

# CHAPTER 2

The apostle, having in the foregoing chapter exhorted them to proceed and advance in the Christian race, now comes to remove, as much as in him lay, what he could not but apprehend would hinder their complying with his exhortation. He therefore gives them fair warning of false teachers, by whom they might be in danger of being seduced. To prevent this,

- I.** He describes these seducers as impious in themselves, and very pernicious to others (v. 1-3).
- II.** He assures them of the punishment that shall be inflicted on them (v. 3-6).
- III.** He tells us how contrary the method is which God takes with those who fear him (v. 7-9).
- IV.** He fills up the rest of the chapter with a further description of those seducers of whom he would have them beware.

## 2 PETER 2:1-3

### DIVINE JUDGMENTS

**I.** In the end of the former chapter there is mention made of holy men of God, who lived in the times of the Old Testament, and were used as the amanuenses of the Holy Ghost, in writing the sacred oracles; but in the beginning of this he tells us they had, even at that time, false prophets in the church as well as true. In all ages of the church, and under all dispensations, when God sends true prophets, the devil sends some to seduce and deceive, false prophets in the Old Testament, and false Christs, false apostles, and seducing teachers, in the New. Concerning these observe,

**1.** Their business is to bring in destructive errors, *even damnable heresies*, as the business of teachers sent of God is to show the way of truth, even the true way to everlasting life. There are damnable heresies as well as damnable practices; and false teachers are industrious to spread pernicious errors.

**2.** Damnable heresies are commonly brought in privily, under the cloak and colour of truth. Those who introduce destructive heresies *deny the Lord that bought them*. They reject and refuse to hear and learn of the great teacher sent from God, though he is the only Saviour and Redeemer of men, who paid a price sufficient to redeem as many worlds of sinners as there are sinners in the world.

**3.** Those who bring in errors destructive to others bring swift (and therefore sure) *destruction upon themselves*. Self-destroyers are soon destroyed; and those who are so hardened as to propagate errors destructive to others shall surely and suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

**II.** He proceeds, in the second verse, to tell us the consequence with respect to others; and here we may learn,

**1.** Corrupt leaders seldom fail of many to follow them; though the way of error is a pernicious way, yet many are ready to walk therein. Men drink in iniquity like water, and are pleased to live in error. *The prophets prophesy falsely, and the people love to have it so.*

**2.** The spreading of error will bring up an evil report on the way of truth; that is, the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, who is *the way, the truth, and the life*. The Christian religion is from the God of truth as the author, leads to true happiness in the enjoyment of the true God as the end, and works truth in the inward part as the means of acceptably serving God. And yet this way of truth is traduced and blasphemed by those who embrace and advance destructive errors. This the apostle has foretold as what should certainly come to pass. Let us not be offended at any thing of this in our day, but take care that we give no occasion to the enemy to blaspheme the holy name whereby we are called, or speak evil of that way whereby we hope to be saved.

**III.** Observe, in the next place, the method seducers take to draw disciples after them: they use *feigned words*; they flatter, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple, inducing them to yield entirely to the opinions which these seducers endeavour to propagate, and sell and deliver themselves over to the instruction and government of these false teacher, who make a gain of those whom they make their proselytes, serving themselves and making some advantage of them; for all this is through covetousness, with a desire and design to get more wealth, or

credit, or commendation, by increasing the number of their followers. The faithful ministers of Christ, who show men the way of truth, desire the profit and advantage of their followers, that they may be saved; but these seducing teachers desire and design only their own temporal advantage and worldly grandeur.

## ~~1~~ 2 PETER 2:3-6

### DIVINE JUDGMENTS

Men are apt to think that a reprieve is the forerunner of a pardon, and that if judgment be not speedily executed it is, or will be, certainly reversed. But the apostle tells us that how successful and prosperous soever false teachers may be, and that for a time, yet their *judgment lingereth not*. God has determined long ago how he will deal with them. Such unbelievers, who endeavour to turn others from the faith, are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on them. The righteous Judge will speedily take vengeance; the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. To prove this assertion, here are several examples of the righteous judgment of God, in taking vengeance on sinners, proposed to our serious consideration.

