselves with the people of God. This made them even more dangerous. But Peter went on to say that *pseudo-teachers* would be "among them." He did not mean that they were not there already, but that they would continue to come, bringing in "damnable heresies." They would come in almost unnoticed, sometimes acting like they would join the churches, but they were messengers of Satan. Their purpose was not to teach the truth, but to teach heresy and to lead people into apostasy.

What did Peter mean by the word "damnable"? He meant that the teaching of the false prophets would lead people to damnation, to hell, because it would turn people away from the truth.

But the ultimate objective was the denial of the Lord, "the Lord that bought them," not that had bought the false teachers, but who by His death on the Cross had bought the people of God, saving them from their sins. So what Peter was saying here is what the Apostle John said in 1 John. All false teaching is primarily, basically, and ultimately anti-Christ. Do you remember what John wrote about antichrists? In 1 John 2:18 he wrote this:

8 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

And then a few verses later, in 1 John 2:22, the Apostle John wrote this:

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

False teachers are usually very crafty. They may not come right out and deny that our Lord is God and the only Savior of men. They may not even talk about salvation. But their teaching will lack any statement about our Lord, which amounts to a denying Him. We need to learn to judge those teachers who come to us by what they do not say as well as by what they do say. The denial of Christ in any way leads to hell.

The word that is translated “Lord” is the Greek word from which we get our English word, despot. Thayer says that the word denotes “absolute ownership and uncontrolled power” (p. 130). When used of our Lord, as it is here, it speaks of believers as being bondservants of the Lord. He has bought us. We belong to Him. He holds absolute authority over us. The thrust of false teachers is an attack upon the Lord’s Person, as well as upon His work. This is what is going on today in the attempt of our government and many church authorities to do away with anything that has to do with Christ or the Gospel. But Michael Green says that their rejection of Christ is primarily ethical, not intellectual. It is the teaching that invaded our world long ago, that there are no absolutes. Everything is relative.

Those who do this are bringing upon themselves “swift destruction.” The word “destruction” is the same Greek word that is translated ‘damnable’ earlier in this verse. Wuest says that it means the loss of all that makes living worthwhile. It is “swift” in the sense that it is certain and impending. It means hell, eternal separation and total misery apart from God. So, even though it seems that anti-God, antiChrist, and anti-Bible forces are winning the battle, they are bringing upon themselves “swift destruction.”

Before we go farther into this chapter I want to remind you of the similarity between 2 Peter 2 and the epistle of Jude. Bible teachers are divided as to which came first. But that problem should not bother us. The point is that the similarity between these chapters emphasizes the tremendous importance of the danger that false teachers are to the church today. For Scripture to say anything more than once, is an indication of its tremendous importance.

2:2 How successful will these false teachers be? “Many shall follow their pernicious ways.” There are just two ways: the way that leads to life, and the way that leads to death. Perhaps you remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:13-20. If not, we need to do so. Listen to what He said:

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wuest says that the word “follow” means that they follow the false teachers to the end. “Ways” speaks of their lifestyle, not just what they believe. It is always the case that the truth of God produces holiness of life, but error leads to sin. See Romans 6:11-23.

Quoting Wuest again, he said that “pernicious” means “unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence” (p. 48). And so he adds, referring to the expression, “pernicious ways,” that it “therefore, does not refer to the heresies of the false teachers, but to their immoral lives” (*Ibid.*). Michael Green says that “pernicious ways” are “shameful ways,” which lead to “reckless and hardened immorality” (p. 107). Those who claim to be free to do whatever they want to do, become bond-slaves of Satan and sin. But, thank God, there is hope. Note what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 about the way of escape, and it is the only way which we as the people of God must remember in seeking to reach those who are following “pernicious ways”:

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; (Continued on the next page)

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

The most powerful instrument that we have is the Word of God. Cf. Heb. 4:12, "For the word of God is quick . . ."

However, as Peter went on to say, the false teachers not only promote ways contrary to the ways of God, but they try to make people think that the Word of God is what is responsible for the troubles that we have in the world. And so their attacks are directed against the Bible. This is very apparent in our society today. Our light has become darkness, and it is all the darker because as a nation we have turned from the truth which has had the major part in our history. Many of us have witnessed the change during our lifetime, but the momentum has increased in the last few years.

As you can readily see, the Apostle Peter, in the first three verses of chapter 2 is seeking to expose the character and work of the false prophets in the OT and the false teachers in the NT. They are really one and the same in what they sought, or are seeking, to do in the spread of their heresies and the ways to which they lead.

2:3 In this verse the Apostle Peter goes on to point out one great objective of the false teachers: money! The Gospel has to do with "the gift of God." Heresy does not seek to give to us but to take from us. False teachers are motivated by "the love of money" which, as the Bible tells us, is "the root of all evil" (1 Tim.6:10). Somewhere, in all sin, money is involved. The huge casinos that have been built in our day, seek to attract people with their pleasures, but their purpose is to get as much money as they can possibly get from the people who go to them. But people always think that they can beat the system. They might win here and there, but ultimately they lose, and lose in a big way.

