

Peter's Epistles #40

False Teachers and False Teaching

2nd Peter 2:1-22

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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Introduction:

Having devoted our previous installment of this series to the subject of false teaching, false teachers, and false organizations, we may now proceed with our verse by verse treatment of 2nd Peter; as noted last time, chapter two, our present context, is largely devoted to that very subject.

Peter, as we saw, was writing to the believers of Asia minor, communicants of the same group of churches first evangelized and founded by the apostle Paul, ministered to by him and his circle, then by Jude, and, after Peter's martyrdom, by the apostle John. More so than Jerusalem and Judea, more so than Rome and Italy or mainland Greece, Asia minor was the epicenter of the explosion of gentile believers into the Church at this time, and it was no doubt for this reason that the churches there came under such exceptional attack by the visible and invisible forces of the evil one. Recognizing these attacks and properly defending against them was of critical importance to the spiritual welfare and advance of the believers in this cradle of Church Age growth. So Peter, as Paul and Jude before him and John afterwards, is led by the Spirit to devote a good deal of his epistle to combating this problem.

Paragraph I (vv. 1-3)

(1) But there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who shall introduce destructive false doctrines – even denying the Master who bought them – and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. (2) And many will follow their lascivious ways so that the way of truth will be subject to blasphemy on their account. (3) And in their greed they will exploit you for profit by means of their fraudulent teachings. [God's] condemnation upon them long since has not been lying dormant, and [His impending] destruction of them has not been slumbering.

2nd Peter 2:1-3

But (v.1a):

(1a) *But* there arose among the people . . .

2nd Peter 2:1a

The adversative conjunction *de* here ("but") provides a contrast between the content in chapter one and that of chapter two. Peter, we recall, had just described the preeminence of the Word of God, affirming that it is superior even to personal experience of miraculous events – because the

Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Pet.1:16-21). Believers all understand – or certainly should – that there is nothing more important in this life than God's Word: reading it, learning from it, applying it, and living by it. Through the Word, taught by prepared and gifted men and made clear to us by the Spirit when we believe it, we grow to spiritual maturity, are enabled to pass whatever testing may come our way, and are prepared to minister to others, thus winning the three crowns of reward which will delight us for all eternity even as they glorify our dear Lord Jesus Christ. "But", Peter reminds us, there is and has always been opposition to our primary task in this world of learning, applying and ministering the truth of the Word. And that opposition comes straight from the devil through the false teachers, false teaching and false organization which Satan empowers and deploys.

False Prophets (v.1b):

(1) there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you . . .
2nd Peter 2:1b

Under the Law, false prophets of the sort mentioned here were to be dealt with severely so that the people might not be led astray.

(1) If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, (2) and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," (3) you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. (4) It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. (5) That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.
Deuteronomy 13:1-5 NIV

"The people" mentioned in our context are the nation of Israel, God's holy nation, specially chosen by Him to be the guiding light for all the nations of the world (Is.42:6; 49:6; 60:3), a witness of God's truth unto salvation (Is.42:6; 49:6-8). As such, every single person in Israel was supposed to be a believer, with all who refused to follow the Lord to be put to death (Deut.13:5-18; cf. Deut.27:26; Jer.11:3). Of course, historic Israel fell far short of that perfect standard.

If a liar and deceiver comes and says, "I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer," he would be just the prophet for this people!
Micah 2:11 NIV

According to our context, false teachers are the equivalent of the false prophets who troubled Israel throughout her history and led the people astray, away from the Lord. Similarly today, false teachers throughout the church-visible are accomplishing the same diabolical purpose.

Peter's use of the future tense here indicates that in addition to the contemporary situation he was dealing with (the very one that Jude had previously addressed), things would become much worse in this regard in the eschatological future. The intensification of false teaching we are presently experiencing in our own day is a clear sign of the coming of the end, and we may expect that noxious trend to continue apace until exploding into never-before-seen excesses of deception once the Tribulation commences and antichrist launches his world religion.

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.

1st Timothy 4:1 (cf. 2Tim.3:1-9)

Destructive False Doctrines (v.1c):

(1) . . . destructive false doctrines . . .

2nd Peter 2:1c

The word translated "false doctrines" above is the Greek *hairesis* from which our English word "heresy" is derived. It means, literally, "divisions", that is to say, teachings which, not being true, tend to divide believers against each other when taught and accepted as true. Peter qualifies this with the Greek word *apoleia*, "destructive" (lit., "of destruction"), a word which refers to the most terrifying destruction imaginable, the destruction of faith in apostasy, the loss of salvation resulting in condemnation.

(13) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction (*apoleia*), and many enter through it. (14) But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Matthew 7:13-14 NIV

In other words, there is nothing in this world more dangerous than pernicious teaching, false teachings introduced by deceitful individuals, no matter how attractive or reasonable these are made to sound – because such lies lead right off the cliff into the lake of fire for those foolish enough to follow.

"Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Matthew 15:14 ESV

Denying the Master (v.1d):

(1) . . . even denying the Master who bought them

2nd Peter 2:1d

Since salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, His perfect person, with both divine and human natures since the incarnation, and His perfect work, the "blood of Christ", His spiritual death for us in the darkness on the cross, sowing doubt about Him is the ultimate heresy, the epitome of dangerous false teaching. Other false teachings may undermine a person's faith.

After all, every truth contained in scripture is there for a reason and we build one truth on another in spiritual growth; but deconstructing our spiritual edifice by paying heed to false and heretical teaching reverses the process and lends momentum to a downward spiritual trend.

Attacking the truth about Jesus Christ, moreover, is going straight to the jugular. For when that source of confidence is cut, the life blood of salvation will surely drain away. We are saved through faith in Christ, but only believers are saved (Jn.3:36). If a Christian stops believing in Jesus Christ, by denying Him, who He is, undiminished deity and true humanity in one perfect person forever (our "Master"), or by denying what He has done for us by purchasing us from perdition through His "blood", His saving work on the cross in being judged for all of our sins (it is He who "bought us"), then said person is no longer a Christian because a Christian is a person who believes in Jesus Christ, His person and His work.

(17) For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith (lit., "is not in a state of belief") in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son. John 3:17-18

In their intent to peel believers away from their faith, away from their salvation, we see the despicable nature of false teachers and their false teaching at its most contemptible. This is the outcome the devil desires, and these individuals are most certainly servants not of Christ but of Satan.

