

A Growth That Endures...



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

Judgment That Does Not Sleep 2 Peter 2:4-10a (731)

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. By now you should be well-acquainted with the big idea for the entire letter: growth in the truth of the gospel fortifies the church against the destabilizing influence of error. You see, the game plan 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 scrimmage line. 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*. This morning in 2:4-10a the Spirit of God instructs us on the theme of divine judgment. And here's the point, the big idea: God is both willing and able to judge sin.

2 Peter 2:4-10a *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 ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, ¹⁰ and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.*

We have come to a most fascinating, even if somewhat disturbing, chapter of Scripture. It deals with the judgment of God. Over the years, I've heard people malign "fire and brimstone" preachers and preaching – preaching that, with intensity and force, speaks to the wickedness of men, the anger of God, and the torments of hell. The phrase "fire and brimstone" describes not only the content of a sermon but its style of delivery as well. It suggests the loud voice, wild eyes, and overcharged gestures of a ranting, raving evangelist.

Admittedly, the idea of divine judgment is not very popular. Many argue that retributive justice is inconsistent with the character of God. A loving God simply would not condemn men and women to hell. To say such a thing confirms that theirs is a god dreamed up in their heads not the God revealed in the Bible.

Exodus 34:6-7, *“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”*

Others argue that the concept of judgment is a relic from a past filled with human ignorance and superstition. It is unworthy of an “enlightened” age and people. Others reject the idea of judgment on account of its perceived inequity. They claim that no sin could possibly be so bad as to merit everlasting, unrelenting torment. Still others scoff and say that the idea of judgment is the result of fearful man’s imagination run wild. All, to one degree or another, reject the idea of judgment because it represents an impediment to sinning. The idea of an accounting takes a little of the fun out of sinning. Others reject the idea of judgment because they have been inoculated by sin; hardened, dulled, calloused to any divine threatening.

Nevertheless, God’s judgment is real. Peter has just said in **verse 3**, *their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep*. Just because you can’t conceive it doesn’t mean it isn’t true. I can’t conceive of a temperature of 80 degrees below zero but my inability to conceive doesn’t change the weather in the Arctic does it?

Peter's main concern in verses 4-10 is not *why* these men will be judged. It is not *when* they will be judged. He doesn't even speculate about *what* their judgment will be like. He does not give a detailed description of the horrors of judgment. Peter's focus is on God. The focus here is not on those who will be judged. The focus is on the Judge Himself. The focus is on God. This passage teaches us a sobering truth about God. This truth is not one that just seems logical. It is not one established on the basis of "good and necessary inference." It is not deduced on the basis of other established facts. No. God by His very acts in history has revealed this to be true of Himself. Here's the point: God is both willing and able to judge sin.

Why does the Holy Spirit include these verses about the judgment of God upon sin? Remember Peter's purpose. His aim is to stabilize Christians. By explaining the ultimate fate of those who perpetrate error among Christians, Peter will, first, help the believers to resist the temptation to follow these guys in their sinful lifestyle. Second, he wants to expose the false teachers for what they are and maybe cause some of them to think twice about what they're doing. Third, he wants to answer their charge that God is not really going to judge men. Fourth, with the teaching about God's power to rescue and deliver the godly he intends to comfort those struggling under the influence of ungodliness. He wants to encourage us to stand.

God is both willing and able to judge sin. To support this point Peter cites three examples of divine judgment from the Book of Genesis. His examples are presented in chronological order. First, Peter recalls God's judgment upon the angels in Genesis 6:1-4. Second, Peter recalls the Flood – God's judgment upon sinful humanity in Genesis 6:5 – 9:17. Third, Peter recalls the destruction of

Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:16 – 19:29. All three are clear and unmistakable acts of divine judgment against sin.

The first example is in **verse 4**. **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.** The angels in view here are those mentioned in **Genesis 6:1-4** and referred to as *the sons of God*. *Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them,² that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."⁴ *The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.* The operative word here is **incarceration**.*

Admittedly this is a mysterious account. From parallel passages in Jude 6 and Revelation 12:7-9 we understand that the wonderful beings [that God created] to serve Him face to face became prideful and rebelled against Him. For their sin they were cast out of heaven. "But Peter is taking us back to the dawn of human history with this strange tale of [these fallen] angels mating with human beings" (Lucas/Green, pp. 95-96). For their great sin God imprisoned them in hell (*pits of darkness*) where they await the final, dreadful judgment.

