

2Peter 11-10-14a

This is Friday, October 14, 2011. We're in the book of 2 Peter, and we pick up in chapter 2, the section that includes verses 4 through 11. We'll pause at the outset to prepare ourselves by going to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we're grateful for this opportunity to spend time together in the study of your word and fellowship with one another, enjoying the blessings that come through the spiritual gifts that you have distributed in our midst to each one of us. We thank you for this passage and the truth that it contains, and we ask that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate it for each heart and each mind, that we will both individually and collectively be edified, encouraged, and strengthened for the work that you have set before us and preparation for the ages which are to come. We thank you for your grace and your faithfulness toward us, and we ask your blessing on us as we study together.

In Jesus' name, amen. Peter, writing to essentially the same people that he sent his first letter to, the Jews of the Diaspora, the believers scattered in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Bithynia and elsewhere, are reminded by Peter of the same thing that he told them in the first letter, although in a different way. If you keep your place in 2 Peter and flip back a few pages to 1 Peter 2, you'll notice the continuity and the advance in what Peter is sending to these people.

Actually, in 1 Peter, just before chapter 2, chapter 1 verse 22, since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, and then he goes on to talk about love, because in verse 24, all flesh is as grass, glory of man is as the flower of the grass, the grass withers and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever. That's why you and I are here tonight. It is the word of the Lord that compels us.

It is the word of the Lord that interests us. It's the word of the Lord that we recognize as our necessary food, food for our souls. And so Peter goes on to say in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 25, now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you, the word of truth, the eternal truth of God.

So then he goes on in chapter 2 to say, therefore laying aside malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking, as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word, in order that you may grow thereby. And we recognize this. This is why we set aside time for not only the study of God's word together and individually, but also we set aside time to think about it, to meditate on it, to chew on it in the privacy of our own minds or together with our spouse or our family.

This is why we think about it in the times between Bible class, because this is what enables us to grow. If we ever start feeling like we're not really making any advance or any progress in the plan of God, if we don't really see ourselves going from strength to strength and finding ourselves better equipped and more fully furnished unto good works, this is likely to be the problem. This is the first place to look.

Are we really valuing and desiring the sincere milk of the word? Because this is how we grow. We do not grow by works. We don't grow by wishful thinking.

We don't grow by fooling ourselves into thinking that we are maintaining a healthy spiritual life. We grow through the sincere milk of God's word, just like a baby. You can't give a baby Kool-Aid instead of milk.

It will not be healthy. It won't grow. You can't give plants attention or play music for them.

They need water. They need the kind of things that enable plants to grow. You can't just walk by your dwindling plant and wish that it was more healthy.

It needs the actual stuff. Our souls are the same way. As I have said many times, Bible class is not enough.

If the only time we really revisit our spiritual life and our spiritual standing before God is during Bible class, we're never going to grow. We're never going to make any progress. We're never going to be prepared.

God will not be able to use us for anything other than a bad example. We won't be laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven. We won't be fitting ourselves for good works now or in the ages to come.

We will not advance in our ability to reflect the glory of God. We have to meditate. You have to want it like anything else worth having.

Want to lose weight? You have to want it bad enough to change your habits, change your diet, change your exercise plan. You have to want it. You can't just think about it or admire it as a great idea.

That's what Peter is saying. He told them this in his first letter. He has revisited that from a slightly different angle here in the second letter.

He has said, look, this prophetic word that you need to grow by has been given in the Old Testament prophets. And it has been made more sure and certain by the apostolic witnesses who are now communicating the word of God to them. But he says, you've got not only to value it and to recognize it, to pay attention to it and to prioritize it, which is what I've just talked about from the first letter, but you've got to be sure that the word you are paying attention to is the real thing and not a substitute.

I read years ago, and I don't really know if it ended up being sucralose or Splenda or whatever, but back in the 1970s or early 1980s, I remember reading in a scientific journal that they were trying to find something better than saccharin and aspartame and whatnot to sweeten things. The new sugar was bad. Boo on sugar.

I personally think sugar in limited quantities, there's nothing like it. But I think most of you would agree with me. But they said, well, we've done research and we have determined that this sugar molecule has some sort of a right hand twist.

And so they developed the exact same molecule, but twisted the other way. It had a left hand twist. And they said, it's the same molecule and it tastes the same.

But because it's got this opposite twist, it does not digest. And so it just goes straight through your system. And you don't get fat.

You can eat all of it you want. And it's just indigestible. It just goes in one end and out the other.

It's great. I don't know whatever became of that. Somebody probably bought the patent and is sitting on it or because they're either C or H in the C&H sugar company and they don't want the sugar guys to go out of business.