**I.** See how God dealt with the angels who sinned. Observe,

- 1.** No excellency will exempt a sinner from punishment. If the angels, who excel us vastly in strength and knowledge, violate the law of God, the sentence which that law awards shall be executed upon them, and that without mercy or mitigation, for God did not spare them. Hence observe,
- 2.** By how much the more excellent the offender, by so much the more severe the punishment. These angels, who had the advantage of men as to the dignity of their nature, are immediately punished. There is no sparing them for a few days, no favour at all shown them.
- 3.** Sin debases and degrades the persons who commit it. The angels of heaven are cast down from the height of their excellency, and divested of all their glory and dignity, upon their disobedience. Whoever sins against God does a manifest hurt to himself.

**4.** Those who rebel against the God of heaven shall all be sent down to hell. There is no place nor state between the height of glory and the depth of misery in which they shall be allowed to rest. If creatures sin in heaven, they must suffer in hell.

**5.** Sin is the work of darkness, and darkness is the wages of sin. The darkness of misery and torment follows the darkness of sin. Those who will not walk according to the light and direction of God's law shall be deprived of the light of God's countenance and the comforts of his presence.

**6.** As sin binds men over to punishment, so misery and torment hold men under punishment. The darkness which is their misery keeps them so that they cannot get away from their torment.

**7.** The last degree of torment is not till the day of judgment. The sinning angels, though in hell already, are yet reserved to the judgment of the great day.

**II.** See how God dealt with the old world, even in much the same way that he dealt with the angels. He spared not the old world. Here observe,

**1.** The number of offenders signifies no more to procure any favour than the quality. If the sin be universal, the punishment shall likewise extend to all. But,

**2.** If there be but a few righteous, they shall be preserved. God does not destroy the good with the bad. In wrath he remembers mercy.

**3.** Those who are *preachers of righteousness* in an age of universal corruption and degeneracy, *holding forth the word of life* in an unblamable and exemplary conversation, shall be preserved in a time of general destruction.

**4.** God can make use of those creatures as the instruments of his vengeance in punishing sinners which he at first made and appointed for their service and benefit. He destroyed the whole world by water; but observe,

**5.** What was the procuring cause of this: *it was a world of ungodly men.* Ungodliness puts men out of the divine protection, and exposes them to utter destruction.

**III.** See how God dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah; though they were situated in a country like the garden of the Lord, yet, if in such a fruitful soil they abound in sin, God can soon turn a fruitful land into barrenness and a well-watered country into dust and ashes. Observe,

**1.** No political union or confederacy can keep off judgments from a sinful people. Sodom and the neighbouring cities were no more secured by their regular government than the angels by the dignity of their nature or the old world by their vast number.

**2.** God can make use of contrary creatures to punish incorrigible sinners. He destroys the *old world by water*, and Sodom by fire. He who keeps fire and water from hurting his people (<sup>238</sup>Isaiah 43:2) can make either to destroy his enemies; therefore they are never safe.

**3.** Most heinous sins bring most grievous judgments. Those who were abominable in their vices were remarkable for their plagues. Those who are sinners exceedingly before the Lord must expect the most dreadful vengeance.

**4.** The punishment of sinners in former ages is designed for the example of those who come after. "Follow them, not only in the time of living, but in their *course and way of living*." Men who live ungodly must see what they are to expect if they go on still in a course of impiety. Let us take warning by all the instances of God's taking vengeance, which are recorded for our admonition, and to prevent our promising ourselves impunity, though we go on in a course of sin.

## ~~2~~ PETER 2:7-9

### DIVINE JUDGMENTS

When God sends destruction on the ungodly, he commands deliverance for the righteous; and, if he rain fire and brimstone on the wicked, he will cover the head of the just, and they shall be hid in the day of his anger. This we have an instance of in his preserving Lot. Here observe,

**1.** The character given of Lot; he is called *a just man*; this he was as to the generally prevailing bent of his heart and through the main of his conversation. God does not account men just or unjust from one single act,

but from their general course of life. And here is a just man in the midst of a most corrupt and profligate generation universally gone off from all good. He does not follow the multitude to do evil, but in a city of injustice he walks uprightly.