Contrast what the Apostle Paul said about his ministry to the believers in Thessalonica:

3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ (1 Thess. 2:3-6).

Two expositors, quoted by Vincent, have the following to say about this third verse, as well as what follows:

There is a graphic picture in [this] sentence (referring to verse 3). The judgment is not *idle*. It is represented as a living thing, awake and expectant. Long ago that judgment started on its destroying path, and the fate of sinning angels, and the deluge, and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah were but incidental illustrations of its power; nor has it ever since lingered. . . It advances still, strong and vigilant as when it sprang from the bosom of God, and will not fail to reach the mark to which it was pointed from of old (Wuest, pp. 48, 49).

This means that God is not, nor has He ever been, silent where opposition to the truth of His Word has been concerned. OT history shows this to be the case, as well as the NT. False prophets came and went; the same is true of false teachers today. We can see even in our own day how false teachers come and go. God is very jealous for His Word, and those who contradict it and oppose it, are doomed from their very beginnings. The final judgment is yet to come, but history shows, on the one hand, that God is always actively defending His

truth with acts of judgment against those who spread “damnable heresies,” which, if believed, lead people directly to hell. If this had not been true, the truth would never have survived to reach us. But it has survived, and it will continue to survive because God will not allow it to fail. God continues to send forth His Word to accomplish what He pleases, and all the demons of hell and the false teachers on earth, will not prevail in their efforts to do away with the Word of God. This great fact ought to be a great encouragement to all who believe the truth and are seeking to spread the truth. The Lord Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

“Feigned words” are carefully crafted words which are designed to give meaning to that which does not exist. False teachers go to great lengths to convince others that error is truth, and that truth is error. There is going to be a final judgment when false teachers and those who believe them will be judged, but Peter says that the Lord is not waiting until then to show His great displeasure with all false teachers and their false teaching. And Scripture gives abundant evidence of the truth of that statement. And so beginning with verse 4 Peter gave some illustrations of God’s judgment against false teaching, against those who spread them, and against those who believe them.

Peter’s first illustration has to do with God’s judgment against sinning angels.

April 30, 2007

B. Old Testament examples of God’s judgment against sin (2:4-16).

1. The angels who sinned (2:4). Cf. Jude 6; Gen. 3:1-5; 6:1-4; Matt. 8:28-29.

2:4 We are not told in Scripture exactly when this happened, but it preceded human sin, according to Genesis 3:1-5. From Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 we have accounts of the rebellion of an angel named Lucifer who led other angels in rebellion against God. He became the archenemy of God, and the angels who fell from their original estate have become the demons that we read so much about in the Gospels. These are fallen angels. But Scripture speaks also of elect angels. See 1 Timothy 5:21. Those who were not elect, have fallen. Those who elect will not fall. So, as far as we know the situation is stable among angels. Among those who have fallen, some are in chains; others are permitted for the present to roam free.

The thought in this verse is that if God did not spare angels, who are creatures superior to men, then we can be assured that He will not spare men who sin. And the Scriptures bears that out. “Hell” in this verse is Tartarus. “Cast down to hell” is the translation of one verb, and aorist participle, in the Greek text. This is the only place that the word is used in the NT, and so we are limited in our understanding of what it means. In Jude’s account he spoke of it as “darkness.” In Greek mythology Tartarus was the place reserved for the most wicked. The KJV is probably right in calling it “hell.” The Lord’s supremacy over these angels, His absolute sovereignty over them, is indicated by the fact that they are “reserved” for judgment, and this has been their permanent place of abode through all of human history.

Note that they have been judged, they are being judged, and they will be judged. Even men (or women) who have been judged for their sins, even though they die, they continue to be judged, and they will experience more judgment at the final judgment. So this verse tells us a great deal about judgment. The lake of fire is the final place for all the wicked, which originally was prepared for the Devil and his angels. See Matthew 25:41.

May 1, 2007

2. The flood in the days of Noah (2:5). Cf. Gen. 6:5-8:22; Matt. 24:37-38.

2:5 See Peter's reference to the flood also in 3:5-6 and also in 1 Peter 3:20.

Both Peter's reference to the flood in the days of Noah here indicate a world-wide judgment in which the old world, the whole world, was destroyed, with only eight people surviving - Noah, his wife, their three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. See again 1 Peter 3:20. Also Gen. 7:17-23. There were no survivors of any life except for those in the ark. And Peter here described the world as "the world of the ungodly." "Ungodly" means that they had no time for God, nor were there any who were even remotely interested in pleasing God. This is perhaps the greatest illustration of the total depravity of the whole human race that we have any place in Scripture.

