

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

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**Speaker:** Mr. David Pulman

## Lessons from 2 Peter: Increasing Apostasy - 2 Peter 2:1-22

The last words of Voltaire, the 18th century French philosopher, before he died were, "I am abandoned by God and man. I shall go to hell. I wish I'd never been born." God only abandons those who repeatedly turn away from Him. God's offer of salvation is always available to whoever will come in repentance to Him. Our subject today is indeed a serious one and highlights the necessity of being right with God before dying.

At one time, the expression, "*Be sure your sin will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23), was commonly used when wrong doing was observed. In recent years, not only is the saying rarely used, but what was considered wrong is becoming increasingly acceptable. Additionally, when people are apprehended for breaking the laws of this country, the punishment appears to be more lenient and less fit for the offence.

*In contrast to the trend in this country, let us consider what God thinks about those who violate His laws and standards.*

### Warning about false teachers

In our chapter today, we will consider Peter's warnings to those who have the same precious faith as himself (2 Peter 1:1). 2 Peter 1 ends with the clear message that it was God the Holy Spirit who caused the prophets in a past age to speak God's message. 2 Peter 1:20-21 states, "*No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*". 2 Peter 2 opens immediately with a word of warning. Peter reminds believers that in Old Testament times, "*there were also false prophets among the people*" (2 Peter 2:1). The people of God in every dispensation have been troubled by those who sowed evil by wrong teaching, seeking to cause doubt and discouragement. In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter states it will be no different for God's people in our dispensation, "*Even as there will be false teachers among you*".

*Peter's message was not only for the believers of Peter's day but also for us.*

Peter, (in 2 Peter 2:1), goes on to describe how the errors will be introduced into the Christian company: these false teachers "*will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*" Secrecy is the way false teachers operate, especially in the early stages so that believers are not initially alarmed. We need only to consider Satan's work in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). It was no outright frontal assault in contradicting God. It was by subtle and devious means that caused Eve to doubt, until God's word was disregarded and disobedience resulted. Satan's lies were destructive for Adam and Eve - they were expelled from the Garden and the close relationship with God was broken (Genesis 3:24). So will false teaching be destructive and break believers' relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our fellowship with God depends upon holding the truth found in God's word. In our day, false teaching also breaks the fellowship between believers. Where can such false teaching lead? Peter clearly states, "*Even denying the Lord who bought them*" 2 Peter 2:1. However, opposing God in this destructive way will bring destruction upon them and, when it comes, judgement will come swiftly.

Sadly many will follow the destructive ways of these false teachers and the truth will be opposed and proclaimed as wrong. Peter shows the false teachers for what they are, covetous - self gain. The deceived believers will be the prey - being exploited. Again, Peter reminds the believers of God's judgement and although it may seem a long time in coming, it will come.

*What is the lesson we should learn from this section? To be like those from Berea, who "searched the Scriptures daily" to see if what Paul was teaching was indeed correct (Acts 17:11). We need to act in the same kind of way, searching the Scriptures.*

### Judgements that happened in the past

In 2 Peter 2:4-9, Peter brings to the attention of believers some well known examples of God's judgement. 2 Peter 2:4 deals with angels, who had rebelled against God. Isaiah 14:12-15 records Satan's, that is Lucifer's, rebellion: "*How*

*you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.* Satan will not escape judgement, but that day of judgement is still future.

From these verses, we see how Satan wanted to be God. The repetition of the word "I" shows his selfish desires. To be as God was the same promise Satan held out to Eve (Genesis 3:5) and, in some respects, this is what people are really saying when they leave God out of their lives. When Satan rebelled, many other angels followed him. In 2 Peter 2:4 it states, *"For if God spared not the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment"*. Did this group of angels commit an additional sin of cohabiting with women and bring this severe judgement upon themselves? See Genesis 6:1-4 and Jude 4. Such was the seriousness of their sin that judgment came swiftly and their imprisonment remains until the final judgment of the lake of fire, see Matthew 25:41.

2 Peter 2:5 concerns the days of Noah and the judgement upon the world by means of a universal flood. Read Genesis 6-8 for a full account of Noah and the flood. The chapters explain the reason for God's judgement but also show God's grace in preserving Noah and his family. *"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent [or imagination] of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Genesis 6:5). *"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD"* (Genesis 6:8).

2 Peter 2:6 concerns the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. We read the historical account in Genesis 18-19. The reason for the judgement, *"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous"* (Genesis 18:20, New International Version). The judgement was different from those previously considered, *"The LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah"* (Genesis 19:24, New King James Version). However, there was one righteous person delivered out of the holocaust that descended upon the cities. Lot was pulled out of the place of destruction. Historically, Lot is a pathetic figure with a wasted life - nothing for God. Yet God is good. God declares Lot righteous. Even though Lot's faith was real, it had no practical impact on his life! As 2 Peter 2:7-8 show, he was not happy, he was *"oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked"* and *"tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds"*.

*This is the sad result of willingly embarking on a life that left God out of the decision making.*

2 Peter 2:9, shows that the Lord is ever ready to deliver His people out of difficulties, *"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations."* Now, although this is true, Lot needed to be looking for God's deliverance. Even when deliverance is clearly available, there can be reluctance to take up God's escape plan. This was true of Lot and, sadly, is probably true for many believers, who become entangled in the world. They know that they are in the wrong situation and yet are reluctant to take the path to safety. The path to recovery includes repentance. To have to admit that they were wrong is a great blow to a person's pride. However, there is blessing when God's deliverance is grasped (read the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32).