For certain men have slipped in among you unawares, men who long ago were destined for this very doom, ungodly men who substitute lasciviousness for the grace of our God and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:4

We saw in our previous installment of this series the means by which these so-called "teachers" of the past distorted the truth (with a variety of Gnostic false doctrines), and there is certainly no lack of false teaching today about our Lord and what He did for us. Any person, group or "doctrine" which calls into question the deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ (since the incarnation), or the work of Christ (in being judged for every single human sin, past and present) is part and parcel of the same satanic operation described here by Peter, meant to doom the human race to damnation – and to capsize the faith of believers most of all. Apostasy, as we affirmed and documented in detail at the beginning of the previous study, is a very real possibility, and will become even more of a danger once the Tribulation begins. Believers who are lackadaisical about spiritual growth, progress and production have always been vulnerable to spiritual decline, whose ultimate end, if allowed to proceed unchecked to its natural conclusion, is apostasy (or the sin unto death). Giving any credence whatsoever to purveyors of any false teaching which questions the precious truths about our Savior is incredibly stupid – and can be lethal to one's faith.

(19) Now we see that they (i.e., the Exodus generation) were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their *unbelief* [lack of faith]. (1) So let us beware lest any of

you should seem to fall short [on this score], by casting aside [God's] promise [in a similar way]. (2) For we have had the gospel proclaimed to us just as they did. But the Word they heard did not profit them, for, though they heard it, they did not mix it **with faith**. (3) Therefore it is we who **believe** who enter into this rest [not those without faith], just as He has said . . .
Hebrews 3:19 - 4:3a

Swift Destruction (v.1e):

(1) . . . and bringing swift destruction upon themselves.
2nd Peter 2:1e

The Greek word translated "destruction" here is the same as the one used earlier in this verse. For the offense of leading believers astray unto spiritual destruction, these false teachers – men whose eternal damnation is in no doubt – will suffer physical destruction, and that judgment will come upon them swiftly. This is a great comfort to us who believe and are having to endure an increasing cacophony of heresies in these late days of the Laodicean era of the Church Age (2Tim.3:13). Whatever success teachers of falsehood may seem to have, whatever benefits they may seem to enjoy, whatever trouble they manage to inflict upon us and upon those we care about, we can take encouragement in the truth shared here with us by the Holy Spirit that they will, in relatively short order, all suffer an abysmal end concomitant with the damage they have done, a destruction which will sweep them away swiftly without any opportunity to take refuge from it.

[These types], though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. In the same way that Jannes and Jambres (i.e., types of the beast and his false prophet) opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. But they will **not** keep on striding forward forever. Their folly will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those two.
2nd Timothy 3:7-9

(14) Enoch, the seventh descendent of Adam also previously prophesied about these sorts, saying, "Behold! The Lord has come with His holy multitudes, (15) to render judgment against [them] all, to convict everyone of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed and of all the harsh words [these] ungodly sinners have spoken against Him".
Jude 1:14-15

Many Will Follow (v.2):

(2) And many will follow their lascivious ways . . .
2nd Peter 2:2a

Peter here intimately connects the false teaching and the false teachers with those foolish enough to follow them. The word translated "lascivious" is the Greek *aselgeia* and refers to wanton, licentious debauchery and excess, namely, all manner of illicit, fleshly indulgence, often referring to sexual sinning of various types but not limited to that area of indecency (Mk.7:22; Rom.13:13;

2Cor.12:21; Gal.5:19; Eph.4:19; 1Pet.4:3; 2Pet.2:7; 2Pet.2:18).

For certain men have slipped in among you unawares, men who long ago were destined for this very doom, ungodly men who substitute lasciviousness (*aselgeia*) for the grace of our God and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:4

Important to note here is that Peter characterizes those who will end up following these false teachers and their false teachings as "many", not necessarily a majority but certainly a staggeringly large number of believers. This prophesy jibes perfectly with what we know from elsewhere in scripture about the Great Apostasy, namely that during the Tribulation it will claim one third of the Church by turning quondam believers away from their prior faith in Christ, as a result of being caught up in the deceit of antichrist's religion so as to worship Satan instead.¹

And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with evil leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2).

Daniel 8:10

And [the dragon's] (i.e., the devil's) tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven (i.e., both fallen angels and fallen believers) and threw them to the earth (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy and consequent association with them in their fall).

Revelation 12:4a

The Way of Truth Will be Subject to Blasphemy (v.2):

(2) . . . so that the way of truth will be subject to blasphemy on their account.

2nd Peter 2:2b

Jesus Christ is the only "Way" to salvation (Jn.14:6; cf. 2Pet.2:21); every other "way" besides this one and only strait and narrow Way leads to destruction (Matt.7:13-14; cf. 2Pet.2:21). The "way of truth" is thus the gospel in its full, biblical sense; that is, not merely the basic knowledge necessary for salvation but the entire realm of doctrine in scripture, the whole truth of the kingdom whose King we are blessed to serve. False teaching of the Gnostic sort in particular which leads believers (or unbelievers who present themselves as "Christian" but truly are not) to behave in a licentious and unsanctified manner brings reproach upon the Name of Jesus Christ.

For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written (Is.52:5).

Romans 2:24 NKJV

¹ See in Coming Tribulation, part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

This bad report is said to come here primarily from the followers rather than the leaders, a reminder that as Christians we are always giving a "witness of the life", whether good or bad (Matt.5:16). If it be a case of those who are in truth not (or no longer) believers in Christ acting in scurrilous ways that bring reproach upon the Lord, that is one thing. But there is little worse for an actual believer in Christ than to cause His Name and our faith ill repute. And of one thing we can be sure, our dear Savior does not put up with such conduct forever.

(30) For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. (31) For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. (32) But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

1st Corinthians 11:30-32 NKJV

(19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions (21) and envy; drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Galatians 5:19-21

Exploitation for Profit (v.3a):

(3) And in their greed they will exploit you for profit by means of their fraudulent teachings.

2nd Peter 2:3a

In this verse we see the motivation (greed), the objective (profit), the means (fraudulent teaching), and the effect (exploitation) of false teachers . . . in the case of any and all who are foolish enough to pay them any heed. Where there is no honor – and the devil has no honor (how much less those who serve him) – there are no scruples regarding what is taught; the only consideration on the part of these false teachers is how best to exploit those who give them a hearing, how best to draw them in and then set the hook. Indeed, the phrase "fraudulent teaching" above is, literally, "made-up words", teaching, that is to say, which only ever intersects with the actual truth in rare instances to give it a patina of legitimacy. The false teachings of such charlatans are therefore merely the "teachings of men" (Col.2:22).

(7) "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: (8) 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. (9) And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' (Is.29:13)."

Matthew 15:7-9 NKJV (cf. Mk.7:7)

Since the days of the Pharisees and in the case of many a mega-cult teacher today, greed has ever been a strong motive for wolves in sheep's clothing to engage in false teaching for the purpose of exploiting the simple-minded. As our context indicates, a powerful draw for the false teaching Peter is inveighing against here has to do with allowing, justifying and even encouraging sexual sin (which also forms part of their own, personal evil motivation: 2Pet.2:14).