**2.** The impression the sins of others made upon this righteous man. Though the sinner takes pleasure in his wickedness, it is a grief and vexation to the soul of the righteous. In bad company we cannot escape either guilt or grief. Let the sins of others be a trouble to us, otherwise it will not be possible for us to keep ourselves pure.

**3.** Here is a particular mention of the duration and continuance of this good man's grief and vexation: it was *from day to day*. Being accustomed to hear and see their wickedness did not reconcile him to it, nor abate of the horror that was occasioned by it. This is the righteous man whom God preserved from the desolating judgment that destroyed all round about him. From this instance we are taught to argue that God knows how to deliver his people and punish his enemies. It is here presupposed that the righteous must have their temptations and trials. The devil and his instruments will thrust sore at them, that they may fall; and, if we will get to heaven, it must be through many tribulations. It is therefore our duty to reckon upon and prepare for them. Observe here,

**(1.)** *The Lord knows those that are his.* He has set apart him who is godly for himself; and, if there is but one in five cities, he knows him; and where there is a greater number he cannot be ignorant of nor overlook any one of them.

**(2.)** The wisdom of God is never at a loss about ways and means to deliver his people. They are often utterly at a loss, and can see no way; he can deliver a great many.

**(3.)** The deliverance of the godly is the work of God, God, that which he concerns himself in, both his wisdom to contrive the way and his power to work out the deliverance *out of temptation*, to prevent their falling into sin and their being ruined by their troubles. And surely, if he can deliver out of temptation, he could keep from falling into it if he did not see such trials to be necessary.

**(4.)** God makes a very great difference in his dealings with the godly and the wicked. When he saves his people from destruction, he delivers over

his enemies to deserved ruin. The unjust has no share in the salvation God works out for the righteous. The wicked are *reserved to the day of judgment*. Here we see,

[1.] There is a day of judgment. *God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world.*

[2.] The preservation of impenitent sinners is only a reserving of them to the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

## 2 PETER 2:10-22

### FALSE TEACHERS

The apostle's design being to warn us of, and arm us against, seducers, he now returns to discourse more particularly of them, and give us an account of their character and conduct, which abundantly justifies the righteous Judge of the world in reserving them in an especial manner for the most severe and heavy doom, as Cain is taken under special protection that he might be kept for uncommon vengeance. But why will God thus deal with these false teachers? This he shows in what follows.

**I.** *These walk after the flesh;* they follow the devices and desires of their own hearts, they give up themselves to the conduct of their own fleshly mind, refusing to make their reason stoop to divine revelation, and to *bring every thought to the obedience of Christ;* they, in their lives, act directly contrary to God's righteous precepts, and comply with the demands of corrupt nature. Evil opinions are often accompanied with evil practices; and those who are for propagating error are for improving in wickedness. They will not sit down contented in the measure of iniquity to which they have attained, nor is it enough for them to stand up, and maintain, and defend, what wickedness they have already committed, but they *walk after the flesh,* they go on in their sinful course, and increase unto more ungodliness and greater degrees of impurity and uncleanness too; they also pour contempt on those whom God has set in authority over them and requires them to honour. These therefore despise *the ordinance of God,* and we need not wonder at it, for they are bold and daring, obstinate and refractory, and will not only cherish contempt in their hearts,

but with their tongues will utter slanderous and reproachful words of those who are set over them.