And yet we can see that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. This means that he was a preacher of the Gospel. In this dark, dark period in human history God had a witness to His mercy and grace in the free offer of salvation. We get discouraged if a few years go by without much of any of a response to our preaching. Noah seems to have preached one hundred and twenty years (see Gen. 6:3) without any response, except possibly those of his own family. See Hebrews 11:7. There was no record up to that time that there had ever been any rain. Noah must have seemed like an old fool to the people of that generation, but it was "by faith" that he did it, believing God who had spoken to him of the coming judgment. It is very significant that, in all of the judgments of Scripture, they were always as bad as God, through His prophets, said that they would be. As terrible as 9/11 was, it was a solemn warning to the whole world of what is ahead if the world does not listen to the preaching of the Gospel.

In Genesis 6:8 and 9 we have God's testimony to the godliness of Noah. Note the order of what is recorded in these verses. Noah experienced God's grace first, and that was what made him the godly man that he was, and that which caused him to walk with God.

These illustrations that Peter used here in 2 Peter, are evidences that God is a holy God. While He is a God of infinite mercy and grace, yet He is also a God of judgment, a judgment that even the Lord Jesus Christ experienced when He died on the Cross. The story of the flood, while God promised never to repeat it, is a story of the judgment of God that should make the world sit up and take notice.

Next we come to Peter's third illustration: Sodom and Gomorrah.

3. Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6-14). Cf. Gen. 18:16-19:38.

2:6 It appears that the mention of Sodom and Gomorrah was followed by verses 7 through 14 where Peter elaborated on this obnoxious and extremely wicked sin.

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was the sin of homosexuality. It is a perversion of God's reason for the creation of the first woman, and the establishment of the family. It is a sin that has continued on in spite of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah where it was concentrated. It is an ungodly lifestyle. And note that Peter said concerning what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah that it was "an ensample [example] unto those that after should live ungodly" (v. 6b). This means that it is just as wicked today as it ever was, and that it always, always, draws judgment from God. It is not evidence of enlightenment, as some would have us believe, but it is evidence of the continuing depravity of the human race. Our nation is courting the judgment of God, not only by tolerating homosexuality, but by legalizing it and supporting it.

The subject of the action taken against homosexuality that Peter mentioned here, is GOD! His is the One Who turned those two cities "into ashes." The Apostle Paul in Romans 1 pointed out that when people in their pride

turn the truth of God into a lie, that God gives them up to the uncleanness of their hearts. See Romans 1:20-25. And in the following verses he showed how the rejection of the truth causes God to turn them over to “vile affections” which is what homosexuality is. This is further proof that departure from the truth of God always brings corruption in living. Homosexuality is evidence of the judgment of God. So it is not a warning that judgment is coming; *it is judgment from God*. And so it is evidence in the case of our own country that we are under judgment, and this leads to the multiplicity of sins such as Paul mentioned in verses 28 to 32 in Romans chapter 1.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, when the Apostle Paul gave another list of sins, he used two words which refer to homosexuals at the end of verse 9. The NASB translates “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind as “effeminate by perversion” in the margin, and “homosexuals.” The NKJV uses “homosexuals” and “sodomites.” So the idea of a homosexual church is the height of blasphemy, and for our government to force upon churches the acceptance of homosexuals as staff members in churches, is only going to bring greater judgment from God. To let homosexual couples adopt children, or get children in any other way, leads to the situation that it would be better for those who approve such action if they had never been born. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah He was declaring His total disapproval and judgment upon a most ungodly and wicked lifestyle. And let us not buy the idea that conditions are different now. They aren’t different. Homosexuality is proof of God’s judgment upon such behavior, and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is a warning to all future generations, including our own.

May 7, 2007

2:7 Up to this point in our chapter we have had two tragic stories taken from the OT, two periods of time when conditions in the world were at a very low ebb spiritually. But, in reality most of human history has been characterized by sin rather than by righteousness. Many of us who are older can remember times when it seemed that everyone went to church. That, of course, was not true, but at least it was not something that people tried to hide if they went to church. Even today in many respects church attendance is booming. But what we see is not a surge in righteousness, nor a keen interest in holy living. In fact, the influence of the world has been brought into the church. People are attracted by entertainment and by music that follows the style that is predominant in the world. Bible teaching is hard to find, and so are people, even in our churches, who are concerned about living to the glory of God. It has always been the case that true Christians, people who are, in the words of Peter, “partakers of the divine nature,” are in the minority. The Lord Jesus even said so while He was here on earth. His chief enemies were the Jewish religious leaders of His day. Listen to the words of our Lord which are found in Matthew 7:13-14:

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The days of Noah and the days of Lot are very much like our own day. In the whole world during Noah’s day there was not another family like Noah and his family. And in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah there was not another family like the family of Lot. We could probably narrow it down even more than that because we wonder about Noah’s family, and we definitely wonder about Lot’s family. So in both instances the righteous may be narrowed down to *one man!*

And yet there was even a great difference between Noah and Lot. We have evidence in the book of Genesis that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and that he probably preached for a hundred and twenty years while he was, at the same time, building the ark. But things were different with Lot. He parted company with his

uncle, Abraham, and “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen. 13:12). He chose Sodom because it was in beautiful country, but he did not know that the people there “were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly (Gen. 13:13). In Genesis 14:12 we learn that he was living in Sodom. Then we are told in Genesis 19:1 when the angels went to investigate Sodom, that Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom which probably meant that he was a city official. If all that of the information we have in Scripture about Lot was limited to what is found in the book of Genesis, we could easily think that Lot was not a child of God. And so I am thankful, and you should be too, that Peter called Lot, “just Lot,” meaning that he was righteous before God. Furthermore, we are told in verse 8 of our chapter that Peter described Lot as “that righteous man,” and said that he had a “righteous soul.” So we can be sure of Noah and Lot, but not absolutely certain about their families.

