

July 10, 2016

Growing in Grace

The Lord Knows How to Rescue the Godly

2 Peter 2:1 – 10

Peter's concern in this letter is for the welfare of his readers. Like a good pastor, he is concerned for their growth and protection. He is anxious to see them growing in the grace of Christ, and he is concerned that false teachers have somehow stymied that growth by their false teaching. He begins in chapter one by giving them the good news. He tells them that the truth of God's word gives a true knowledge of God, which leads to confidence in His magnificent promises which deliver power for right living and produce a certainty in their calling and election. And now in chapter 2 we have the flip side of this as it were. If chapter 1 was the good news, here is the bad news. There are no commands or imperatives here, just a terrifying description of what will happen to those who teach lies and those who follow lies instead of truth. Peter emphasizes the inevitability of God's judgment on sin and paints a bleak picture for those who despise God's authority. And yet, even here, the grace of God shines through. Even as he predicts certain terrifying judgment for those who reject the God who made them, he promises rescue for those who embrace Him.

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. No doubt Peter remembered Jesus' warnings on this subject in the gospel of Matthew. *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*¹ And Peter links the false prophets that arose during the Old Testament period with the false teachers that are coming in his day. He's not referring to some future event but rather that they are already here. And it's quite remarkable when you think about it. Probably no more than 30 years had passed since Jesus had ascended to heaven, and here these guys are peddling their heresies to the church. And Peter is saying, 'Watch out. These guys are here and they're teaching bad stuff'.

The problem with false teachers is not so much their doctrine, although that is usually sketchy at best. But rather it is in what their teaching does. It effectively turns the hearts of people away from God to something else. The effect of their preaching and teaching is to seduce people away from God. They may be powerful speakers, they may be charismatic personalities, they may even perform some incredible signs and wonders. But in the end, what they preach has the effect of turning the hearts of people away from God to other things. Anything that causes you to love things instead of God is a false teaching. Any teaching that points to the blessing instead of the Blesser is false. Anything that weakens the clear imperatives of the word of God is false. Anything that drowns out the voice of God or causes you to disregard His word is false.

Peter says they introduce heresy. Heresy literally means to choose a position contrary to the word of God. And this usually happens when someone gets a 'New Revelation.' And Peter says these false teachers don't introduce their false teaching openly. They bring it in secretly. It's wrapped up in teaching that sounds good, but doesn't line up with revealed truth. It would be easier if they would tell you up front that what they are teaching is contrary to the word of God, but they don't do that. They usually cloak it in 'Thus saith the Lord' or some other such religious flummery. What God has to say He has already said in His word once for all delivered to us, and everything subsequent to that has to line up with His revealed word or you can immediately discount it.

And what they teach is ultimately destructive in that it has the effect of seducing our hearts away from God to other things. It will always lead to denying the Master who bought them. This is an interesting term Peter uses here – 'The Master who bought them.' He doesn't say they deny Jesus, or the Father, or the Holy Spirit – but 'the Master who bought them.' **I think this indicates that at the heart of their heresy, at the deepest level of their false teaching, is a denial of the Lordship of Christ over their lives.** That is, they don't want to be controlled by Christ. They don't want to be restrained by Him or let Him have charge of their lives.

1 Matthew 24:11 ESV

Peter David, in his commentary on this says, "Their problem is not so much heterodoxy but heteropraxy...They deny their Sovereign Lord in that they do not obey him"¹² In other words the problem is not so much false doctrine but false living. Later in chapter three, Peter confronts their doctrinal heresy, but here he focuses on their lifestyle which contradicts their claim to be disciples of Christ. They effectively deny the master who bought them by refusing to bow to their master's will.