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence."
Matthew 23:25 NIV

Condemnation not Dormant (v.3b):

(3) [God's] condemnation upon them long since has not been lying dormant, and [His impending] destruction of them has not been slumbering.
2nd Peter 2:3b

This sentiment is very close to what we saw Peter say at the end of verse one ("bringing swift destruction upon themselves"). However, the word "condemnation" here (Greek *krisis*, [punitive] judgment) looks farther forward, not to their painful exit from this world that is the recompense for their foul behavior (i.e., their "swift destruction"), but to their "condemnation" at the Great White throne judgment of Jesus Christ, the so-called "last judgment" (Rev.20:11-15; cf. Matt.25:31-46), and their subsequent casting into the lake of fire, which constitutes their "impending destruction" (i.e., the "second death": Rev.2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8).²

As awful as false teachers are and as awful as their false teaching is and will be, especially under the umbrella of antichrist's religion which will be responsible for so much apostasy and persecution of true believers, nevertheless we cannot forget that they will be justly recompensed in a most frightful way, in being destroyed while still on this earth, then condemned at the last judgment, so as to suffer the most horrible eternal end.

"But as for the cowardly and unbelieving and foul and murderers and the sexually immoral and those involved in the occult and idolaters and ***all those who are liars*** – their portion (i.e., "inheritance") will be in the lake burning with fire and sulfur which is the Second Death."
Revelation 21:8

So no matter how much distress false teachers may have personally caused us and those we love, their fate is to join the long list of those who opposed the Lord – and were destroyed for doing so: e.g., Egypt (Gen.15:14; Ex.14:19-31); Assyria (Is.10:5-19); historical Babylon (Ps.137:8; Is.13:1-22); Edom (Jer.49:7-22); Moab (Is.25:10-12); and last but certainly not least, mystery Babylon (Rev.18:1-24).

Paragraph II (vv. 4-10a)

(4) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into the gloomy pits of Tartarus (i.e., the Abyss) and consigned them to be guarded there under punishment for [the day of] judgment, (5) and did not spare the antediluvian world, but kept Noah safe as a proclaimer of righteousness along with the seven with him, when He

² *N.b.*: the "second death" is ***not*** the cessation of existence but an eternal result so horrible that "death" is used to describe it in contrast to "eternal life" (cf. Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:49-50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; 25:41-46; Lk. 13:28; Rev.21:8).

brought the flood upon the ungodly inhabitants of the world, (6) and condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, reducing them to ashes and making an example of them for those bent on similar ungodly behavior, (7) and rescued righteous Lot who was tormented by the depraved lifestyle of those lawless men – (8) for through the things he saw and heard just by dwelling among them this righteous man was torturing his righteous heart day by day by [exposure to] their lawless deeds. (9) For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under guard in punishment for [the day of] judgment – (10a) especially those who in their lust pursue the polluting of the flesh and so despise [God's] divine authority.
2nd Peter 2:4-10a

Angels (v.4):

(4) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into the gloomy pits of Tartarus (i.e., the Abyss) and consigned them to be guarded there under punishment for [the day of] judgment . . .
2nd Peter 2:4

Here Peter begins a long anacoluthon, a grammatical non sequitur which never completes the expected construction. Specifically what we have here are two examples of God's judgment upon behavior which threatens believers, both of which end in an aposiopesis, namely, the leaving out of the obvious conclusion – so obvious that stating it would detract from the effect of what precedes (cf. in English, "If you dare to do that, then . . . "; cf. Rom.9:22-24 in the Greek). Our God is merciful and longsuffering beyond any human measure (Lam.3:22-23; Mal.3:6; Rom.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; 3:15; cf. (Ex.34:5-7; Is.30:18; Is.48:9; 1Tim.2:4; 1Jn.4:7-19), but, for the sake of preserving the righteous, He will not tolerate evil behavior forever.

(9) For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under guard in punishment for [the day of] judgment – (10a) especially those who in their lust pursue the polluting of the flesh and so despise [God's] divine authority.
2nd Peter 2:9-10a

In our context, both examples demonstrate God's intolerance of gross sinfulness which endangers believers: 1) in verses 4-5, of the demons who almost destroyed the human race through the engendering of the nephilim who would have destroyed Noah and his family, the last believers alive on the earth; and 2) in verses 6-8, of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose conduct was on the cusp of swamping the faith of righteous Lot, the only believer therein. In both cases, moreover, as the previous quote demonstrates, what we have are examples of gross sexual misconduct of the sort which the contemporary Gnostic teachers were justifying.

(5) While you [already] know all these things, I want to remind you that although the Lord saved [all] His people from the land of Egypt at the start, in the end He destroyed those who proved unfaithful, (6) and the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation, He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of the judgment of that great day, (7) just as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities; for they all prostituted

themselves in the same manner as these [angels] did, having pursued sexual relations [lit. "flesh"] inappropriate for them (i.e., outside of the natural order). [And so it is that] they have been appointed an example and incurred the penalty of eternal fire. (8) In the same way these [false teachers], deluding themselves with false visions, defile their flesh, reject all authority, and bring slander against angels (i.e., Gnostic "combat" with aeons).

Jude 1:5-8

We are thus invited to compare and apply these historical examples to the "condemnation" and "[impending] destruction" of the false teachers mentioned in the previous verse. Truly, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" for judgment (10:31) – or certainly should be seen to be by any human being with the slightest amount of spiritual common sense. But that is lacking on the part of the false teachers Peter is contesting with for the faith of his charges in the churches of Asia Minor (just as Jude had done as evidenced in the quote above). Peter does not hope to change their behavior, servants of Satan that they are, but in the Spirit he does have hopes of warning off the recipients of this letter from following these scurrilous characters so as to share in their judgment, condemnation and destruction. By appealing to these two notable precedents in scripture, precedents which Jude had previously employed as well, Peter purposes to shake his readers out of their present complacency and instill some godly trepidation into the hearts of any and all who have been attracted for whatever reason to these dangerous false teachings.

Peter's first example – of conduct the Lord will not tolerate so that false teachers (and by implication any and all foolish enough to follow them) ought to beware – has to do with the outrageous violation by demons of the basic ground rules God has set for angelic interaction with the human race. Angels, being far more powerful than we are (at present) could easily destroy all of humanity in short order. That being the case, there are clear limits to what demons are allowed to do – there must be, otherwise we would not still be here. But during the days before the great flood, the devil attempted a particularly sinister and (he must have thought at any rate) clever gambit whose end game would have been that very destruction of humanity demons are otherwise forbidden to engage in, albeit in a much more subtle way than through any direct attack. We have covered Satan's attempt to pollute the human genome before.³ Suffice it to say here that by having his demons commingle with human women so as to create the race of the nephilim, half-breeds that were only nominally human, it would soon have come to pass through consequent intermixing that no true human beings would be left on planet earth. So serious was this problem – because then there could be no Messiah to save humanity from its sins (and no humanity left to save at that) – that it necessitated God's destruction of the entire world with the great flood, excepting Noah and his family, possibly the only truly human individuals to survive to that point (cf. Gen.6:9).