Here in verse 7 we are told that Lot was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.” We have learned that the word “conversation” in Peter’s epistles (and elsewhere in the NT also) means conduct. “Vexed” means that he was oppressed by the way people in Sodom lived and talked. It was a heavy weight upon his heart which was like a heavy burden which he could not get rid of. And Peter described it all as “wicked.” It was *godless*. One lexicon describes it as *Godless*.

However, God “delivered” Lot when judgment fell upon Sodom, but the Lord kept Lot from being involved in the sin of Sodom. It was a deliverance which God in His sovereignty exercised in Lot’s life. He neither participated voluntarily, nor was he ever raped – which the men of Sodom would do to most men who came within their reach. The Lord protected His child from the lustful behavior of the Sodomites. How gracious God is even when we do not seek His care and His protection. This was really a miracle from the Lord. Lot had no idea of what he was getting into when he moved to Sodom.

This ought to be an encouragement to us. In the worst of times, men can never overrule the almighty power of God. Only eternity will reveal to us how many times the Lord has protected us from our own sinfulness, or from what others would do to us or our loved ones. We need to pray constantly that the Lord will preserve us and our loved ones from evil men who are everywhere around us.

The description about Lot is continued in verse 8.

2:8 Lot was “vexed” by what he saw and heard every day of the week, month after month, of “their unlawful deeds.” It is possible for us to see some very bad thing on television, if that is what we are looking for, but, thank God, such sins are not being committed before our very eyes “day by day.” What the men of Sodom were doing was not “unlawful” according to the laws of Sodom, but they were “unlawful” according to the laws of God. In the Greek text the words “seeing and hearing” are placed at the beginning of this verse to emphasize what really got Lot down.

2:9 When we look at our world, it is easy to feel that our whole society is out of control. And this can be very discouraging to us. We all know what it is to be “vexed” although we may not have known what that word means. We use it often to express the fact that we are irritated. But as we listen to the news, or read in our newspapers what is going on in our cities, the terrible crimes that are being committed, and even the natural disasters which are becoming more and more frequent, it is easy to lose heart, to get depressed. That is why we need a verse like verse 9. (Read it.)

Where can we have hope? In our politicians? In ourselves? In our fellow believers? No, to them all. They may play a part under the sovereign will of God. But our only security is “the Lord.” Note carefully the wording of this verse. Peter tells us here under the direction of the Holy Spirit that the Lord always knows what to do, and He always has the power to do to carry out His will. The Lord never needs to be advised by angels or

men as to what to do. No one has ever been His counsellor! His knowledge is infinite, eternal, and always true. New situations arise in our lives all of the that confound us, but the Lord is never taken by surprise, never is He at a loss as to what to do. And He doesn't need help from anybody else! The Lord always knows where we are, and what we are going through, and He always what to do, and He has the power to do it. You and I need to let our minds and hearts drink in the truth about God. He knows how to deliver us. This is where we need to remember 1 Corinthians 10:13. (Quote it.) This verse could be a verse out of the Psalms, couldn't it?

But what is a statement of blessing to those of us who are partakers of the divine nature, is a truth that ought to strike the greatest fear in the heart of all of the unjust. The first part of this verse has to do with “the godly,” or *the just*; the latter part has to do with “the unjust.” There is a day of judgment coming in which the punishment of all sinners who do not know the Lord, are going to face the consequences of having sinned against our holy, sovereign God. The words, “the Lord knoweth,” which are given at the beginning of this verse, apply just as much to “the unjust” as to “the godly.” The Lord Jesus said that “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19), but what wicked people don't know is what we are told in Psalm 139:12,
 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

“The Lord knoweth how . . . to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” The word “reserve” is the Greek word for *keeping*, and here it means *to keep from escaping*. And it is a present infinite which means that the Lord keeps the unjust, holding them for the final judgment, and there is no escaping from the God of heaven and earth—at least, not after death. The writer of the book of Hebrews asked the question, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Savior for the whole world. And He can save because He died to atone for the sins of all who will ever repent of their sins, and put their trust in Him. And that has to be done in this life. Once a sinner dies, there is absolutely no possibility of escaping the eternal judgment of God.