But it's not sugar. It tastes like sugar, but it isn't sugar. And it doesn't have the nutritive value of sugar.

And we all need some sugar. Same thing with or in the same way, I should say, there is genuine truth and there's something that looks like truth and tastes like truth, but it doesn't have the nutritional value. It doesn't have any of the benefits of actual truth.

So this is what Peter is warning his audience about in the second letter in this section. Just as there were false prophets among the people, so there will be false teachers in your midst. First letter, value the word, seek out the word, take in the word, grow thereby.

Second letter, don't be indiscriminate in what you grab and try to grow with. It's got to be the right word of truth. Accept no substitutes, no counterfeits, no pleasant deceptions.

So he has said many are going to start passing out this false truth and many others are going to follow them. All you have to do is look around in our world today to see the truth of this prediction. There is a lot of stuff being passed around, being promulgated, being taught, being published, being pushed on the internet, on the media, on Christian television, Christian radio, and it is not God's truth.

It is a distortion, it's a perversion. It looks like it, sometimes it tastes like it, but it's got an opposite twist. It is indigestible, it is unhelpful at best, and destructive at worst.

Peter says it is destructive. Many will follow these destructive ways, and by destructive it is not only harmful to the genuine Christian faith, it undermines it, gives it a bad name, repels people. Instead of drawing them to Christ, it drives them away from Christ because it is off-putting, it is powerless, it is disappointing, it is empty, it is tasteless, it is non-nutritive, it has no power.

It only has the power to deceive and to disappoint, and it destroys our reward, and our inheritance, and our potential to serve God in the future. When this stuff comes in and takes the place of, this is like eating the worst junk food in the world, and you no longer have an appetite for good food. We are anemic, we are pathetic, we are ill-equipped, unprepared, misguided, doing more harm than good as believers when we fall for these false teachings.

Peter says, don't do it, they are destructive. And that word Apollia and its variants means there is great loss and ruin. Apollia means those two things, loss and ruin.

Judas is described as the son of perdition, almost every time he is mentioned in scripture. Judas who betrayed the Lord, Judas the son of perdition. Jesus praying, actually he is mentioned as the one who betrays the Lord almost every time he is mentioned.

Jesus praying in John chapter 17, that long prayer in John 17 where he is talking to his father and he says, of those you have given me I have lost none except the son of perdition, Judas, the son of Apollia. Ruin and loss, that's what these teachings do, and look how many times he uses it. They bring in these destructive heresies, bring on themselves swift destruction, and many will follow their destructive ways.

Destruction, destructive, destructive. Because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed, driving people away from Christ. I can't think of anything that would incur a more severe penalty than impeding someone who is trying to find the truth of Christ, whether in salvation or to grow as a believer.

And for another believer to be standing in the way, we become an enemy of the cross. So, if you think about all this and wrap it all up into one idea, it is very important for us to not only seek the truth, but to ensure that we have got hold of the truth and that we have not been led astray with destructive heresies. You think, well, now come on, I'm at Grace and Truth Bible Church and we study in Greek and Hebrew and blah, blah, blah.

There are areas of deception that go beyond what we hear and go beyond what we believe. It can enter in in the area of application. We can be comfortable with things that have gone on in our society because Christian teachers tell us that this is how it should be done.

People can say, well, Christians need to band together and change society, or Christians need to vote for this guy or not vote for that guy, or Christians need to fill in the blank, dot, dot, dot. Well, maybe, maybe not. It is not enough to hear and it is not enough to assent to the accurate teaching of the Word of God.

You remember our interpretive triangle, right? Observe, interpret, what? Apply. I am often here for the observation. I am often here for the interpretation.

But I am almost never there for the application, except my own. And I can mess up the

application, you can mess up the application, or we can have our application modified and conditioned by other things that didn't really come from the Word of God. Think about the weight of church tradition and the influence that it has had on ordinances, on stewardship, on modes of worship and assembly.

There is very little in the Word of God specified in any of those areas, but we have large brick edifices built in all of those areas, don't we? There are huge bodies of thought and conclusion on ordinances, huge bodies of thought and practice when it comes to what is considered to be biblical stewardship, what is considered to be the mission of believers in this life. Your primary function is to evangelize and so on. And it is easy to fall in.

And these are just examples. There are many more specific examples that pertain in our individual life, when we speak up and when we don't, what we do and what we don't do, how we live our lives in the world. This is what Peter is talking about.