This sort of attack has not been permitted since, and the Lord has a punishment for any and all fallen angels who were then or may in the future be tempted to go down that forbidden path of "abandoning their first estate":

³ See in particular SR 5: The Seven Millennial Days, section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line".

. . . and the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation, He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of the judgment of that great day.

Jude 1:6

Being creatures of light, angels, fallen angels or demons, are terrified at the prospect of being imprisoned in the lightless Abyss (a.k.a. Tartarus).⁴ It was to that portion of the underworld, (designed as prison for demons who violate the basic guidelines God has set up for the resolution of the conflict now raging between Satan's forces and the forces of God so as to prevent repetition of such violations), that the angels involved in illicitly fostering offspring with human women before the great flood were sequestered, and, as far as we can tell from scripture, demons have, ever since, been very reluctant to engage in any activity that would land them there.

(30) Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. (31) And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

Luke 8:30-31 NIV

Being imprisoned and enchained in "gloomy pits" for the duration of the war (with a temporary respite for some during the Tribulation: Rev.9:1-6; 9:14-16), while it seems unpleasant enough to us is apparently a terrifying prospect for Satan's forces, keeping the offenders out of circulation ("to be guarded"), and sending a strong message of the Lord's intolerance of such behavior to all the rest of the demons. This punishment was, in effect, the worst thing that could happen to a fallen angel (short of the lake of fire). As such, this first example invites us to understand an equally "worst case short of hell" scenario hanging over the heads of these false teachers – and their followers (absent repentance).

Noah (v.5):

(5) . . . and did not spare the antediluvian world, but kept Noah safe as a proclaimer of righteousness along with the seven with him, when He brought the flood upon the ungodly inhabitants of the world . . .

2nd Peter 2:5

In contrast to the "ungodly inhabitants of the world", God preserved Noah, and did so in a miraculous way which also demonstrated Noah's great faith. Uniquely, "Noah did *everything* just as God commanded him" (Gen.6:22 NIV), and who else would even dare to make such a claim? But Noah's responsiveness to God in building the ark was also a witness – over many years – to the unbelieving world of that time. His contemporaries knew that He served God, for he was a man who "proclaimed [God's] righteousness", something for which his contemporaries had little use. God gave these ungrateful unbelievers a witness in the ark and the message of salvation proclaimed by Noah – a demonstration of His inimitable grace in spite of the hard

⁴ See CT 1: Introduction, under Revelation 1:17-20, "The Keys to Death and Hades"; CT6: The Millennium and New Jerusalem, section VI.3, "The Sea, Death and Hades"; and BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.m, "The Descent of our Lord into Paradise".

hearts upon which it fell. Herein we see the intended parallel between the false teachers and their victims on the one hand and those who listened to Peter and his fellow teachers of the truth on the other. Scoffers and mockers will be swept away by the flood of judgment, but those who believe in and hold fast to the truth will be delivered.

(37) "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, (39) and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Matthew 24:37-39 ESV

It is difficult to imagine much worse than drowning slowly without being able to do anything about it and having everything and everyone you care about destroyed at the same time and in the same way. This is in fact the worst case short of hell. The suddenness and the unpredictability of the judgment about to come upon these false teachers and their followers will constitute a not insignificant part of its horror – a warning to those on the wrong path and a solace to those who are presently enduring the harassment of the wicked.

Sodom and Gomorrah (v.6):

(6) . . . and condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, reducing them to ashes and making an example of them for those bent on similar ungodly behavior . . .

2nd Peter 2:6

The case of Sodom and Gomorrah, proverbial for their gross sinfulness characterized in particular by sexual misconduct, provides Peter's second example of God's just and swift destruction of unbelievers who place believers in danger. In this second case, while we cannot see the Abyss to which the offending demons were dispatched, we can still see the Dead Sea which covers those once proud cities, standing as a monument to any and all who may ever be "bent on similar ungodly behavior". The moral for us today, distressed as we may well be about similar conduct emanating from various false teaching and those who proffer it with immensely deleterious effects which are percolating through our own society today, is that God is neither unconcerned nor uninvolved in what is happening. Therefore we who belong to Him can justly relax and not be disturbed about the degeneration that surrounds us at every turn. The Lord will not allow us to be destroyed by these corrupt and perverted trends, nor will He allow them to continue forever. We can, we must, be confident of His protection of us and of His timely destruction of the foul forces that seek to destroy us along with all that is good and righteous – just as He delivered Noah and his family, and just as He delivered Lot.

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., that "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance.

2nd Peter 3:7-9

Deliverance will come. Justice will come. Our job, as believers, is to wait on the Lord until His good time arrives. His timing is always perfect. The test for us is to accept that obvious truth even when tribulation and corruption are reaching an intolerable crescendo all around us. We will be delivered in God's perfect time.

And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

(3) Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. (4) Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you".

Isaiah 35:3-4

Lot (v.7-8):

(7) . . . and rescued righteous Lot who was tormented by the depraved lifestyle of those lawless men – (8) for through the things he saw and heard just by dwelling among them this righteous man was torturing his righteous heart day by day by [exposure to] their lawless deeds.

2nd Peter 2:8

While the Lord destroyed Sodom, He delivered "righteous Lot", and we remember from Genesis chapter nineteen that He went to a great deal of trouble to do so, sending a pair of angels to bring Lot out, bringing out his family as well, having them take him out by the hand when he hesitated, and even granting him a town to escape to at his request. The Bible calls Lot "righteous" not because of any particular saintliness on his part but because he, like us, possessed God's righteousness through faith (Gen.15:6; Rom.3:21-24; 3:28; 4:4-5; 4:13; 5:1; 5:8-9; 8:1; 9:30-31; 10:6; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.2:16; Eph.2:8-9 Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7; cf. Jer.33:16). In other words, Lot was a believer – the only one in the entire area of Sodom and Gomorrah, a fact unanticipated by Abraham when he sought to dissuade the Lord from destroying these evil cities. Abraham was concerned for Lot primarily, and, indeed, Lot was the only believer – the entire remnant – in Sodom. While the Lord tells Abraham that He will not destroy the place "for the sake of ten [who are] righteous" (i.e., ten believers), in fact there was only one: Lot. His sons-in-law refused to take warning (Gen.19:14), his wife disobeyed a direct command not to look back [in longing] (Gen.19:17; 19:26), and his daughters soon proved that they were lacking faith as well (Gen.19:30-38). A mere ten believers would have been sufficient "salt" to keep Sodom and Gomorrah from being destroyed, but there comes a point where the remnant is too small to prevent God from intervening against horrific sin and evil, and that point is the necessary deliverance of the believers who still remain within the country in question when being endangered by its degeneracy.