We know this is the case because Peter goes on to say: *2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.* Peter uses a word here to characterize the heresy of false teachers that I probably wouldn't have used – **sensuality**. This word is often translated licentiousness which means blatant sexual immorality or unbridled lust. It has the implication of illicit desires carried to excess. Far from being controlled by the Holy Spirit, these guys were controlled by their lusts. I don't think, however, that Peter was saying that these guys were advocating sexual sin from the pulpit. If they were, no one would listen to them. This stuff is introduced **secretly** – that is in an underhanded way, not openly. I think most people would recognize that someone who openly advocated sexual indulgence was not in touch with God and would reject their teaching. But it is done in a secret way. A way that perhaps looked okay on the surface, but if taken to its logical conclusion would result in living like you please. Rather than being mastered by Christ, they are their own masters.

And what they teach, although cloaked in Christianese, carries the weight of their rebellious living. So ultimately, what they teach is a lie, delivered with a thin veneer of truth. Because at the root of sensuality, which Peter says is what they actually teach, is pure self-enjoyment. That is living for yourself, indulging your appetites and desires with no regard for restraint or self-discipline. One commentator puts it like this: **'It is a condition of the soul which does not know and cannot endure the torment which discipline makes for it.'** An undisciplined life will always devolve into sensuality and self-seeking pleasures. And the end of this kind of teaching is a shamelessness that is unembarrassed by any kind of sin, and even an arrogance in sinning. And this is why these false teachers will even deny the Master who bought them – **because to admit to His Lordship is to come under control of the Master.**

Peter says that what this does is cause the way of truth to be maligned. The Greek word is **blasphemeo** and means to speak profanely of sacred things. In the New Testament this word is nearly always used to indicate an arrogant speaking against God. **This means that whatever the false teaching is, it will ultimately cause the character, nature and ministry of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, to be spoken of badly by outsiders.** It also will ultimately cause outsiders to demean the character and nature of the real Christians who hold to the Word of God, because these teachers deny the Master who bought them. And their teaching will cause their listeners to act in a way that will make outsiders despise the gospel, and they will live in such a disobedient way that Christ is scorned and held up to ridicule.

I suppose the so-called Laughter Revival, also known as the 'Toronto Blessing', in the 90's was one of the worst examples of this thing. Sardonic laughter, spasmodic jerks, shaking, roaring, barking and all manner of strange things characterized this phenomenon. And one of the results of this was that Christ was held up to ridicule in the world. Time magazine, in an article titled *Laughing For the Lord*³ pointed out that Anglican churches across England bore a greater resemblance to rock concerts and rugby matches than to Christian worship. Sanctuaries were littered with bodies as people sob, shake, roar like lions and laugh uncontrollably. Newsweek reported that people in churches worldwide were jerking spasmodically, dancing ecstatically and acting like animals. Late news anchor Peter Jennings, not known for his religious piety, was even moved to wonder if the changes he documented in churches affected by this phenomenon were in some way compromising the essence of Christianity. *and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. At the root of these false teachers' motivations is money. Plain, old fashioned greed. The word here, **pleonexi'a**, indicates greediness, or covetousness. **Pleonexi'a** is an outcome of pure selfishness that leads to dishonesty and deceit. And these greedy guys exploit those to whom they are preaching with **false words**. The word is **plastos**, from which we get our word **plastic**.

2 Davids, Peter H., The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2006), 221.

3 <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,981256,00.html>

They exploit their hearers with plastic words; fabricated words that mean whatever the speaker wants. They mold words at will to suit their greedy purpose. And with this kind of talk, Peter says that they merchandise their hearers. That's the word – *emporeuo'mai* – (em por yoo oh' my) This is where we get our word – *emporium* – and the meaning here is **with made up words these teachers make merchandise of the people**. And money is at the heart of something that has been called the Prosperity Gospel. Also known as Word of Faith teaching, or "Name it and claim it", and "Positive Confession", or very simply the 'Blab It and Grab It' gospel. Its central doctrine is that health and prosperity are promised to all believers, and all you have to do is have enough faith to speak it into existence.

