

A Growth That Endures...



A VERSE BY
VERSE
EXPOSITION
OF THE
EPISTLE OF
2ND PETER

An Accursed Brood 2 Peter 2:10b-16 (732)

Men who were teaching doctrinal error had infiltrated the churches of Asia Minor. Shamelessly were these men also living godless lives and encouraging the members of the churches to join them in their recklessness. The doctrinal and moral stability of the church for which Christ died was being threatened. II Peter was written to check this devastating influence. Peter's strategy is to saturate the believers with the truth of the gospel so that the destructive errors (in doctrine or practice) would be recognized and resisted. Peter's main point is that growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error. You see, the objective of every false teacher is to disparage, to misrepresent, to twist the truth of the gospel; to have it perceived as something other than what it is. And so Peter argues that the gospel they have been taught is true. He says in **1:16**, *we did not follow cleverly invented stories when we preached the gospel to you*. Peter is defending the authenticity of the gospel he and the other apostles have preached.

But in Chapter 2 Peter lines up on the other side of the ball. He takes the offensive. In shocking terms he lets everyone know the ultimate fate of men who would challenge God and who would harm those precious ones for whom Christ died. He says of the false teachers in **2:3**, *their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep*. Indeed, last Sunday in **2:4-9** the Spirit of God instructed us on the theme of divine judgment. Peter's focus is on God. Peter is pointing out that God by His very acts in history has revealed that He is both willing and able to judge sin.

2 Peter 2:4-7, 9 *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; ⁷ and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men ... ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.*

In **verse 10a**, Peter gets more specific, introducing a group of people to whom God's condemnation especially applies – the false teachers who were disturbing the peace of the churches to whom he is writing. **Especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority**. Indeed, this half verse captures the two characteristics of the false teachers - their sensuality and their arrogance - that Peter elaborates and condemns in verses **10b-16**.

II Peter 2:10-16 *Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties,¹¹ whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.¹² But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,¹³ suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;¹⁵ forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,¹⁶ but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.*

Peter's description must not be limited to cult leaders or professing Christians who openly deny nearly every plank in the platform of historic, orthodox Christianity. Not all dangerous men and women manifest all of these characteristics all of the time. His words are aimed at those found in average churches in average cities; the distant cousins of this bunch Peter has in mind; men and women whose influence echoes that of the false teachers of Peter's day.

God calls them *an accursed brood*. This title is taken directly from verse 14. The NASB and other versions translate the Greek *accursed children*. The NIV uses the word "brood." I like that. A brood, you see, is a family of young; the young hatched at one time; a group having a common nature or origin. Brood emphasizes the familial connection. God sees the false teachers we've been talking about as related to one another in their common sin and common destiny. And this particular brood is *accursed*. They live and move under the curse of

God. God has declared that they are evil, detestable. God has determined to punish them for their despicable evil. *An accursed brood*. This is the terrible evaluation of heaven upon these men and upon all of their kinsmen; all who sow discord, all who teach error, all who would take advantage of the saints, all who would mislead them, all who live reckless, disobedient lives and who encourage God's precious people to do the same.

"Peter now launches into a direct tirade against the false teachers" (Hillyer, p. 196). He speaks first to their arrogance. **Verse 10b. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.** *Daring* people are determined to please themselves at all costs. The first year Julia and I were married we lived in an apartment facing a large open courtyard. On night several guys brought their coolers full of beer, their lawn chairs, and their stereo out and decided to have a party. Boisterous, drunk, and obnoxious their revelry went on well past midnight. No one could sleep and appeals to them went unheeded. Finally, the police had to break it up. In the same way, these guys are absolutely reckless and irresponsible. They are *self-willed* – "determined to do as they please. "Undeterred by the challenge of any appeal to logic, common sense, responsibility, or feeling of decency, they ride roughshod over the rights, opinions, and interests" of both men and angels (see Hillyer, p. 196).