And they said [to Lot], "Stand back!" Then they said, "This one came in to stay here, and

he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them."
Genesis 19:9 NKJV

Not only had Lot's presence been the reason for God's previous restraint as He delayed His righteous judgment as long as possible to give everyone the maximum opportunity to respond to Lot's example so as to be saved (2Pet.3:9), but all the inhabitants who were now threatening him with murder were only even still alive and free because his uncle Abraham had rescued them for Lot's sake (Gen.14:1-16). But instead of being grateful for this deliverance and seeking to know more about the God of Abraham and of Lot who had graciously and miraculously rescued them, these unbelievers had only used the time given them to sink ever deeper into sin and evil.

But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.
Genesis 13:13 NKJV

And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, (21) I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."
Genesis 18:20-21 NKJV

Lot was far from perfect. He had failed to restrain his herdsmen when they quarreled with Abraham's men. He had chosen to dwell in Sodom, and chose to go back there even after being taken captive and rescued by Abraham. We have it from our verse in context that, as a believer, the shameful conduct of the Sodomites "tortured" his heart, but scripture makes **Lot** the subject. Having to witness such lawless, evil deeds offended his believing conscience – but he remained in Sodom even after all that happened and all that he was suffering spiritually.

No doubt dwelling in Sodom was a much easier life than being a nomadic herdsman. No doubt Lot was influenced by his wife and daughters who preferred it. Separating on his own without God's help was too much for Lot to bear – so God delivered him. That is Peter's main point here, but it is worth noting that there is a difference on the one hand between walking closely with the Lord as Abraham did and not needing to be delivered from situations of one's own making, and on the other hand putting the Lord into a position of having to deliver us because of our bad decisions. Beyond all argument, the former is far better than the latter. Not only is Abraham's approach much more pleasing to the Lord, but we should also note that Lot, while he is a believer, did not have the same blessed end that Abraham did. Lot was not able to reside in Zoar, even though it was granted to him (his "fear" was no doubt occasioned by him being held responsible by the residents for the fate of their kinsmen: Gen.19:30). The affair with his daughters resulted in producing the Moabites and the Ammonites, inveterate enemies of Israel as opposed to Abraham's seed of promise. And while Abraham died in a good old age in peace and prosperity, we hear nothing more of Lot who may well have ended his days in that same cave. Yes, God delivers believers while destroying hostile unbelievers for our sake, but better to be like Abraham and the recipients of Peter's letter who rejected the false teachers than those who were delivered from their hands through God's judgment, "so as through fire" (1Cor.3:15).

(28) "Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; (29) but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire

and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. (30) Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

Luke 17:28-30 NKJV

Rescuing the Godly; Keeping the Unrighteous under Guard (v.9-10a):

(9) For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under guard in punishment for [the day of] judgment – (10a) especially those who in their lust pursue the polluting of the flesh and so despise [God's] divine authority.
2nd Peter 2:9-10a

The aposiopesis ends here. That is to say, the proposition "If God did all that to the fallen angels and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, then . . .", is never completed, meaning that we are to understand a similar or potentially worse and unspeakable end for the false teachers who are vexing the churches of Asia Minor in Peter's day: "[. . . then how do these false teachers think that they will escape God's judgment?]"

(5b) I want to remind you that although the Lord saved [all] His people from the land of Egypt at the start, in the end He destroyed those who proved unfaithful, (6) and the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation, He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of the judgment of that great day, (7) just as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities; for they all prostituted themselves in the same manner as these [angels] did, having pursued sexual relations [lit. "flesh"] inappropriate for them (i.e., outside of the natural order). [And so it is that] they have been appointed *an example* and incurred the penalty of eternal fire.

Jude 1:5b-7

Peter affirms Jude's analysis and adds in the Spirit that the fact of being involved in and promoting sexual indiscretion, *aselgeia*, will make God's judgment upon these false teachers all the more certain, swift and horrific. Their punishment will continue until the last judgment (meaning, temporal judgment and eventual death in this life, and then being kept in Torments after this life is over until the last judgment occurs; cf. Matt.23:33; 2Pet.2:11; 3:7; Rev.18:10). But many of the godly believers here who are "rescued from temptation" we have to understand have placed themselves in need of that rescue – just as Lot did. Noah did nothing wrong; Lot was complicit by choosing his place of residence and confirming it by continuing there even after his first rescue by Abraham. The believers in Peter's day who are not following the false teachers are the "Noah group" – the fact of being harassed by this eventuality of attack from without is not their fault – and God will deliver them. That set of believers, on the other hand, who are giving these false teachers a hearing or, still worse, believing anything they have to say are the "Lot group". God will deliver them as well (assuming that they do not abandon their faith entirely), but that deliverance will be a "Lot type" and not a "Noah type", wherein instead of being a witness to others for their good conduct they are instead delivered by a gracious Lord in spite of their questionable conduct.

Paragraph III (vv. 10b-16)

(10b) Reckless, self-willed, not fearing to blaspheme angelic powers (lit., "glories"), (11) [although] this is a place where even [elect] angels, of much greater strength and power, [will not go, so as to] bring against them (i.e., the demons) a blasphemous judgment before the Lord (i.e., to curse them). (12) But these men, like dumb animals (i.e., rather than human beings with even modest common sense), destined by birth to be captured and destroyed, blaspheme in matters they do not understand, will themselves be utterly destroyed as a result of their destructive behavior: (13) they are destined to receive the recompense (lit., "wages") of their unrighteousness; considering their daily provisions nothing but an excuse for pleasure, luxuriating in their deceptions, communing with you [in an unholy fashion] as spots and blemishes among you (i.e., abusing communion). (14) With eyes full of adultery and on the lookout for sin without restraint, they entrap those insufficiently grounded (in the truth). They are accursed children whose hearts are well-trained for greed. (15) Having left the straight way behind, they have wandered astray and followed the way of Balaam, son of Beor, who loved the pay that comes from unrighteous behavior. (16) But he received a rebuke for his exceptional madness when his mute beast spoke in a human voice and restrained that prophet's folly.

2nd Peter 2:10b-16

Blaspheming Angels (v.10b-11):

(10b) Reckless, self-willed, not fearing to blaspheme angelic powers (i.e., demons; lit., "glories"), (11) [although] this is a place where even [elect] angels, of much greater strength and power, [will not go, so as to] bring against them (i.e., the demons) a blasphemous judgment before the Lord (i.e., to curse them).