The prosperity teaching works like this: a proponent will tell you that if you want God to bless you (**with money, of course**), you will first have to 'sow a seed of faith' (translation: **send money to the prosperity teacher**). God is then obligated to send you as much as a hundred-fold in return. Alternatively, or in addition, God will also owe you physical healing. Of course this begs a question: If you can get money at a 100 to 1 return, why do prosperity teachers always ask for more money? **Because if this were true, a prosperity teacher would be sending you money.** One prominent false teacher, who owns a \$10 million corporate jet, a \$107,000 Mercedes sedan, a \$2 million home and other houses worth another \$2 million put it this way: *"If you stay in your faith, you are going to get paid," "I'm living now in my reward."*⁴ But I say if you settle for a reward now, there will not be one later. In fact what you can expect is what Peter told his readers 2,000 years ago concerning these false teachers: *Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.* In other words, judgment is inevitable.

The judgment on these false teachers, Peter says in verse 3, is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. In other words, God is not asleep at the switch. There is a reckoning that is coming, and we should tremble at the prospect. And then he shows from God's word why this is so with three examples: the angels who sinned, the great flood of Genesis, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. What Peter is trying to point out here is that judgment is a foregone conclusion. It is inevitable. God will only allow sin to go on for a season. He will not wait forever. And Peter starts here with God's judgment on angels. *4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;*

The reference here to angels who sinned might be a reference to Genesis 6 where the Bible says that *'...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.'* and because of that unholy mixture, they were cast into the abyss, in chains awaiting the final judgment. Other commentators see this as a reference to the original fall of Satan and some of the angels before Genesis, and is a reference to the punishment meted out to them. But whatever the offense, the point here is that if angels, who are created, immortal beings are not spared when they sin, how much less mortal man? Especially those false teachers who deny the very Master who bought them, and mix the word of God with their own flights of fancy for their own benefit?

The second example is the great flood of Genesis which God brought on the whole world of the ungodly. *5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;* The Bible tells us in Genesis 6:11, that *'...the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.'*⁵ Three times the Bible uses this word 'corrupt' and it literally means spoiled. The earth was spoiled for the use God intended and so He remade the world and took care of the corruption at the same time. But again the point is that God will absolutely judge and destroy all that which corrupts His original intent and design, all that which rises up in rebellion to Him, all false teachers who make a mockery of the glory of God.

And the third example is with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which no longer exist because God made their destruction an example to those who think that God can be mocked. *6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes He condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;*

4 <http://www.ltdmin.com/leader.php?id=74>

5 Genesis 6:11-12 ESV

The story of the destruction of these cities, having come down to us thousands of years after the fact, is intended to highlight the inevitability of God's judgment on sin. The sin of Sodom, and that of her sister city, Gomorrah, was not firstly that of homosexuality, although that is the first thing we think of. But there is a root to that sin that goes very much deeper. They were full of arrogance, pride. *Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.*⁶

In Sodom, they were filled with arrogance; they were wealthy; and they lived lives of careless ease. They had lots of me-time. They were into recreation and entertainment in a big way; and they refused to help the poor and needy among them. And the Lord says *They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.* It was this arrogant pride that led them into all kinds of sexual deviation. And this is the sin of the false teachers as well. Peter tells us in verse 10: *Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones.* Peter pinpoints the root problem here. These guys are so arrogant and self-pleasing they boldly go where angels fear to tread. Just consider the arrogance of a teaching that says that God must obey our commands if we speak the right words with enough faith.

But the inescapable conclusion from these three stories is that the judgment of God is inevitable. However, that's not the end of it. If that is all we had, this would be a bleak passage indeed. On the one hand, we need to know that a final judgment is in the offing, it's around the corner, it is coming down on sin and all ungodliness. But on the other hand, we need to know that while judgment is inevitable, it is not inescapable. There is a way of escape. And Peter gives us two examples from Scripture: Noah, a preacher of righteousness in a world filled with corruption; and Lot, a righteous man living in a corrupt society.