Peter selects this particular example to press a point. "No one is exempt from judgment, not even the angels ... The proud false teachers claimed that they, at least, were beyond God's judgment. But Peter says that no one, not even the

most glorious, powerful, [and privileged] of those who stand against God, can avoid him" (Lucas/Green, p. 96). Do you have it in your mind that you are just too wealthy, too privileged, too educated, too influential, too anything to be called to account for your sins before the Judge of all that is? Think again, my friend. *If God did not spare even angels when they sinned ...* God is both willing and able to judge sin.

The second example is in **verse 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.** The operative word here is **inundation**. We are familiar enough with the account of the Flood. The *ancient world* was human civilization in the days of Noah. Why did God send the Flood? It is clear from **Genesis 6:5** and **11-12**, *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ... Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.*

Peter selects this particular example to press several points. First, no wickedness shall survive God's judgment. **Hebrews 2:2** assures us that *every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense*. Second, the scope of God's judgment extends to the whole created order. **Genesis 7:21** says, *and all flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind*. It is the prerogative of the Creator to destroy everything He has made. Where shall a sinner hide? Third, judgment is sure no matter how ridiculous the idea sounds. Can you imagine the ridicule Noah had to endure as he opened up his boat building business in the middle of the desert?

“Shem, I think your dad has a real problem. Have you and your brothers considered getting him some counseling?” Have you dismissed God’s judgment as a ridiculous idea; something so remote and distant that you have, for all practical purposes, put it out of your mind? Think again, my friend. *If God did not spare the ancient world ...* God is both willing and able to judge sin.

The third example is found in **verses 6-8. 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 ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds).** The operative word is **incineration**. Peter selects this particular episode to press a main point. The wrath of God will consume the sinner. Peter tells us that God *reduced these cities to ashes* – like the fine powder that remains after the flames have consumed a stack of firewood. Peter goes on to say that this particular demonstration of judgment was and is to serve as an example to sinners.

“The sin of the inhabitants was that of unspeakable sexual immorality and perversion. The city of Sodom has even given its name to an evil practice which is still rampant today” (M. Bentley, p. 214). We call it homosexuality. Peter does not list specific sins that merit such destruction. Indeed, Sodom and Gomorrah is a picture of the fate of any and all who are ungodly “whatever their particular sin or sins should be” (Nisbet, p. 253).

Do you think, for some reason, your fate will be different? Think again, my friend. The word of God says Sodom and Gomorrah are *an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter*. God is both willing and able to judge sin.

Peter then draws his conclusion in **verses 9 and 10a**. **Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,¹⁰ and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority**. In the final phrase (10a) Peter zeroes in on the false teachers specifically.

The Lord knows how. God is both willing and able to judge sin. What is it about God that makes Him willing to judge sin? First, God in His very being – all of His attributes in unison - revolts against sin. God is not a fallen creature like we are. He is the untainted and sinless Creator. He is neither drawn *to* sin nor tempted *by* sin. On the contrary, God cannot look upon sin. Sin provokes His righteous anger. Second, God's zeal for His honor means that He must react to all that brings reproach upon His glorious name. Third, God's governance of His creation demands that injustice, evil, and lawlessness be punished. Fourth, God's declaration is that He will, in fact, judge sin. And God will do what He says He will do. **Isaiah 46:11**, *"Truly I have spoken' truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."* **Isaiah 45:23**, *"The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back."*

The Lord knows how implies that God will actually do it. He will actually accomplish His purposes in judgment. **Isaiah 46:10**, *"My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure."* The basis for His judgment is His holy Law. The time and manner of judgment are, of course, up to Him.

The Lord knows how means more that God knows how to lock folks up (incarceration), make it rain (inundation), or start a big fire (incineration). *The Lord knows how* doesn't mean that God has experience in dealing with difficult people. In other words, that He knows how to handle the situation.

Willing to judge doesn't imply a reluctance or hesitancy; that God is unsure; that He is torn like a divided jury; that He is struggling to reach a verdict. On the contrary, willing is a positive action on the part of God. When the King wills something it is, indeed, His decree. It is His decision. It is His determination to act. It means He is agreeable to it. It is consistent with His holiness, and justice, and yes, even His love. No contradiction or tension exists with the character of God.