**II.** This he aggravates, by setting forth the very different conduct of more excellent creatures, even the *angels*, of whom observe,

1. They are *greater in power and might*, and that even than those who are clothed with authority and power among the sons of men, and much more than those false teachers who are slanderous revilers of magistrates and governors; the good angels vastly exceed us in all natural and moral excellences, in strength, understanding, and holiness too.
2. Good angels are accusers of sinful creatures, either of their own kind, or ours, or both. Those who are allowed to behold the face of God, and stand before his throne, cannot but have a zeal for his honour, and accuse and blame those who dishonour him.
3. *Angels bring their accusations of sinful creatures before the Lord*; they do not publish their faults, and tell their crimes to their fellow-creatures, in a way of calumny and slander; but it is before the Lord, who is the Judge, and will be the avenger, of all impiety and injustice.
4. Good angels mingle no bitter revilings nor base reproaches with any of the accusations or charges they bring against the wickedest and worst of criminals. Let us, who pray that *God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven*, imitate the angels in this particular; if we complain of wicked men, let it be to God, and that not with rage and reviling, but with compassion and composedness of mind, that may evidence that we belong to him who is meek and merciful.

**III.** The apostle, having shown (v. 11) how unlike seducing teachers are to the most excellent creatures, proceeds (v. 12) to show how like they are to the most inferior: they are *like the horse and mule, which have no understanding*; they are *as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed*. Men, under the power of sin, are so far from observing divine revelation that they do not exercise reason, nor act according to the direction thereof. They *walk by sight, and not by faith*, and judge of things according to their senses; as these represent things pleasant and agreeable, so they must be approved and esteemed. Brute-creatures follow the instinct of their sensitive appetite, and sinful man follows the inclination of his carnal mind; these refuse to employ the understanding and reason

God has given them, and so are ignorant of what they might and ought to know; and therefore observe,

**1.** Ignorance is the cause of evil-speaking; and,

**2.** Destruction will be the effect of it. These persons shall be utterly destroyed in their own corruption. Their vices not only expose them to the wrath of God in another world, but often bring them to misery and ruin in this life; and surely such impudent offenders, who *glory in their shame*, and to whom openness in sin is an improvement of the pleasure of sinning, most justly deserve all the plagues of this life and the pains of the next in the greatest extremity. Therefore whatever they meet with is the just *reward of their unrighteousness*. Such sinners as sport themselves in mischief deceive themselves and disgrace all they belong to, for by one sort of sins they prepare themselves for another; their extravagant feastings, their intemperance in eating and drinking, bring them to commit all manner of lewdness, so that their *eyes are full of adultery*, their wanton looks show their own impure lusts and are designed and directed to kindle the like in others; and this is what they *cannot cease* from — the heart is insatiate in lusting and the eye incessant in looking after what may gratify their unclean desires, and those who are themselves impudent and incessant in sin are very diligent and often successful in deceiving others and drawing others into the same excess of riot. But here observe who those are who are in the greatest danger of being led away into error and impiety, even the *unstable*. Those whose hearts are not established with grace are easily turned into the way of sin, or else such sensual wretches would not be able to prevail upon them, for these are not only riotous and lascivious, but *covetous* also, and these practices their hearts are exercised with; they pant after riches, and the desire of their souls is to the wealth of this world: it is a considerable part of their work to contrive to get wealth; in this their hearts are exercised, and then they execute their projects; and, if men abandon themselves to all sorts of lusts, we cannot wonder that the apostle should call them *cursed children*, for they are liable to the curse of God denounced against such *ungodly and unrighteous men*, and they bring a curse upon all who hearken and adhere to them.

**IV.** The apostle (v. 15, 16) proves that they are *cursed children*, even such covetous persons as *the Lord abhors*, by showing,

1. They *have forsaken the right way*; and it cannot be but such self-seekers must be out of the right way, which is a self-denying way.

2. They have gone into a wrong way: they have erred and strayed from the way of life, and gone over into the path which leads to death, and takes hold of hell; and this he makes out by showing it to be *the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor*.

(1.) That is a way of unrighteousness into which men are led by the wages of unrighteousness.

(2.) Outward temporal good things are the wages sinners expect and promise themselves, though they are often disappointed.

(3.) The inordinate love of the good things of this world turns men out of the way which leads to the unspeakably better things of another life; the love of riches and honour turned Balaam out of the way of his duty, although he knew that the way he took displeased the Lord.

(4.) Those who from the same principle are guilty of the same practices with notorious sinners are, in the judgment of God, the followers of such vile offenders, and therefore must reckon upon being at last where they are: *they shall have their portion* with those in another world whom they imitated in this.