2:10 Adding to the predicament which people face who “walk after the flesh,” who seek their satisfaction and pleasure in sins of the flesh, or what Peter called, “the lust of uncleanness.” Sinners who live profligate lives need to notice the word “chiefly” in this verse. It points to those who will be singled out for special punishment. It could be translated, *most of all*. In the context of this verse, he probably was speaking about sodomy.. But it would include all forms of adultery and fornication. The “lust of uncleanness” is “the lust of the flesh.” Peter in using the verb “walk” is speaking of a lifestyle. It describes their journey through life.

But how else are they described? They “despise government.” This is not another category, but another description of those who live in “the lust of uncleanness.” In Jude 8 the word that is translated “government” here in 2 Peter 2:10, is translated “dominion.” In the lives of people who are given to gross sin, there is a corresponding disregard for the authority of government and the laws of the land, a despising of authority in the home, in the church, any place where people are faced with authority. And most of all and worst of all, it results in a rejection of God's authority and the authority of His Word.

May 8, 2007

As Peter went on to say, “presumptuous . . . selfwilled . . . and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” Again on this verse Wuest quoted Strachan, speaking of false teachers and their influence on all of society:

Their tendency seems to have been to make light of the Unseen, to foster a sense of the unreality both of sin and of goodness, and to reduce the motives of conduct to a vulgar hedonism, (the doctrine that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life, and that moral duty is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure-

seeking instincts and dispositions) (p. 54).

Michael Green stated it this way:

This, then, is the character of the false teachers as set out so far. They are dominated by lust, their passions are given free sway, with the result that they behave like animals, while the mental and spiritual sides of their humanity suffer atrophy. They are headstrong, rebellious against the will of God, and reckless of the consequences. They are contemptuous of other people, be these human or celestial. They are self-willed; the sensual man always is, for in the last analysis self is all that matters to him. His hell is this, that his world contracts until the only thing he has left is the self he has corrupted. Who can say that 2 Peter is irrelevant to our generation? (p. 117).

That bumper sticker which perhaps you have seen, which says, “Question Authority,” is expressive of all of this. And the statement of Lincoln, that “the government of the people, and for the people, and by the people, shall not perish from the earth,” has been corrupted to mean that whatever people want, that is what they are entitled to have. There is no greater evidence of the total depravity of the human heart than that which is taking place before our very eyes in our own government today. It affects the home. It affects government. It affects the church. It ruins personal lives, and ultimately will lead to anarchy where no one is safe. How thankful we should be that ultimately *God is in charge, not man!*

“To speak evil of dignities” – The word for “dignities” is the plural δόξας, which is usually translated *glories*. This is Peter’s way of speaking of the authorities which God has established – angels, government, the family, and most importantly, the church. Their glory is seen when they fulfill the purposes for which God has established them. When they are lit. *blasphemed*, as the world is doing today, chaos results, and man faces the judgment of God.

2:11 Then Peter mentions by way of revelation that even among the elect angels you do not find the kind of rebellion against God and the authorities which God has established that we can see among men. Angels are “greater in power and might” than men. They know that what men are doing is wrong, but they leave in the hands of God the consequences of man’s rebellion in human life which inevitably come.

2:12 “But these” – Here Peter is speaking of the false teachers who begin by rejecting the authority of God and the authority of His Word, thus seeking to destroy all authority which has been established by God, blaspheme things that they do not understand stemming from the sovereign authority of God, are sealing their own corruption and their ultimate judgment at the hand of God. Beginning with verse 12, and continuing on in verses 13 and 14, we have Peter’s denunciation of the false teachers in the strongest possible language, but his comments about the false teachers continue to the end of the chapter.

This ought to remind us of what James said about teachers, and be a warning to those of us who seek to teach the Word of God. He said, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). The NASB renders this verse, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.” The teaching of God’s Word is of the greatest importance to God (or else He would not have revealed it as He has), and so those who corrupt what He has given are going to face the judgment of God, both here and hereafter! They don’t know what they are talking about. The truth of Scripture does not center around the pleasure of man, but around the pleasure of God. And so those who put man in God’s place are going to pay the consequences in the eternal judgment of God. They “shall utterly perish in their corruption,” does not mean annihilation, but eternal judgment, suffering forever, paying the consequences for what they have done to the Word of God.

2:13 The NASB translates the beginning of this verse, “suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.”

There will be rewards for unrighteousness as there will be rewards for righteousness. No false teacher will get away with anything. There are eternal consequences for have tampered with the truth of God so as to attempt to make it say the opposite of what it does say.

Normally sin is reserved for the night time. But false teachers brazenly encourage sin in the daytime, a life devoted totally to sin. The Apostle Paul noted in 1 Thessalonians 5:7 that the normal time for drunkenness and all that goes with it, is the night. He said, "They that be drunken are drunken in the night." But the farther people get away from the Word of God, the true meaning of Scripture, the more they will be given to their sin. Note again that false teaching results in moral declension. The teaching of God's Word is a preventive against sin; false teaching does just exactly the opposite. And sin always have a blinding effect upon those who practice it. So people become more brazen in sin as a result of false teaching.