God also possesses the ability to judge sin. He alone can condemn. He alone can absolve. His is infinite and absolute authority and God possesses infinite power to back it up. His is infinite wisdom to discern sin. God is able to rightly discern even the thoughts and intention of the heart. In His infinite wisdom He is able to render a perfectly just verdict in every case (Ps. 98:9). **Genesis 18:25** asks, *Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?* In His infinite power He is able to actually execute the sentence. God is both willing and able to judge sin.

I am going to stop at this point. We are going to sing and then I want to resume and to conclude this sermon at the Lord's Table. Let's pray as we do that.

God is both willing and able to judge sin. Peter illustrates this point with historical examples from the Book of Genesis. As compelling as these three are, they do not represent the ultimate example. God's willingness and ability to

judge sin was displayed supremely on the cross of Jesus Christ. It was there that the offended God *condemned sin in the flesh* (**Rom. 8:3**). It was there that His wrath against all ungodliness was poured out in all its fury. It was there that the righteous anger of God was unleashed. All of it exhausted upon His own Son who voluntarily stood in the place of guilty sinners.

Peter uses the three examples of judgment from Genesis to make one other point. It's this: while judgment is **inevitable** it is not **inescapable**. Yes, verse 9 teaches us that *God knows how to keep the unrighteous for the day of judgment*. But it also teaches that *God knows how to rescue the godly*. This is clearly demonstrated in the preservation of Noah through the Flood and the rescue of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah. Certainly, God judged sin on the cross of Christ. But God also ordained the cross, the sacrifice of Christ, as the only way to redeem sinful men and women. Not only does He know how to judge; God knows how to redeem. His Son must die.

My friend, judgment and punishment are inevitable. You may either endure the punishment for your sins yourself (that's what hell is for) or you may avail yourself of God's provision for your rescue. You may receive Jesus Christ and trust His substitutionary work on behalf of sinners. You may flee to Jesus as He is offered to you in the gospel.

It is nothing more or less than the gospel of God's grace in Christ that is set before you in the Lord's Supper. The bread and the cup are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus; the same Jesus who satisfied divine justice by His sufferings and death in the place of sinners.

This Table is prepared for those who have placed their trust in this good Savior, those who have been baptized, and for those who have joined themselves through membership to a church where this gospel is loved and preached. If this does not describe you then we invite you to remain among us and to use this time to reflect upon and consider the way of escape opened up to you in and through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said of the bread, *“This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”* Jesus said of the cup, *“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”*

Heavenly Father, the writer of Hebrews asks, *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (Heb. 2:2)?* O God, open the eyes of each one now to see that *“there is salvation in no one else; for these is no other name [other than Jesus] under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).* We ask this in the name of our Savior, even Jesus. Amen.

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The big idea:

God is both _____ and _____ to judge sin.

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Many argue that retributive justice is _____ with the character of God.

Others argue that the concept of judgment is a relic from a past filled with
human _____ and superstition.

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_____ run wild.

All, to one degree or another, reject the idea of judgment because it represents an
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Others reject the idea of judgment because they have been _____
by sin; hardened to any revealed truth.

God's judgment is _____.
Peter's focus in this passage is on _____.

Three examples of divine judgment from the Book of Genesis:

Verse 4. 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
(see Gen. 6:1-4).

Point: No one is _____ from judgment, not even the angels.

Verse 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 (see Gen. 6:5-9:17).

Three points: First, no wickedness shall _____ God's judgment. Second, the _____ of God's judgment extends to the whole created order. Third, judgment is sure no matter how _____ the idea sounds.

Verses 6-8. 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 men⁸ (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds) (see Gen. 18:16-19:29).

Point: The wrath of God will _____ the sinner.

Verses 9 and 10a. Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,¹⁰ and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

What is it about God that makes Him willing to judge sin?

First, God in His very _____ – all of His attributes in unison - revolts against sin.
Second, God's _____ for His honor means that He must react to all that brings reproach upon His glorious name.
Third, God's _____ of His creation demands that injustice, evil, and lawlessness be punished.
Fourth, God's _____ is that He will, in fact, judge sin (**Is. 46:11, 45:23**).