At the end of 2 Peter 2:9, we have the full extent of the judgement on those sinners who perished in the cities from which Lot escaped. They died but that was not the end, *"and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgement."* Asaph, one of the psalmists, had a similar problem in understanding how God would deal with the wicked who all their life opposed God. In Psalm 73:17 we read, *"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end."* Asaph had to seek the presence of the Lord in order to understand the secret of how God deals with those who continually oppose Himself and refuse His offer of salvation. In Asaph's day, the wicked not only seemed to escape punishment but prospered! We may see this around us today. However, the wicked cannot escape God's punishment in the day of judgement (read Revelation 20:11-15).

*How important it is to respond positively to God's offer of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross at Calvary.*

### **Characteristics of the false teachers**

In 2 Peter 2:10-17, Peter strips away the outward guise of respectability from those who traffic in false doctrine to reveal their true character. Verse 10 refers back to the previous verse when it states, *"And especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries."* The false teachers are ungodly, morally corrupt and have no time for authority, especially the authority of the Scriptures, God's revealed instruction to the people of the world. Their arrogance in promoting error is a feature of their self-will and independence from God. Further to this, *"They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries [or celestial beings - New International Version], whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord"* (2 Peter 2:10-11). It seems to me that today the

slander and arrogance is not only levelled against celestial beings but the Lord Himself is the object of all the vile imaginations of unregenerate people, in what is said, written and even broadcast. There seems to be no boundaries when it comes to opposition to God. 2 Peter 2:11 is in contrast to 2 Peter 2:10, where God's mighty angels leave rebukes to the Lord.

*The Lord is the only One who will rightly assess matters in the day of judgement.*

Peter continues in his description of those who are false and states, "*But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption*", 2 Peter 2:12. Their behaviour is likened to beasts that have no understanding. As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*"

Now this lack of understanding is entirely their responsibility. People have the necessary faculties to make their own decisions. Therefore, their own corruption becomes their eternal downfall. More than this, Peter states in 2 Peter 2:13, that they earn their destruction at the hand of God, "*and will receive the wages of unrighteousness.*" God is not unfair; everyone is rewarded for what they do. God's laws and standards are unmoveable. 2 Peter 2:13 ends with the condemnation of those who peddle error, becoming insensitive in their vile ways so that even in daylight their depravity was displayed. They became a blemish on society, seeking to lead others into the same kind of vileness.

2 Peter 2:14 continues describing the morally bankrupt, "*Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.*" Along side this catalogue of degrading behaviour is their covetousness, "*They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.*" (2 Peter 2:15) Their motive in all they do appears to be greed for riches. Regarding Balaam, God caused a dumb donkey to speak and rebuke the madness of the ungodly prophet. That was a temporary restraint but eventually Balaam continued in his covetous ways (see Numbers 22-24).

Now in 2 Peter 2:17 we have Peter's conclusion on the value of the false teachers: "*These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*" Their teaching brings no benefit whatsoever to the hearers. Sadly, their end is "*blackness of darkness forever*". The lake of fire, described in Revelation 20:11-15, is also described by Peter as blackness of darkness. It might seem a contradiction but the absence of light and the eternal destructiveness of fire seems to me to highlight the horror of eternal judgement on those who know not God.

*This must make every true believer more urgent in seeking to spread the good news of salvation.*

### **Turning your back on God and His truth**

In 2 Peter 2:18-22, Peter refers to those who have joined the Christian company but who have never truly accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour and Lord. Why do non-Christians join a church?

- It's the latest 'in' thing to do;
- Christians seem to have a good time;
- It's intellectually challenging, lively debates;
- They seem to be all well off;
- I have always gone to Church;
- My parents were members, so I am; etc.

I am sure the list is almost endless. However, if a person has no real solid foundation of faith to rest on, then when something more attractive comes along there is no living link with the true God to hold them safely and guard them from error. This is what Peter is speaking about in these verses. This is not the error that a saved person can be lost - **they were never saved**. They called themselves "Christian" but it was a sham. They were in the Christian company for all the wrong reasons.

Therefore, when some new teaching comes about, the old unregenerate nature is appealed to and the person is off to follow this, without ever stopping to check the Scriptures. 2 Peter 2:18 states, "*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*" (New International Version). How were they "*just escaping*"? It was the preserving influence in Scriptural teaching which, if adhered to, would preserve a person as far as the excessive evil in this world. But, sadly, that person might still not know the Lord Jesus as Saviour. Therefore, there is the danger of being led away out of true Christian influence. Peter in 2 Peter 2:21 states, "*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of*

*righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred commandment that was passed on to them” (New International Version).*

In 2 Peter 2:19, we find that the teachers of error are in bondage and the only logical outcome is that their followers are led into that same bondage. Their lives become increasingly more corrupt and their end is eternal destruction in the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15 states, *“If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (New International Version).* How do we get our names in the book of life? By accepting the Lord Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Accepting that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for sins - there is no other way. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).*

Peter now states that the end result of such people is worse than before they had known anything about the Christian company and the blessing that God has for those who truly repent. *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20).* This reminds me very much of the story at the beginning of Matthew 25: *“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you” (Matthew 25:1-12).*

*The seriousness of pretending receives the condemnation, “I do not know you”.*

So the end result of those who turn away from God, Christianity, the message of salvation and the Lord Jesus Christ is summed up by Peter in 2 Peter 2:22, *“It has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”* The natural person without the new nature of Christ will always return to their old ways. It is the responsibility of each of us who truly know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, to encourage ourselves in the Lord, to read, understand and seek to live out the godly principles of the Christian life day by day.

*We need a testimony with a consistent godly life to attract people to Christ.*

We have considered some serious warnings in God’s Word today. They are warnings that clearly God felt necessary to give to the people of Peter’s day and to us today. But God warns us, not to depress us, but to encourage us to turn to Him. It is helpful to look at Peter’s closing words of this epistle: *“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).* That will keep us, however evil the day.

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