Peter continued, "Spots they are and blemishes." In the light of what the Apostle Peter said in his first epistle about our Lord being "without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19), his words here mean that false teaching does not produce a likeness to Christ, but just the opposite: more spots and more blemishes. False teaching does not remove sin; it increases sin. It does make us like Christ (which is the object of salvation), but it makes people more unlike the Lord than they normally would be (which is bad enough).

Peter's mention of the feasts here at the end of verse 13 seems to be a reference to the love feasts which the people of God practiced, expressing their love for God and their love for each other as they feasted together. These were times of special fellowship which the people enjoyed. But even these were corrupted by the false teachers as they dared to invade the most sacred times that the people enjoyed together. In our day this would be similar to false teachers partaking of the Lord's Supper in order to deceive in a further way the people of God.

So false teachers not only bring in the erroneous teaching, but they corrupt that which the people of God do in obedience to the Word of God.

2:14 "Having eyes full of adultery" – It seems amazing that supposedly false teachers could degenerate to such an extent. We have seen before that our eyes often become instruments of sin. What we see often leads to coveting, and eyes that are "full of adultery" tend to look upon every woman as what Michael Green called, "a potential adulteress" (p. 122). "Eyes full of adultery" also seek out those who can satisfy such sexual desires. They "cannot cease from sin." False teaching does not deliver its followers from sin, but it leads to a greater enslavement to sin.

But who are potentially those who can be deceived by false teaching and so led into such depraved actions? Peter said it will always be "unstable souls." "Unstable" means a person who goes back and forth as far as the truth of God's Word is concerned. They are not grounded, not convinced, of the truth of Scripture. They may have been, so to speak, "born in the church," but they only have a very superficial knowledge of God's Word. People not only need to be taught the Scriptures, but the truth needs to be written on their hearts by the ministry of the Spirit of God. People can even sit under good teaching, and yet not be learning much of anything. That is why we need to be very prayerful about the ministry of the Word.

They have hearts that are "exercised with covetous practices." You see, coveting not only has to do with material things, but it has to do with people. "Exercised" speaks, as you might imagine, of a person who goes to a gymnasium to exercise for health. In fact, we get our English word *gymnasium* from the Greek verb which Peter used here. It is possible to exercise, to train ourselves, along either moral or immoral lines. Many people are like this regarding sin. They live in anticipation of it. They plan for it. They look for it. They talk about it.

And they usually find it. But they show that they are not children of God, but “cursed children.” These are children who are under the curse, not saved, religious, but unregenerate.

It seems from all that Peter has to say that we need to be especially prayerful and watchful over all who are identified with the church, and regularly sitting under the ministry of the Word. Every church has people who think that they are saved, and who can act like they are saved, but who are not saved. They are the ones who are especially receptive to anything that comes along, either a doctrinal heresy, or a practical departure from Scripture. Many of them may be sincere, but they are sincerely wrong. Sincerity is a good characteristic only if it is exercised within the truth.

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2:15 “Who have forsaken the right way” seems to indicate that some of these false teachers, were at one time inclined to accept the truth of Scripture, but they themselves are the victims error and deception and now they are engaged in deceiving others. They have turned from “the way of truth” (see 2:2), and now speak of the truth as though it is error. They have “gone astray” (reminding us of Isa. 53:6). The unregenerate human heart shows more of an inclination always toward error than toward God and His truth even after it has been exposed to the truth and has even professed to follow it at least temporarily. Any departure from Scripture is going astray.

The illustration of what Peter was talking about here, is Balaam. His story is given to us in Numbers 22, 23, and 24. Peter, here in verse 16, called him “a prophet.” Now prophets were men in OT times who spoke from God. Not all prophets were writing prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, to cite two examples, but, like Elijah and Elisha were spokesmen from God for their generation. So Balaam must have been one like Judas Iscariot, who had been appointed to a prophetic ministry, and he must have had a reputation for being able to bring the curse of God upon people, or Balak, the king of Moab, would never have called him to come to curse Israel. Balaam communed with God about cursing Israel, but each time the Lord refused to let him do it. However, later Balaam encouraged the children of Israel to worship Baal-peor, thus luring them into idolatry, and ultimately bringing the judgment of God upon them. (See Num. 31:16.) And when the Lord sent His people against the kings of Midian, not only did they kill all of the kings of Midian, but Balaam also was killed because he was evidently living among them. But why would he advise the people of Israel to worship Baal? For two reasons: one, because he knew this would bring the judgment of God upon them, and, two, because he was getting pay for doing so. Peter tells us here that Balaam “loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

These are Jude’s words about Balaam and Cain and Korah (Core in the KJV):

11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 11-13).

In our Lord’s letter to the church at Pergamos we have this further word concerning Balaam:

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate (Rev. 2:14-15).

So by getting the children of Israel to compromise with the worshipers of Baal, he accomplished the same purpose as if God had cursed the children of Israel as Balak wanted him to do.