(5.) Heinous and hardened sinners sometimes meet with rebukes for their iniquity. God stops them in their way, and opens the mouth of conscience, or by some startling providence startles and affrights them.

(6.) Though some more uncommon and extraordinary rebuke may for a little while cool men's courage, and hinder their violent progress in the way of sin, it will not make them forsake the way of iniquity and go over into the way of holiness. If rebuking a sinner for his iniquity could have made a man return to his duty, surely the rebuke of Balaam must have produced this effect; for here is a surprising miracle wrought: *the dumb ass*, in whose mouth no man can expect to meet with reproof, is enabled to speak, and that with a human voice, and to her owner and master (who is here called a *prophet*, for the Lord appeared and spoke sometimes to him, <sup>1023</sup>Numbers 22:23, 24, but indeed he was among the prophets of the Lord as Judas among the apostles of Jesus Christ), and she exposes *the madness* of his conduct and opposes his going on in this evil way, and yet all in vain. Those who will not yield to usual methods of reproof will be but

little influenced by miraculous appearances to turn them from their sinful courses. Balaam was indeed restrained from actually *cursing the people*, but he had so strong a desire after the honours and riches that were promised him that he went as far as he could, and did his utmost to get from under the restraint that was upon him.

**V.** The apostle proceeds (v. 17) to a further description of seducing teachers, whom he sets forth,

**1.** As *wells*, or fountains, *without water*. Observe,

**(1.)** Ministers should be as wells or fountains, where the people may find instruction, direction, and comfort; but

**(2.)** False teachers have nothing of this to impart to those who consult them: the word of truth is the water of life, which refreshes the souls that receive it; but these deceivers are set upon spreading and promoting error, and therefore are set forth as empty, because there is no truth in them. In vain then are all our expectations of being fed and filled with knowledge and understanding by those who are themselves ignorant and empty.

**2.** As *clouds carried with a tempest*. When we see a cloud we expect a refreshing shower from it; but these are clouds which yield no rain, for they are driven with the wind, but not of the Spirit, but the stormy wind or tempest of their own ambition and covetousness. They espouse and spread those opinions that will procure most applause and advantage to themselves; and as clouds obstruct the light of the sun, and darken the air, so do these *darken counsel by words without knowledge* and wherein there is no truth; and, seeing these men are for promoting darkness in this world, it is very just that the mist of darkness should be their portion in the next. Utter darkness was prepared for the devil, the great deceiver, and his angels, those instruments that he uses to turn men from the truth, and therefore for them it is reserved, and that for ever; the fire of hell is everlasting, and the smoke of the bottomless pit rises up for ever and ever. And it is just with God to deal thus with them, because

**(1.)** They allure those they deal with, and draw them into a net, or catch them as men do fish; and,

**(2.)** It is *with great swelling words of vanity*, lofty expressions, which have a great sound, but little sense.

(3.) They work upon *the corrupt affections* and *carnal fleshly lusts of men*, proposing what is grateful to them. And,

(4.) They seduce persons who in reality avoided and kept at a distance from those who spread and those who embraced hurtful and destructive errors. Observe,

[1.] By application and industry men attain a skilfulness and dexterity in promoting error. They are as artful and as successful as the fisher, who makes angling his daily employment. The business of these men is to draw disciples after them, and in their methods and management there are some things worth observing, how they suit their bait to those they desire to catch.

[2.] Erroneous teachers have a peculiar advantage to win men over to them, because they have sensual pleasure to take them with; whereas the ministers of Christ put men upon self-denial, and the mortifying of those lusts that others gratify and please: wonder not therefore that truth prevails no more, or that errors spread so much.