Noah, Peter says, was a preacher of righteousness. Genesis 6 doesn't tell us about his preaching but it does say that: *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.*⁷ While the rest of the world was walking according to their lusts and perversions and deceits, Noah was walking with God. But he was not only righteous and blameless and walking with God; according to Peter, he was preaching to the unrighteous as well. And you have to believe that he was not preaching your best life now. Judgment was coming. The world as they knew it was ending. Noah was not building bigger barns and a nicer home, or worrying about his I.R.A. or his 401K plan. There was a flood coming and he was all about building an ark. If we really believe that God is going to judge the earth one day, how does our life reflect that?

Noah's was blameless. He was practicing what he was preaching. And he was preaching the righteousness of God and the judgment of God to a world that was largely unconcerned or even aware of such things. The knowledge of the righteousness of God and the judgment of God really puts a crimp in most people's plans for the future and limits their lifestyle and choices. They probably picketed his work site. He was probably on the nightly news with sound bites that made him look really nutty. He was probably bad-mouthed for not being tolerant of other religions. The PITA people probably filed a lawsuit when he began putting the animals in the ark. But Noah preached anyway; and he probably preached like Martin Luther said preachers ought to preach: ***'Preach about sin in such a way that they will hate their sin or they will hate you for exposing it.'***⁸ I have a feeling that Noah did not have what you might call a fan club.

Then Peter gives us the example of Lot: *7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard);* If Noah represents a bright light of blameless integrity and faithfulness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation – Lot is a somewhat dimmer glow. Since the Bible is clear that Lot was a righteous man, Peter emphasizes that fact three times, then we must, however reluctantly, agree that Lot was righteous.

But the question is, in what sense was Lot considered righteous? If this story is to give us any hope of rescue for us, we need to understand what Peter must have been trying to say through it, because if there was anyone I would not have judged to be righteous, it would have been Lot. Look at his life.

6 Ezekiel 16:49 ESV

7 Genesis 6:9 ESV

8 http://www.azquotes.com/author/9142-Martin_Luther/tag/sin

You'll find the story starting in Genesis 13, and we're not going to go in depth here but just give you the Cliff Note version. First of all Lot grabbed the best land for himself when he and Abraham parted ways. He took the well-watered valley while Abraham got the rocky hillside.⁹ He didn't run off right away to live in Sodom, but he did go from being a sojourner to city dweller. He was still in his tent, but he was settled in the city. He gave up his stranger and alien status as a God-follower for the comfort and entertainment of city life. And then he kept moving toward Sodom. The language of the text makes it clear. Literally it says, '*he pitched his tent toward Sodom*'.¹⁰ He wasn't in Sodom – but he was leaning in that direction. Eventually he abandons the tent altogether and moves into Sodom. And finally the Bible records that Lot was *sitting in the gate of the city*, which meant he had influence and authority there. He had really bought into Sodom. And the Bible says that the men of Sodom were 'wicked, great sinners against the Lord'.¹¹

So Lot was really settled in the city when God sends a couple of messengers to tell him the jig is up and he needs to scoot. But when the men of the city surround his house, demanding to have sex with the two angelic visitors sheltering under his roof, he offers his daughters to them instead. Now whatever you think about middle eastern hospitality, this can in no way be considered a righteous act. And when he goes to his sons-in-law to tell them judgment is coming and they have to leave, they laugh at him, thinking that good old Lot is having a joke.¹² Evidently, Lot did not have a reputation as a preacher of righteousness like Noah. And when dawn began to break over the city, and the messengers were telling him to run, the text says, '*he lingered*'. Evidently he didn't want to go and the angels actually had to grab him and his family by their hands and physically drag them out of the city.¹³ And even as they were dragging Lot out of the city and heading toward safety in the mountains, Lot argues for a change of venue. And then there is the sordid story of incest with his daughters as they are hiding in a cave. However you paint it, this does not look like the picture of a righteous man.