2nd Peter 2:10b-11

Having reminded us in the previous paragraph of the divine precedents for judging the likes of these false teachers, Peter, as Jude did before him, now goes on to examine some of their more dangerous characteristics. This exercise is helpful in revealing their true character, their particular methodology of deception, and the brazenness of their behavior – factors which should all enhance the determination of readers to stay far away from such individuals and their teaching. These descriptions of the truth below the surface may not promote their recognition, however, as almost all such false teachers are very effective at hiding their wolfish nature beneath a thick covering of wool. For that reason, this section is even more necessary, because by impressing upon his parishioners and us the dangerous nature of these false teachers, our brethren of the past then and we now should be both more intent on discovering them before they do damage – and less apologetic about calling them out for what they are (rather than being foolishly tolerant of their evil).

Reckless: Arrogant, presumptuous, bold, brazen, daring are all acceptable synonyms for translating the Greek word *tolmetes*. *Tolma*, the base word here, was the characteristic quality of the Athenians during their heyday according to Thucydides. Characteristically, the Athenians were risk-takers who gambled on victory no matter the odds, a quality which often demoralized their opponents, but which, in the end, proved their ruin (when they lost the greatest gamble of all, the invasion of Sicily). Taking on God Himself is the most reckless thing any person could ever do. Pretending that in doing so one was actually "helping Him" is even more breathtakingly

arrogant (i.e., doing "Gnostic combat" purportedly on His behalf). And setting oneself to slaughter His sheep for one's own benefit as the true purpose of all this deception makes the English word "reckless" seem almost insufficient.

Self-Willed: The Greek adjective *authades* and other parts of speech from the same root refer to stubbornness, arrogance, and surliness. Etymologically the word-group has to do with "putting one's own desires first". Titus 1:7 tells us that this is a characteristic which no godly pastor-teacher should ever exhibit. While true teachers need to be resolute and unflinching in defense of the truth, stubbornness for its own sake is no virtue, and arrogantly assuming one's own correctness and/or demanding compliance in all matters based on one's position is a model to be avoided at all costs (even though it is easily recognized today in all too many pastors and groups). Applied to these particular individuals and false teachers in general, "self-willed" also has to do with putting their own interests in front of those of the congregation whom they are supposed to be serving – exactly the opposite of what the Bible commands and commends of true teachers of the Bible (cf. 1Thes.2:7-12).

Angelic Powers: In the very last part of the previous paragraph (part of the same verse in our modern verse structure), the false teachers in question were described as those "who in their lust pursue the polluting of the flesh and so despise [God's] divine authority." The word "divine authority", Greek *kyriotes* (derived from *kyrios*, the word for Lord/LORD, and thus literally meaning "Lord-ship), ties in directly with the word "powers", literally "glories" (*doxai*) as a reference to angels. Jude had likewise combined the two terms in his parallel passage:

In the same way these [false teachers], deluding themselves with false visions, defile their flesh, reject all authority (*kyriotes*), and bring slander against angels (lit., "glories", *doxai*; i.e., in Gnostic "combat" with "aeons").

Jude 1:8

The word "authority" can be used of angels as well (Col.1:21; Eph.1:16), since in terms of the elect angels, their authority is directly derived from God's authority. The "glories" in both passages are angels, given that name by both Jude and Peter, and directly connected to God's authority by being paired with the word *kyriotes*, to make clear the completely unauthorized nature of attempting any sort of "combat" with them – who are we, who is anyone, to dispute God's authority or anyone given it, or to despise His glory or anyone manifesting it?

Whether elect or fallen, angels are not to be underestimated – and certainly not to be slandered, disparaged or blasphemed by mere human beings, as they are "of much greater strength and power". That is drinking down arrogance and ignorance in a toxic cocktail sure to result in no good. And the proof of that truth is in the fact that even elect angels do not deign to attempt what these false teachers are prescribing and ostensibly doing (i.e., Michael in his unwillingness to disparage the devil when involved in combat with him being the prime example named in Jude 1:9 and understood here as well). If even other angels, beings of "much greater strength and power" than we refrain from such activity, it is the height of temerity to assume that anything but disaster could result from attempting to take part in this Gnostic combat, however engaged in (and that remains true of any such activity today, no matter how popular, such as exorcisms, "commanding" or "binding" spirits, or any sort of putative engagement with demons or angels of

any sort).⁵

While all this may seem beyond obvious to us, we should not underestimate the fascination that many people have with angels and all things angelic. When that curiosity is piqued through the prospect of communing with heavenly beings – and in ways that correspond to hidden desires at that – it is not entirely beyond understanding why these charismatic false teachers were able to gain a hearing with many and a foothold with some. And that is true even in cases where the appeal was not to licentiousness but to asceticism and abstemiousness (as an equally effective way to engage in such "combat"). For on the one hand there are many individuals who are more inclined to the excess of self-deprecation instead of to over-indulgence, and on the other hand to the *worship* of angels (another aspect of Gnostic teaching) as opposed to doing battle with them (Rev.19:10; 22:8-9; cf. Heb.1:5-14; 2:5-9):

(16) So don't let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in the category of festival observances, be it of new moons or Sabbaths. (17) All these things are shadows of what was to come, but the reality has to do with Christ. (18) Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and *the adoration of angels*, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, (19) yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given. (20) If you have died with Christ to these false [pagan] principles [belonging to] this world, why are you letting yourselves be [wrongly] indoctrinated as if your life were of this world? In accordance with the commandments and teaching of [mere] men [these false teachers tell you] (21) "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!", (22) even though [we know] that all these [are only] things [which] decay with use. (23) Such teachings have a [false] reputation for wisdom, but [only] in concocted religion, [false] humility, and [legalistic] harsh treatment of the body – they have no actual power to neutralize the [sinful] flesh (i.e., the sin nature is not to be controlled by these legalistic approaches).

Colossians 2:16-23

Like Dumb Animals (v.12):

(12) But these men, like dumb animals (i.e., rather than human beings with even modest common sense), destined by birth to be captured and destroyed, blaspheme in matters they do not understand, will themselves be utterly destroyed as a result of their destructive behavior:

2nd Peter 2:12

As most of us are well aware as pet owners or otherwise having been in close and frequent contact with them, animals can be amazingly intelligent. Clearly, the lack of ability to speak is what is meant by the word "dumb" here, and as a consequence not being conversant with the ways of humanity. Thus, animals may be trapped or hunted, for example, and be taken in spite of

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Gnosticism afflicting the churches to whom Peter wrote this epistle, see the previous installment of this series, Peter #39.

their intelligence, cunning and caution. People, however, who do have the ability to speak (with some exceptions of course) generally become acquainted in life with the ways of the world. That is to say, if they have a normal upbringing they can be expected to develop at least a modicum of what we call "common sense", through which they will not behave in such bizarrely stupid ways so as to destroy themselves immediately thereby – running across traffic on a busy freeway at night without taking care, to cite just one of an infinite number of possible examples. The latter, however, is something an animal might very well do. Peter here compares the behavior of these false teachers (and those who follow them) to just such recklessness. For what could be more reckless than opposing God and His truth in such a direct and dangerous way as these Gnostics were doing? One might actually dash across an expressway at night without looking and live to tell the tale (possible), but lie about God and His truth in the service of the devil and not face the consequences? Impossible.