This is some of the most practical information we could ever get in the New Testament. In 2 Peter 2, when he says, by covetousness, and this is not only their own covetousness, these bringers of destructive heresies, but they pander to and manipulate the covetousness that all of us are born with. Everybody has a wanting streak.

We desire things. And in moderate doses, desire is a good thing. In moderate doses, we call this desire ambition or drive or dedication.

I want to finish what I start. I want to provide for my family. I want to be a good spouse or a good parent or a good child or a good student or a good employee.

We want certain things. And in moderation and channeled in the right direction with the right objective, these are wonderful drives. But, like many other things that are good in moderation, to excess, these drives can become sinful and even evil.

And this is where Peter is going in this chapter. He's going to move from godly modes of behavior to the excessive ones that become ungodly. Well, these heresy purveyors know about the drives of the human heart.

People want security. People want acceptance. By the way, all you have to do is look around at the membership tactics for large churches to see that there is a strategy of appealing to the desire for acceptance.

You see a big billboard when you're driving down the highway. It's got a church name on it. And it says something about, you know, come have a good time with us.

Come to a place where you're accepted. It's a family place. It's comfortable.

It doesn't say we rigorously teach the truth of God's word. It doesn't say we stand against heresy

and falsehood. It doesn't say come here and get the sincere milk of the word by which you will grow.

They will typically often underplay their teaching ministries, which they may have. But what is the appeal? A group of smiling people, usually culturally diverse people, several of them, all smiling. And it looks like, wow, that looks like a club I would want to join.

What are they doing? They're hooking into our desire for something. Desire for fellowship. Desire for acceptance.

Nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with wanting to be accepted. Nothing wrong with wanting to be part of a fellowship.

But is that the reason we go to church? Well, shouldn't be. By covetousness, they will exploit you. We lure them with something.

Entertainment. We will send you to heights of emotional inspiration and ecstasies with our music and our corporate experience. You know, come experience worship with us.

If you ever see a slogan like that, it's a little, at least a small caution flag. We don't go to church for experience, although we can have great experiences at church, but it's not why we go. Don't let anybody exploit you by tapping into your often God-given healthy desires.

But they manipulate them. They turn them. They shift them.

They try to change their target and their focus by covetousness, by desires. These words, epithumia and so on, are used for, Paul says, I've got a great epithumia to see you. And then he turns right around in a couple of paragraphs and says, watch out for these unhealthy epithumias.

It just means desire. Some desires are good, some aren't. They will exploit you with deceptive words.

And once again, that's not the teaching of the truth of the word of God. That is not reflecting the truth of who God is, what his plan is, what the program and purpose is for us. It's not right.

It is a deception. And that's where these things begin to go astray. Then he goes into this section that we're now in, and he says, their judgment has not been idle.

It was bothering me because I couldn't quite get a handle on that these past couple of weeks, and I did a little more work on it. And what this really means is, this was sort of a figure of speech, and we would understand it better if it was expressed in the opposite way. Instead of saying, not been idle, we would say, their judgment has been busily accumulating.

If it isn't idle, what is it doing? It's actively building. If you've got a bunch of workmen and they're idle, if it's siesta time, they're just sitting in the shade, smoking and talking. This is the opposite of

that.

Their destruction has been accumulating. It has been building. Think about that.

We say, well, their destruction is building. What does building mean? It means constructing. Well, that's the opposite of being idle.

So, in colloquial English, we would say, by covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words. For a long time, their judgment has been steadily building. Every time they deceive again, every time they manipulate through covetousness, it builds more judgment.

And by the way, we have seen in other passages that this is one of the ways we know that we're talking about believers. The judgment for unbelievers does not build. The judgment for unbelievers does not accumulate.

We saw this in Romans, where those who by patient continuance in well-doing are seeking for glory and honor and immortality, but others who lie and do not the truth and so on, are storing up unto themselves wrath in the day of wrath and indignation, the righteous judgment of God. Remember that? Storing up unto themselves wrath. We have a lot of wonderful capabilities as believers.

One of the unwonderful capabilities that we have as believers, that unbelievers don't have, is we can store up not only treasure in heaven, blessing and reward, we can also store up judgment. We can build and accumulate judgment. It can grow and get bigger over time if you're a believer.

For unbelievers, there is only one judgment. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life. The wrath of God abides on him.

The books are opened, and another book which is of life, and anyone not found written in that book is cast into the lake of fire. Not depending on how high up their name is, a hotter or cooler part of the lake of fire. Not a sort of judgment or a greater judgment.

Hot spots in hell, not found in scripture. For unbelievers, there is one uniform judgment, and it is destruction in the lake of fire. Same for everybody.