Angels? That's right. These guys will "get in the face" of the devil himself. They have no fear; no regard for any kind of authority or superior power. They poke fun at the unseen spiritual world and ignore, flout divine authority when it challenges their behavior. *Angelic majesties* is a reference to fallen, evil angels. These guys do not hesitate to mock (challenge) the "power of the devil and his

demons" (*The New Geneva Study Bible*, p. 1981). Something even perfect angels do not dare to do.

Verse 11. Whereas [perfect] angels who are greater in might and power [than these false teachers] do not bring a reviling judgment against them [the devil and fallen angels] before the Lord. In the background here is the tradition of the "archangel Michael disputing with the devil about the body of Moses" (Hillyer, p. 196). **Jude 9** says, *But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."* Even perfect angels who possess much greater power than any man do not take it upon themselves to rebuke, to mock, to challenge the devil and his demons. They leave such matters with God Himself.

Peter says at the end of **verse 10** that these men **despise authority**. These men hate to have anyone tell them what to do. God detests the spirit of insubordination and those men who manifest it - men who have no regard for lawful authority; men who place themselves above rebuke, correction, or counsel. When someone in the church manifests such a spirit or attitude, take heed.

Verse 12-13a. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed. Peter likens these guys to dumb farm animals - beasts such as cattle, hogs, and chickens raised for no other purpose than to be slaughtered. These animals are absolutely oblivious to their destiny. They do only what is natural to them. These men are the same way. For all their elevated rhetoric these guys are ignorant. They claim to possess

spiritual, theological, and biblical insight. They pitch impressive new ideas. They don't know what they're talking about. They know nothing but to follow their instincts; to follow their natural inclination to sin.

And there is a steep price to pay for such a life. **Suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.** Norman Hillyer observes, "Peter is making a point valid for all generations ... those who give themselves up to the pursuit of materialistic and fleshly pleasures will ultimately so corrupt their own body, mind, and spirit that they lose even the ability to enjoy such pleasures. Sensuality is self-destructive. [**Galatians 6:8**, *For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.*] The self-indulgent striving after pleasure yields diminishing returns, and so ever more extreme efforts have to be made to obtain satisfaction" (p. 199).

Now Peter speaks to the second grand characteristic of these men – their sensuality. **Verse 13b. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you.** These men enjoy pursuing their sinful pleasures 24-7. They *revel in the daytime*. Since antiquity such a lifestyle has been "recognized as a sign of degeneration" (Hillyer, p. 199). **Isaiah 5:11**, *Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!* Usually men avail themselves of the cover of darkness to hide their debauchery. Not these guys. They are absolutely shameless. They'll drink, carouse, and chase women in broad daylight.

The irony in this is that these guys identify themselves with the community of faith. Men, have you ever put an uncapped pen in your pocket by mistake only

to have a co-worker come up to you and say, "Man, Ferrell, your pen has leaked all over the place. You've got a big black stain on your shirt." On account of their sinful lifestyles God says these individuals are blots and blemishes on the true church. So ignorant and shameless are they that they continue to fellowship with the saints, "indulging their own sinful pleasures even as they continue to join with other Christians in celebrating the atoning work of Christ at the church's fellowship meals" (Moo, p. 126).

Verse 14. Having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children. This brood shares a typical and all too common weakness. They are preoccupied with sex. They lust after every woman they see. They view every female as a potential adulteress (M. Green, p. 122). For a time in Nashville, Julia and I sat under the ministry of a pastor who had problems with women. After we had moved to Texas we heard that this same man had taken a church in Fort Worth. Not too long after that we learned that he had had an affair with a church secretary and lost his ministry. *Their eyes never cease from sin.* "They are always looking for women with whom they can satisfy their lustful craving" (Bentley, p. 220). The more illicit sex they have the more they want. They cannot stop! They are driven by raw lust.