For certain men have slipped in among you unawares, men who long ago were *destined* for this very doom, ungodly men who substitute lasciviousness for the grace of our God and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:4

As our context affirms and as Jude had also observed, as a result of their *choices*, the false teachers here are said to be "destined" to the destruction which is hanging over their heads. This "destiny" is thus a self-chosen one as it is for all who have been given the right to choose, the image of God. Free will is the operative feature of the entire plan of God wherein He allows each of us to determine our eternal future and, in the case of believers, the level of rewards we will receive as well. Everyone of these choices has been perfectly woven into the plan of God in a way that has preserved the free will of all.

And when the Gentiles heard this [gospel message], they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were *ordained* to eternal life believed.

Acts 13:48 KJV

By speaking of the unalterable nature of the plan of God here, Peter (and Jude before him) is not saying that these men had no choice – far from it. They made their choices and did so in a most determined way, choices to turn away from the truth and away from Him who is the truth to the one who is the father of the lie – and more than that, to do their best to suborn and seduce as many believers as possible to follow that same road to destruction. Just as these false teachers have made their choices and have done so to such an exceptional degree that no turning back is here considered possible, so also the believers to whom Peter (and Jude) was writing had free will. And Peter's entire purpose in writing this is to prevent any and all who read it from sharing that same destiny of destruction, keeping away from it (for those who have not as yet responded to the Gnostic siren song) and pulling free out of it (for those who had).

(25) [The servant of the Lord must] in humility be correcting those who oppose him, in the hope that God may grant them to repent and acknowledge the truth, (26) and that they may come to their senses, [escaping] from *the devil's trap*, though they have now been *taken captive* by him to do his will.

2nd Timothy 2:25-26

Destined to Receive Recompense (v.13a):

(13a) they are destined to receive the recompense (lit., "wages") of their unrighteousness;
2nd Peter 2:13a

As mentioned above, predestination is based upon free will, God's decreeing of every choice we actually have made in His perfect plan, both in the case of those of us who are saved but also in the case of those who reject God's grace and will for their lives (cf. Is.29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer.18:1-6; Acts 13:48; Rom.9:19-22; 1Pet.2:8). Our choices come from our free will, the image of God residing in our spirits given to us at birth. But those choices have consequences, and there is no greater choice – with no greater attendant consequences – than the choice to choose the way of life in Jesus Christ or the way of unbelief, sin and evil which leads to condemnation. That is the just "recompense" for the false teachers in our context who, beyond all others in this world, have made it clear to men and angels both that as followers of the devil they have firmly chosen *against* the Lord.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23 KJV

(7) Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (8) For the one whose sowing is directed to his own [sinful] flesh from that [sinful] flesh will reap corruption, but the one whose sowing is directed toward the Spirit, from that [same] Spirit will reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:6-8

Abusing Communion (v.13b):

(13b) considering their daily provisions nothing but an excuse for pleasure, luxuriating in their deceptions while communing with you [in an unholy fashion] as spots and blemishes among you (i.e., abusing communion).

2nd Peter 2:13b

While there is certainly a sense in which we ought to eat for strength not for drunkenness (Eccl.10:17; cf. Prov.23:20), the particular abuse here has to do with communal meals, "love feasts" (or *agape* feasts), the forerunners of the later, much more restricted communion ritual laid out by the apostle Paul and meant to avoid similar problems (1Cor.11:23-34). The issue of abusing communion was one which Jude had addressed as well (Jude 1:12). In a similar fashion, the believers in Corinth had, in Paul's absence, conducted themselves in a shameful way when celebrating "the Lord's supper" (1Cor.11:17-22). We know from the latter reference that the problem in Corinth revolved around some individuals bringing lavish meals for themselves while others were not able to do so. In those days there would also have been alcohol present – wine – without which a meal would not be a meal. So that would have provided an additional opportunity for extravagant and excessive behavior. In modern times, this particular abuse had generally been resolved by separating the communion ceremony from collective dining and by making the latter communal wherein everyone is served the same.

The additional problem in the Asian churches, however, was that these Gnostic teachers were insinuating themselves into the fellowship of the earlier "bring your own" *agape* feasts and using those occasions as opportunities for gluttony and drunkenness wherein they imposed upon the other attendees. Such behavior demonstrates that they were more interested in gastronomical pleasures than any sort of fellowship – and that they "served their stomachs" in fact rather than the Lord whom they pretended to revere.

(17) I entreat you, brothers, to mark those who are creating conflicts and pitfalls contrary to the doctrine you have learned, and stay away from them. (18) For such men do not serve our Lord Christ, **but their own stomachs**, deceiving innocent hearts with their fancy sermons.

Romans 16:17-18

An even bigger problem was that since at this time no such separation between the communion ceremony and such "*agape* feasts" had yet been made, the vile behavior and underhanded motivations of these interlopers had the effect of polluting the entire purpose of these communal meals which was to remember the person and the work of Jesus Christ in dying for our sins and winning for us eternal life. The underlying message is clear: all such individuals and their followers too should be expelled from these feasts.

(6) Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? (7) Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (8) Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (9) I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – (10) not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. (11) But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. (12) What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? (13) God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

1st Corinthians 5:6-13 NIV

Eyes Full of Adultery (v.14a):

(14a) With eyes full of adultery and on the lookout for sin without restraint, they entrap those insufficiently grounded (in the truth).

2nd Peter 2:14a

With this verse Peter indicates that he has received even more distressing reports, namely, that the abuses on the part of these Gnostic teachers have not stopped with gluttony, drunkenness and brazen imposition. These men were interested in exploiting those whom they seduced not only financially and materially but also sexually – and in any other sinful way their predilections inclined them. Peter adds the telling point that it is especially those who are "insufficiently grounded in the truth" who are most vulnerable to such entrapment. Anyone can be tempted, but

those who do not have a firm grasp of the truth are much more readily deceived – which makes their seduction all the more easy for those who are well-practiced in that black art.

It is an invariable principle that turning aside from the truth always makes a person susceptible to lies instead. The human heart abhors a vacuum, and where there is no truth to fill it, the opposite will flood in without resistance. Those who chose to give these Gnostic teachers a hearing most likely did so at least partially out of spiritual ignorance – otherwise the falsity of what they were being taught would have been repellent from the start. In any church or Christian association, there will be varying levels of interest in the truth. The less the interest, the more the vulnerability to being entrapped by lies, precisely through the lack of a solid edifice of truth in the heart.