Small, great, evil, nice, shirt-off-your-back, good guy, never believed in Christ. Same lake of fire as the worst, mass-murdering, atheistic, godless, ne'er-do-well that ever lived. Because it is gone-ness.

It is no more-ness in the lake of fire. But, for believers, and these false teachers are believers, they are storing up for themselves wrath. For a long time, their judgment has been actively building, not idle.

It doesn't sit there in one place at one level. The more they do this, you look around, you know

the names of some believers who are doing this through the media actively. And I think, through the deceitfulness of the heart, they probably think they are doing something good.

And because they are not examining themselves to see if they are in the faith, this is something we have to do. Our heart will deceive us, and you don't want to wind up with the judgment deceived. We have got to appeal to God, get down on our knees, and ask Him to show us.

Remember David prayed, and he said, Lord, show me my secret faults. We have to genuinely, earnestly, sincerely go to God and say, Lord, if I am in the wrong, if I am failing in some way, show me. Purge me with hyssop so that I can be clean.

Wash me. Make me whiter than snow. Expose my hidden faults.

Help me to see them so that I can fix them. I don't want to go blithely tripping up to the judgment seat to be a big flash fire, and then useless in the kingdoms that come. Who would want that as a believer? But these individuals deceive themselves, and then go about deceiving others.

And their judgment does not stay at one level. It builds. And their destruction, their apolia, their loss and ruin, isn't asleep.

It's awake and growing. So then we have this section. If God did not spare the angels who sinned.

Now, you can find most commentaries. I was looking at a study note in the NIV study Bible on this passage. And they say, well, some people think that this is the angels who kept not their first estate and intermarried with humans, but angels are spirits, and they don't seem to be able to marry according to what Jesus said in Matthew.

Therefore, it is best to understand this as Satan and the demons. And then in the next verse, where it says they are imprisoned in Tartarus, they say, well, apparently some angels are in Tartarus and others aren't, and we don't really know why. You know, some are loose to plague people and others aren't.

Well, I disagree. Respectfully, but I disagree. And here's why.

Step back and look at this. Look at verses 4 and 5. God did not spare the angels who sinned, but saved Noah. Then you look at verses 6 and 7. Judging the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and delivering Lot.

You see that? And if you look at these in detail, Peter sets up these two situations. Here are the angels that sinned, but Noah is delivered. Here are the cities that were vastly wicked, and here's who was delivered.

So with that structure, with that symmetry, which is a Hebrew way of thinking, and Peter is an

Israelite, you know, a Galilean of the Galileans, if there ever was one, he thinks in those Old Testament symmetrical terms. And this is a parallel. So that strongly suggests, and I would say indicates, that the situation from which Noah is delivered is caused by these angels who sinned.

In the same way that the judgment that Lot is delivered from is caused by the evil people in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are two pericopes, two parallel situations. And we've studied them in detail.

And he delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked. This is some real interesting Greek. I wish I had time to go into all of the convolutions of it.

But suffice it to say that the word righteous is oddly constructed, and the word order is such that, even though this is active in form, but the syntax suggests both an active and a passive, so that. A good way to translate this, in my humble opinion, would be, and delivered righteous Lot, who, well, go on to verse 8. This is really where the word order helps us out. It says, And to try to make good English out of this, they've reversed it.

And verse 8 helps us really understand verse 7. So let me give you a little bit of this from the Greek. It says, Those are the first five words in verse 8. Now, blemati, this is the BLE, that's like from blepo, right? To see. And ekoue, you know, it's like acoustics, what he heard.

So, and then the post-positive gar there goes up in the front in English. So we say for, seeing, or in what he saw, and in what he heard. And then you have the word dikaios.

Some manuscripts have ha-dikaios, but it's really better without the article. And then you have en katoikon, dwelling in their midst, day after day, hameron, ex hameros. Then it says, suke dikaion, and this is his righteous soul.

Then you have anomois ergois e basanizin. And the vexing is the very last word. So obviously in English you have to re-scramble it.

But if you didn't follow all that, here's the bottom line. It's a very interesting way to put the sentence because on the one hand it suggests that Lot's sight and hearing were constantly made uncomfortable through what he saw and what he heard. But vexed is in the singular and it is referring to Lot.

Lot vexed his own soul. His righteous eyes and his righteous ears, or what he should have been looking at being righteous and what he heard should have been righteous. But instead he, by choice, dwelt in Sodom.

And so there is an element of culpability. It's partly, at least, his own fault. Doesn't excuse the men of Sodom for being who and what they were, but Lot is put in the active here.