False teachers often get a foothold with the people of God by suggesting a compromise with the truth of God. We must never compromise with the truth nor with the practice of the truth. It always leads to defeat. Our politicians, at least a majority of them, operate on the basis of compromise. And that is one reason our government is corrupt. The truth must always prevail. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. When right compromises with wrong, the wrong always wins. A little step in the wrong direction, leads to another little step. And then the steps get larger and larger until there is a complete departure from the true way. And we need to be particularly suspicious about the desire for money. “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10), not money, but “the love of money.” And Paul continued in that verse with these words: “Which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

In opposition to all of this Paul went on to say,

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

The best defense is a strong offence. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

Balaam knew that God would not curse His people just because their enemy wanted them to be cursed. So he did wrong in asking the Lord about it even the first time, but he opened himself up to trouble when he asked the Lord the second time, and then went to talk to Balak. These are important lessons that we all need to learn.

The next verse tells us how the Lord sought to keep Balaam from sin.

2:16 George Mueller used to say, “The steps of the Lord are ordered by the Lord, and the stops are too.” The background for this incident is Numbers 22:21-35 which we need to take the time to read.

Notice that what Balaam was doing was both “iniquity” and “madness.” It was “iniquity” because it was a transgression of God’s will. “Madness” means *foolhardiness*, or *insanity*. Even a child would have been capable of knowing that what Balaam was doing was sinful in God’s sight.

The Lord sent the angel of the Lord to stand in Balaam’s way, and as you read the account in Numbers 22 you see that this is one of those instances in the OT where the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Balaam. And we can say that it was the Lord because of what the Apostle John recorded for us in John 1:18. When Balaam got so mad as his donkey that he could have killed him, the Lord gave the donkey the ability to speak to his master.

We don’t have experiences like this, but there are times in our lives when the Lord orders our circumstances to restrain us from doing something that is not His will. So here is another lesson for us to take to heart. And then the Apostle Peter has no more to tell us about Balaam. But he continues his expose of the false teachers in verses 17 and following.

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2:17 Peter shows in the next three verses that false teachers make great promises, and great claims for themselves, but they are all just so many words.

In the commentary which is a combination of Robert Leighton and Griffith Thomas, Alister McGrath and J. I.

Packer have given us this translation:

These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him (p. 278).

Water is very essential for life. This is emphasized by the traveling of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan. False teachers try to make people believe that they have found springs of living water, but they are empty springs instead. How different were the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the woman of Samaria! When He asked her for a drink of water while He was waiting for His disciples to return with food from the city, she expressed surprise that He, a Jew, would ask a drink from a woman of Samaria. And then He said to her,

If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water (John 4:10).

And then, after she asked a couple of more questions, He said to her,

13 . . . Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13b-14).

False teachers make great promises, great claims which they make for themselves, but they mean absolutely nothing. But to show how the Lord considers such teachers, Peter said that for them is reserved, lit., “the blackness of darkness for ever.” This, of course, is a description of hell. The severest of punishments are “reserved” for those who seek to replace the Word of God, either in part or in all of its entirety, with their own doctrines which are not true, but are specifically designed to seduce and deceive people who are led astray by them.

2:18 The false teacher uses “great swelling words,” *boastful words, words of pride*, but words which ultimately mean nothing. These are words that deceive and trap people. They are combined with “the lusts of the flesh.” And the word “wantonness” means excessive sins of the flesh, but it is sometimes used to include other sins as well. The last words of this verse speak of those who have just recently been saved. The false teachers target them, or people who have been saved for a time but who are not established in the truth. Dr. Mitchell used to say that false teachers concentrate on those who are primarily ignorant of the truth. This emphasizes the need for pastors and mature Christians to see to it that those young in the faith are taught the Scriptures. One thing that is often said about churches today, is that it is hard to find churches where the Word of God is taught. Most churches that claim to be evangelical use the Bible, but you can sit under such teaching and never really learn anything. It is often mixed with a lot of emotionalism, encouraging people to seek experiences that supposedly will establish them, but these often fall into the category of error because they are a departure from Scripture.

Paul’s words to Timothy at the end of 2 Timothy 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, are words that need to be followed continuously in every generation of believers. Failure to do so will leave even true believers in a state of spiritual infancy.

2:19 In 1 Corinthians 11:1 the Apostle Paul set the pattern, not only for himself, but for all who profess to be true teachers of Scripture. A teacher should be one who people can safely follow because he is following Christ. Peter in this verse was speaking of those who promise delivery from sin while they themselves are “the servants of corruption.” We are frequently exposed to teachers like this even in so-called evangelical churches. In John 8:34 we have these words of the Lord Jesus: “Whosoever commiteth sin (present tense) is the servant of sin,” the bondservant of sin. And just before that, in John 8:32, the Lord said, “And ye shall

know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Error increases man’s bondage to sin. The only true instrument of deliverance is the Word of God. There is absolutely no other way. In that great 119th Psalm, the Psalmist said very clearly, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). And we need to know that the only person who is going to hide the Word of God in his heart, is the person who has experienced true salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no question but that man’s greatest problem, is sin. The world’s greatest problem is sin. And it is only through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ Who died not only to save us from the penalty of our sins, but from the power and dominion of our sins, that any person can be delivered from sin’s bondage. *Any other teaching will only tighten the hold that sin has in a person’s life.*

As evidence of this, look at what Peter has written in verse 20 of our chapter.