But you cannot ignore the fact that three times Peter describes Lot as righteous - *righteous Lot, that righteous man, his righteous soul*. So, in what sense is Lot righteous? The problem we have is that we tend to equate righteousness with behavior. Noah was blameless, a preacher of righteousness – therefore obviously God rescued him. Lot, on the other hand had nothing to recommend him for rescue. And yet, both were rescued. What that means is that our definition of righteousness needs to be adjusted by the revelation of Scripture. I am not discounting the fact that the concept of righteousness impacts behavior. There are things we do that are righteous as well as unrighteous. But when the Bible declares someone righteous, it is not first of all pointing to that person's actions or inactions. What the Bible points to is something called faith.

Right in the middle of Lot's story, we read of Abraham's interaction with God. In chapter 15 of Genesis, God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham and the Scripture records that Abraham, '*...believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*'.¹⁴ Righteousness is a matter of reckoning and it comes to us by faith. In the apostle Paul's words in Romans he says that we are justified by faith. The only way we could ever be considered righteous or be justified is to believe in the gospel. That is, we must believe in the only righteous man who ever lived, and it is His righteousness that is reckoned to our account. It has nothing to do with our behavior, or the strength of our faith, or the urgency of our prayers. It has altogether to do with believing in Christ who is our righteousness.

You see, Lot was righteous in the very same way you and I are righteous, by trusting in the God of Abraham. The only biblically consistent answer to this question is that Lot must have believed in the God of Abraham. Paul tells us in Galatians 3: *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*.¹⁵ Whatever his shortcomings, whatever his weaknesses, Lot must have believed as Abraham believed. One little clue to that is Peter says that Lot was greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the people of Sodom, and his soul was tormented by the things he saw and heard. Unrighteous people are not overly distressed by sensual conduct. Unrighteous people are not unduly tormented and troubled by the sin around them. But whatever his failings, and they were many, Lot's righteous soul was distressed and troubled.

9 Genesis 13:10 ESV

10 Genesis 13:12 NASB

11 Genesis 13:13 ESV

12 Genesis 19:14 ESV

13 Genesis 19:15-16 ESV

14 Genesis 15:6 NASB

15 Galatians 3:9 ESV

You see, the point here is rescue. God rescued Noah. He rescued Lot. The focus of Peter's message here is that God's judgment is inevitable. It will come. It will not spare the unrighteous. *The Lord knows how...to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.* Their judgment is waiting, and it will come. But His judgment is not inescapable. There is hope. There is the possibility of rescue. It doesn't depend on your behavior. It depends upon on your status. ***The Lord knows how to rescue the godly, the righteous.*** The question is, are you righteous? That is, have you trusted in Christ who is your righteousness? If you have trusted in Christ, you have been declared righteous. It is not because of what you have done, but because of what Christ has done for you.

God in Christ came down to take our sin and bear our punishment on the cross. And in the final judgment, you will be proclaimed righteous because you have been united to the only righteous One who bled and died for you. No one can be righteous apart from Christ, but all who are in Him are declared righteous along with Him. That is how Lot could be declared righteous even in the midst of his sin. His story is a testament to the audacious grace of the gospel and announces hope for you and me. Just as this passage speaks to the wonderful grace and mercy of God to a broken and sin-sick world. **The Lord knows how to rescue the godly.**

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will He keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.¹⁶

Our merciful God and gracious Savior,

We are keenly aware that there is nothing in us that would recommend us to You or make ourselves worthy of Your saving grace. You are so righteous and we are so unrighteous and the only hope of salvation we have is to hide in the righteousness of Your dear Son. Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. And by His stripes we were healed. Thank You for the promises of the gospel to rescue sin-sick sinners, pardon rebels, liberate captives and save the lost. Awaken us to the wonder and reality of Your great love for us and grant us the faith to trust in what You have done for us we pray in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.