They are always on the prowl *enticing unstable souls*. Remember Peter's aim in this letter? He wants to stabilize Christians. Now you can see why. Because it is the theologically, biblically, and morally unstable who are the most easily seduced by false teaching and false teachers. The *unstable* are not those on Paxil or Prozac. They are those not solidly grounded in the truth of the gospel. Alexander Nisbet says, "Those who are not rooted in knowledge by clear

information and frequent meditation on the truth and do not have their hearts established with grace by the frequent exercise thereof, will readily be a prey to soul-deceivers.” This is why we are committed to a faithful, historical, substantial ministry of the Word and Sacrament in this place.

Another common characteristic of this accursed brood is *greed*. Jerome said, “Whereas other vices grow old as a man advances in life, avarice (greed) alone grows young.” This past Monday Adelphia Communications Corporation founder John Rigas was sentenced to 15 years in prison. His son, Timothy, the company’s CFO, was sentenced to 20 years. The judge who sentenced them called the affair “one of the largest frauds in corporate history.” They were found guilty of deceiving investors and stealing about \$100 million from the company for their personal use. By the way, John Rigas is 80 years old (Star-Telegram, June 21, 2004, 2C). Peter says these guys are *trained in greed*. The Greek word translated *trained* here is *gymnazo* from which we get the modern word “gymnasium.” They are in the gym of sin working out, practicing, and exercising in an effort to get stronger in and more proficient at the pursuit of forbidden things. When someone in the church manifests such an attitude, take heed.

And at the end of verse 14 we hear the pronouncement of heaven itself. *Accursed children. Accursed brood.* They are the children of a curse. And in verses 15 and 16 Peter likens them to a character in the Old Testament – Balaam.

Verses 15 and 16. Forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. But he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a

dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. The account of Balaam to which Peter refers is found in Numbers 22-24. Balaam was a prophet. “He appeared on the scene as the Israelites were camped on the plains of Moab, preparing to enter the Promised Land. Balak, king of Moab, desperate to stop the invasion, sought to hire Balaam to curse Israel. Although Balaam consulted God about what he should do, the text makes clear that he was still inclined to go his own way” (Moo, p. 127).

“The heart of the Balaam story and the crux of his dilemma was that he knew what God wanted him to do, and yet for reasons of personal profit he was willing to do the opposite. His moment of decision came when an angel blocked his path with a message from God (Numbers 22:21-35). Balaam was so self-absorbed and unspiritual that he could not see the angel, and spurred his donkey on. But the donkey spoke, rebuking Balaam’s cruelty and spiritual blindness. The Lord then enabled Balaam to see the angel and hear his message” (Lucas/Green, p. 114).

“Balaam, for the sake of monetary gain, left the right way, the path of obedience to God. Balaam tried to seduce the people of Israel to follow immoral practices (Num. 25:1-9; 31:16; Rev. 2:14). More than that, Balaam was out for personal honor and material gain at the expense of God’s people ... “Similarly, the false teachers of Peter’s day are seeking to lure believers into immoral revelry, into having a good time. They are advancing destructive heresies, aimed at making believers deviate from the way of truth” (Hillyer, p. 200).

It has been nearly 2000 since Peter penned this letter to the churches of Asia Minor; 2000 years since the men he described were influencing the churches.

Little has changed. “The same doctrinal errors lead people astray and the same sins of the flesh gain hold on them” (Moo, p. 132). Peter could just as well been “analyzing the church in 2005” (p. 132). We need to be aware that error comes into the church through both the words and the actions of men (and women). False teaching and false living most often go together. “Following bad doctrine leads to bad practice” (p. 133).

It was obvious that such men cannot (and should not) be trusted to represent the true Christian faith. But what about the rest of us who are not charged with teaching in the church? Can we be trusted? Trusted to hold the apostolic faith? Trusted to carry ourselves with humility and love? Trusted to submit to Christ and the authorities He has placed over us? Trusted to preserve the peace of the church. Trusted not to work behind the scenes to accomplish our own selfish agenda? Trusted to live a life in public and private that would adorn the gospel of grace. May God, by His Spirit, make it so.