2:20 Now as you read carefully the last three verses of 2 Peter 2, I think that we have to say that Peter was not speaking of a person who has really trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. He was talking about a person who had professed faith in Christ and to extent had “escaped the pollutions of the world” through what they had learned about the Lord Jesus Christ. But then “they are entangled again therein.” This means that it becomes evident from the way they go that they have not really been saved. Then it usually follows as Peter says here that “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”

Judas Iscariot is an example of this. And so is Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10. Children can grow up in a home where they hear the Gospel, and they may even profess faith in Christ themselves, but as time goes on it becomes apparent that their hearts have not been changed. I have seen this happen time and time again in the lives of young people. But it is not limited to young people. I have seen it happen to men who have become church leaders. It sometimes happens to pastors who have gone all through seminary, and then turn away. The Bible makes it very clear that once a person is really born again, they can never lose their salvation. But what Peter was concerned about here was people (and they can be of any age) *who profess, but do not possess. They profess Christ, but they do not possess Christ. Or to state it another way, Christ does not profess them.*

This is one thing I don’t like about these large evangelistic campaigns. There is nothing comparable to them in Scripture. The pressure that people are placed under to “go forward.” Time has shown that the majority of people who profess Christ in such circumstances, are not truly saved. They may think that they are, but their lives demonstrate that they are not! And it disturbed me no end when I learned that most of the people who come forward first were those who had been trained to be personal workers. It is deception designed to get people to go forward who are not Christians. It is the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, but even a lot of preachers and evangelists don’t believe that. They believe that the preaching of the Gospel is very important, but they also believe that we have to do something to get people to “confess Christ.”

Look at the words in verse 20 “entangled” and “overcome.” To be “entangled” is to be caught in a net like fish. And note the word “again.” They have been “entangled” before (because this is what sin does to people; it is what sin has done to us). “Overcome” means that the hold that sin has in their lives is complete.

Hearing the Gospel places all who hear it under a place of great responsibility to God. So that when a person hears the Gospel, and supposedly accepts it, but not from the heart, then sin “entangles” them once again and they are “overcome” so that “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” Peter here was referring to the Lord’s own teaching. Cf. Matthew 12:43-45.

And so to what conclusion did the Apostle Peter come regarding those who have been “entangled” again, and “overcome”? You see it in verse 21.

2:21 Can you think of any more ominous words than those which the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Peter to write here in verse 21? (Read.)

The Gospel has to do with “the way of righteousness.” And there is only one “way of righteousness.” There is only one way to find acceptance with God, to be assured that your sins are forgiven, and that they will never be remembered against you again. They are gone. Forgiveness is yours. You are justified in the sight of a holy God. Peter indicates that they had heard it, that they had understood it, but that they had turned “from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” What is “the holy commandment” which had been delivered unto them? It was the Gospel. They had been commanded by God to believe it.

In our study of 2 Thessalonians 1 last Sunday we learned in connection with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the final judgment, that our Lord will come:

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.

How do we *obey* the Gospel? We obey it by believing in it. This is “the way of righteousness,” and the only way of righteousness! As Paul told the Athenians on Mars Hill, “God . . . now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Not to repent and to believe the Gospel is to disobey the Gospel, and to disobey God.

But how did Peter illustrate what happens to many people? Verse 22 will tell us.

2:22 Peter called his explanation proverbial. We see the first in Proverbs 26:11: “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returned to his folly.” The second evidently was proverbial also from some source, but Peter in using it was recognizing that it also was true.

Why does a dog return to eat its own vomit? Just because that is what dogs do, by nature. Dress it up. Give it all the comforts of life. But it still will practice this, shall I say, *nauseating*, habit. And clean up a pig as best you can, cover it with power and perfume, but when it comes to a muddy puddle, you will not be able to keep him out. Why? Because that is what pigs do. It is the nature of a pig to want to wallow in mud.

Why does a person who is not really saved, but who has turned away from sin to some extent, go back to his sin? Because that is the nature of a human being. We are sinners by nature, and by choice. A dog returns to his vomit by nature, and by choice. A pig loves to roll around in the mud because that is what he does by nature, and by choice. There is no remedy for a dog. Neither is there any remedy for a pig with respect to these habits. There is a remedy for man, but only one. He is the only remedy. He is the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But when He does not change the heart of man, that man may be refined in many ways, but he will still go back to his sin.

This is why Peter was so strong in his opposition to false teachers. They were powerless to change any person. Neither can humanistic psychology change people the way they need to be changed. It is still true that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Only Christ can deliver sinners from the penalty of their sin; only He can deliver sinners from the enslavement of sin.