

2 Peter 2:4-22 – The judgment of false teachers

There will always be false teachers. Many will follow them. They are clever, and work secretly to win followers. But they are not forgotten by God. He has already set a day to judge them. His judgement will be swift and terrible. Now Peter talks about that judgment – so that the churches can understand the danger, and avoid these dangerous people. How much stronger the churches would be if they would listen to Peter!

God has already shown his anger (v1-9)

God will judge the wicked. This is not a new teaching. God has already performed great judgments in the world, that we can remember so that we do not forget. There is a day of judgment when justice will be done. We should not look for all things to be put right before then. But, he has left examples to show just how great and certain his judgment is.

Verse 4 tells us about the original rebellion of many angels, under the leadership of Satan. This is a dark subject – the Bible says very little about it. But it tells us (Jude 6) that those angels were immediately judged, and are kept in darkness until the end of time to be punished.

Verse 5 reminds us about the flood that destroyed the world in Noah's day (Genesis 6-8). God washed away the whole human race, except for 8 people in godly Noah's family. He knows how to judge the world!

Verses 6-8 remind us about Sodom and Gomorrah, two wicked cities where the people were lustful and sexually immoral. They went even into unnatural practices. The world today is telling us that our bodies are our own, and that we should experiment and have fun. But the Bible tells us that we were made by God and must use our lives only under his law. Sexual activity is only for when we have been joined to someone in marriage. Because of their immorality, God destroyed those cities (Genesis 19) with fire from heaven. Yet, he saved his people – godly Lot, who kept himself separate and pure, even whilst he was greatly distressed at the evil of the city. Even if the pure ones are very few, God will remember to deliver them when the wicked are destroyed.

Why God is so angry with false teachers (v9-16)

God is holy and pure. He is upright; all light, with no shadows. Verse 9 tells us that he is angry with the unrighteous. How are these false teachers unrighteous? Verse 10 tells us that these people are led only by their desires. They are fallen and corrupt like all of us – but they give themselves to that corruption. Like animals, verse 12, they follow only what they want now. They live (v13) only to get pleasure for themselves. They see something they want, though it is unlawful, and they fight to get it, no matter how unclean they become (v14). They are greedy for gain, like Balaam the prophet who was led by a desire for money (Numbers 22). They do not care about authorities, but are arrogant and proud. God made us to live in the world under authorities – parents, churches and governments. But these people speak blasphemously about things they know nothing about. They lead others into sin as well (v14), enticing them to follow their corrupt ways (v18). They are not only going to hell themselves, but leading others with them. This is not how man was made to live. He was made to be a humble, hard-working, unselfish, loving servant of God and of his fellow man. But these people live only to please themselves, as if they were gods. God is full of fury towards them – we should tremble. In verse 13 Peter told the church clearly that such people are stains and blemishes and do not belong in the church; we should throw them out.

Conclusion: Better that they had never known the truth at all (v17-22)

Such people are good for nothing, verse 14. What use is a well without water? It promises you something, but leaves you empty. These false teachers speak great, impressive words – but they are empty of spiritual life and blessing. Sadly, many people still follow them, because they promise them pleasure and ease. Will you follow those who promise you good things – or will you follow the narrow way of the truth in Jesus? They are out of control and doomed. Their great promise is “freedom” (v19). But what is freedom? Does it mean you can do anything you desire? That is not freedom. What are your desires? Is it freedom if we desire evil and death and run into it? No – that is slavery. These false teachers are slaves of their own corruptions. True freedom is the freedom to do what we should – to serve God and man with a joyful heart. None of us can be gods; we must all either be the servants of sin or of Christ. Who is your Lord? Who do you live for? Whose servant are you?

These false teachers were worse after hearing the gospel than before. For an unsaved person, there is always hope. They may hear the gospel, repent and be changed by the Holy Spirit. But, the same sun that melts ice also bakes clay. Some people are worse after they hear God's word. They hear it, but they do not change inside. It only changes them for a time on the outside. But inside, they become harder – they become familiar with God's word without knowing its saving power. They start to take it for granted, as nothing of any great importance. They become immune to it. They can then hear it and carry on in sin without feeling any need to repent. It would be better if they had never heard the gospel, rather than hearing it and blaspheming God by running into sin afterwards. Such people need a very mighty miracle from God to save them. None of this should surprise us or make us be discouraged. Verse 22 tells us that such people are only showing their true nature. They are doing what they must. If we are not renewed in our souls by true conversion, then we can only follow evil desires. There are people in the churches who do not know Christ, and they must in the end return to their depravity. Are you truly converted? Does Christ live in your life? Has his Spirit come to dwell with you and change you? Is your Christianity on the outside only? Or have you really been born again by his power? It is vital that you know, and that you seek the Lord until he has truly made you a truly converted person. Where are your desires? What do you long for?