Now, why would I agonize through all of that? We often have a choice as to how much of what

we see and what we hear is vexing to righteous eyes and righteous ears. And this is a decision we have to make and it is individual in some cases. It's parents for their children in some cases.

But how much do we tolerate, for example, in entertainment? How many suggestive scenes? How much filthy language? And by the way, language is an issue unto itself. I mean, there are things that are culturally considered to be not decent or not fit for polite company, but if you stop and think about it, there are some things that are in fact really inappropriate. And there are other things that have just been deemed that way by a very high standard that might not pertain.

Everybody's got to make this decision for themselves. Here's the point. The Bible doesn't say, Thou shalt not say the following list of four-letter words or Thou shalt not look upon the following list of indecent situations or whatever.

It's left to our judgment. Well, you can look at Lot as an example of bad judgment and what he was willing to put up with. And as I say that, the English major part of me is constantly reminded that you don't end a sentence in a preposition and that ends a sentence in two prepositions.

When I say, what are you willing to put up with? But if you try to fix that and you say, how do we choose what we up with put? So, forget that rule for now. There are some things up with which I will not put. We have to make that choice.

Think about it. Lot is made culpable here. He's vexing his own soul by sticking around in Sodom.

And this had an effect, notice, after the destruction. When you read in Genesis 19, Lot doesn't seem to have, you wonder what he was thinking when he offers his two daughters to the perverts outside. Well, is that evidence of a wearing down of his moral sensibilities and his family responsibilities, his responsibilities to his daughters as a father that he would cast them to the wolves, so to speak? You have to wonder.

Later on, after the cities are destroyed and they go away and you suddenly have the conception and birth of Moab and Ammon, you think about those daughters. Where did they get such a notion to get their father drunk and then to commit incest with him on purpose in order to get pregnant because they wanted children? Well, where did those ideas come from? That Lot took his family to Sodom. Lot dwelt by choice in Sodom because the grass around the city was greener for his flocks and herds.

So, Peter draws our attention very tactfully to this. Even though God reserved those cities and the people who dwelt therein for judgment, Lot brought vexation on his own soul and vexed his own eyes and his own ears by what looks very much like a poor choice of place to live based on a bad set of priorities. And you look at the results.

His wife couldn't even stick with him to get out of the city. What's the matter with her? Was he having difficulty getting out of the city once he found out how evil it was because his wife couldn't

bear to leave? Maybe. You look at the downward influence on his family.

Which is the chicken and which is the egg? Was it the cause of them going to Sodom in the first place or did being in Sodom take them even further or is it both? But it is food for thought. And Peter complicates this sentence a little bit so that even as he is making his point about how God can deliver his people out of judgment, what about culpability? Noah was a proclaimer of righteousness in a line of proclaimers of righteousness. And so that's one example.

Then you get to the similar analogous situation and Lot is kind of at the other end of the spectrum. It doesn't say, and Lot, the proclaimer of righteousness, does it? It says, Lot, who lived in a state of vexation through what he saw and what he heard. And he too was delivered.

But you wonder, what is the nature of that deliverance in the eternal future? Where will Noah rank in the reward and blessing of Old Testament saints? And where is Lot going to rank in the reward and blessing of Old Testament saints? I don't think their houses are going to be side by side. It's an admonishment. It is a caution for us to decide.

What is really important? Is entertainment, is enjoyment, is some sort of pleasure, some sort of green grass causing us to compromise in ways that we should not? Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. It isn't my place to make that decision for anyone else. It isn't anyone else's place to make that decision for me.

We all will stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ and there will be no finger pointing to other people. We will stand and give an account of ourselves. So, as Paul says, let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.

Situations vary. Weaknesses and strengths vary. There are some people who can indulge in a thing and it has no effect because it's not an area of weakness for them.

There are other people that very same thing can destroy them or their family because there is a weakness. There is less strength in that area. That's why God has given us discretion.

Don't look over the fence. Don't think about anybody else. It is up to us to manage our own souls, our own households and make the decision for ourselves in this area.

But you look at Noah. Both of their families come into view, don't they? Noah and 1 Peter, Peter does make an issue of the eight souls. That's why people so often I think miss the eighth preacher of righteousness here because they just go back to 1 Peter and say, Oh, look, Peter has already talked about the eight people.

Well, family is in view and you think about Lot and the tragic outcome of his family. Noah doesn't lose anybody in his family. All eight people are delivered.

How many come out unscathed in the Lot deliverance? Nobody, really. I think in some ways you

almost feel sorry for Lot and wish he hadn't been delivered. He wouldn't have had these Moabites and Ammonites plaguing the people of Israel ever after.

Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll continue examining this very fascinating section of 2 Peter chapter 2.