[3.] Persons who have for a while adhered to the truth, and kept clear of errors, may by the subtlety and industry of seducers be so far deceived as to fall into those errors they had for a while *clean escaped*. “Be therefore always upon your guard, maintain a godly jealousy of yourselves, search the scriptures, pray for the Spirit to instruct and establish you in the truth, walk humbly with God, and watch against every thing that may provoke him to give you up to a reprobate mind, that you may not be taken with the fair and specious pretences of these false teachers, who promise liberty to all who will hearken to them, not true Christian liberty for the service of God, but a licentiousness in sin, to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts.” To prevent these men’s gaining proselytes, he tells us that, in the midst of all their talk of liberty, they themselves are the vilest slaves, for they are the servants of corruption; their own lusts have gotten a complete victory over them, and they are actually in bondage to them, making *provision for the flesh*, to satisfy its cravings, comply with its directions, and obey its commands. Their minds and hearts are so far corrupted and depraved that they have neither power nor will to refuse the task that is imposed on them. They are conquered and captivated by their spiritual enemies, and yield their members servants of unrighteousness: and what a shame it is to be overcome and commanded by those who are themselves *the servants of corruption, and slaves to their own lusts!* This

consideration should prevent our being led away by these seducers; and to this he adds another (v. 20): it is not only a shame and disgrace to be seduced by those who are themselves the slaves of sin, and led captive by the devil at his pleasure, but it is a real detriment to those who have clean escaped from those who live in error, for hereby their latter end is made worse than their beginning. Here we see, *First*, It is an advantage to escape the pollutions of the world, to be kept from gross and scandalous sins, though men are not thoroughly converted and savingly changed; for hereby we are kept from grieving those who are truly serious and emboldening those who are openly profane; whereas, if we run with others to the same excess of riot and abandon ourselves to the sins of the age, we afflict and dishearten those who endeavour to walk as becomes the gospel, and strengthen the hands of those who are already engaged in open rebellion against the Most High, as well as alienate ourselves more from God, and harden our hearts against him. *Secondly*, Some men are, for a time, *kept from the pollutions of the world, by the knowledge of Christ*, who are not savingly renewed in the spirit of their mind. A religious education has restrained many whom the grace of God has not renewed: if we receive the light of the truth, and have a notional knowledge of Christ in our heads, it may be of some present service to us; but we must receive the love of the truth, and hide God's word in our heart, or it will not sanctify and save us. *Thirdly*, Those who have, for a time, escaped the pollutions of the world, are at first ensnared and entangled by false teachers, who first perplex men with some plausible and specious objections against the truths of the gospel; and the more ignorant and unstable are hereby made to stagger, and brought to question the truth of doctrines they have received, because they cannot solve all the difficulties, nor answer all the objections, that are urged by these seducers. *Fourthly*, When men are once entangled, they are easily overcome; therefore should Christians keep close to the word of God, and watch against those who seek to perplex and bewilder them, and that because, if men who have once *escaped are again entangled, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning*.

**VI.** The apostle, in the last two verses of the chapter, sets himself to prove that a state of apostasy is worse than a state of ignorance; for it is a *condemning of the way of righteousness*, after they have had some knowledge of it, and expressed some liking to it; it carries in it a declaring that they have found some iniquity in the way of righteousness and some

falsehood in the word of truth. Now to bring up such an evil report upon the good way of God, and such a false charge against the way of truth, must necessarily expose to the heaviest condemnation; the misery of such deserters of Christ and his gospel is more unavoidable and more intolerable than that of other offenders; for,

**1.** God is more highly provoked by those who by their conduct despise the gospel, as well as disobey the law, and who reproach and pour contempt upon God and his grace.

**2.** The devil more narrowly watches and more closely confines those whom he has recovered, after they had once gone off from him and professed to be the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ (<sup>4125</sup>Matthew 12:45); they are kept under a stronger guard, and no wonder it should be so when they have licked up their own vomit again, returning to the same errors and impieties that they had once cast off and seemed to detest and loathe, and wallowing in that filthiness from which they appeared once to be really cleansed. Well, if the scripture gives such an account of Christianity on the one hand, and of sin on the other, as we have here in these two verses, we certainly ought highly to approve of the former and persevere therein, because it is a way of righteousness, and a holy commandment, and to loathe and keep at the greatest distance from the latter because it is set forth as most offensive and abominable.