Satan's strategy in this Gnostic ploy was, clearly, to use his followers to attack the weakest links in these congregations and thereby gain a foothold of false authority wherein these "teachers" became established in the very churches the devil meant to destroy. Peter, as Jude did before him, does his best to combat this danger from a distance by calling these scoundrels out for what they really were, and laying bare for all to see the true effect of their machinations. Good lessons for us to keep in mind today as we face similar attacks.

(1) So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. (2) For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, (3) implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, (4) betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away. (6) Of this sort are those who [even in our own day] worm their way into households and take captive the [spiritually] weak who are loaded down with sins, leading them astray with various lusts, (7) [victims who consequently,] though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. (8) In the same way that [Pharaoh's court magicians] Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. (9) But they will not keep on striding forward forever. Their folly will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those two.

2nd Timothy 3:1-9

Accursed Children (v.14b):

(14b) They are accursed children whose hearts are well-trained for greed.

2nd Peter 2:14b

As Paul affirms at 1st Timothy 4:7-8, physical training, "exercise" (the meaning of *gymnazo* in both passages; cf. English "gymnasium"), is beneficial in the short term, helping us maintain our health during our temporary stay here on earth; but "exercising ourselves unto godliness", that is, striving to maintain and improve our spiritual health and thereby building up our relationship with the Lord, is "profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1Tim.4:8 NKJV).

In contrast to temporarily beneficial physical exercise and eternally beneficial devotion to spiritual growth, however, these false teachers have "trained up their hearts unto greed and covetousness" (Gr. *pleonexia*, etymologically meaning to want to possess "more" than everyone else). While children who receive from their parents a decent education in how to conduct themselves in life may be expected to mature into functional and socially acceptable adults, Peter describes these false teachers who have striven only to pervert their hearts as therefore still being children – but children who are destined for cursing rather than blessing on account of the contemptible path they have chosen.

Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right [or not].
Proverbs 20:11 NKJV

The Way of Balaam (v.15):

(15) Having left the straight way behind, they have wandered astray and followed the way of Balaam, son of Beor, who loved the pay that comes from unrighteous behavior. (16) But he received a rebuke for his exceptional madness when his mute beast spoke in a human voice and restrained that prophet's folly.
2nd Peter 2:15-16

Peter indicates here that at least some of these false teachers – and not a few of their followers – were originally on the "straight way", the "strait and narrow" path that is the only way to salvation (Matt.7:13-14; Jn.14:6). Abandoning this one safe road, the only one which leads to eternal life, for the sake of some filthy lucre here in this temporary world is about the poorest bargain one can imagine, giving up unlimited blessing for the sake of a single meal of worthless potage as Esau did (Heb.12:16).

Jude, when mentioning Balaam, had also invoked Cain's murdering of Abel and Korah's rebellion; Peter is led to focus solely on Balaam, emphasizing the folly of preferring temporary worldly wealth to the glories of eternity as the salient characteristic of these Gnostics which now needs to be addressed. Like the Pharisees, they were lovers of silver rather than lovers of the Lord (Lk.16:14), and this characteristic has doomed them and damned them.

(7) We have brought nothing into this world – and are not able to take anything out of it.
(8) So if we have daily sustenance and coverings for our bodies, we will be content with these. (9) Those who want to get rich fall into temptations, traps, and many senseless and harmful lusts – the kind which swamp men[’s hearts] to their destruction and damnation.
(10) For the love of money is a root [cause] of all evils – [and it is] in the pursuit of which [love of money that] some have wandered away from the faith (i.e., become apostates) and have pierced themselves through with many pains.
1st Timothy 6:7-10

The above should be blatantly obvious – to all believers in Jesus Christ who are walking anywhere near close to the Lord. But these men have blinded themselves to the truth to the extent that they now not only resemble "dumb animals" (as we saw at 2Pet.2:12), but have come to mimic Balaam who had to be corrected by a dumb animal, his donkey, who was given the

power of speech in order to rebuke him. Balaam, as Peter reminds us, was, temporarily at least, restrained from this "madness" by that extraordinary occurrence. But these men, to the contrary, show no signs of coming to their senses. To be more senseless than a donkey, more senseless even than a man temporarily corrected by a donkey, is to be truly foolish indeed.

Paragraph IV (vv. 17-22)

(17) But these [false teachers] are waterless springs, mists driven by the storm, for whom, [the same] gloomy darkness (i.e., of v.4) has been reserved (n.b., in their case. the lake of fire). (18) For by pouring forth [statements] of outrageous folly, [by appealing to] fleshly lusts, and by making use of every [sort of] sensuality, [these false teachers] entice those who [previously] had truly escaped from those who live [such] lives of deception (i.e., the false teachers). (19) [These false teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. (20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".

2nd Peter 2:17-22

Waterless Springs and Mists (v.17):

(17) But these [false teachers] are waterless springs, mists driven by the storm, for whom, [the same] gloomy darkness (i.e., of v.4) has been reserved (n.b., this time the lake of fire: Jude 1:13).

2nd Peter 2:17

Peter's description here is reminiscent of what Jude had written to these same churches previously:

(12b) They are clouds of false promise, driven off course by every wind. They are trees which bear no fruit in season, doubly dead and uprooted. (13) They are wild waves of the sea, belching forth their own shame. They are stars which refuse to follow any fixed course for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude 1:12b-13

"Waterless springs" and "clouds of false promise" share in common the fact that they do not accomplish their primary promise of providing water – which is symbolic in both passages for the water of the Word of God (Is.55:1; Jn.3:5; 3:8 [Greek]; Jn.4:10; 4:13-14; 7:37-39; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Heb.10:22; 1Jn.5:8; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17; cf. Ex 17:5-6; Num. 20:8; Ps.36:8-9; 42:1-2; 63:1; 84:5-7; Is.8:6; 12:3; 41:17; 44:3; 55:10-11; Jer.2:13; 17:13; 1Cor.3:6-7; Heb.6:7), which these false teachers promise but do not provide – quite the opposite, namely, substituting

the devil's lies instead. This is reflected by the fact that in both cases, Peter's mist and Jude's clouds, we see that neither exhibits any constancy, no resilience that the Word and our faith in it provides, but instead both yield readily to whatever wind, to whatever storm may arise. So are all those who are not grounded in the truth of the Word of God. Only through believing and following the truth can we stand our ground regardless of the pressures that come.

(24) "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: (25) and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. (26) But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: (27) and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Matthew 7:24-27

Gloomy Darkness: God is light (Jn.1:5), and in eternity there will be only light and no darkness (Rev.21:25; 22:5). Darkness is symbolic of evil and of all turning away from the truth (Gen.1:2; Eph.5:11; 6:12; Col.1:13; 1Jn.1:6; 2:11). Therefore darkness is always associated with judgment and punishment, a just dessert for all who embraced the darkness of the lie instead of the truth. The Abyss to which the fallen angels who "abandoned their first estate" were confined is dark (Jude 1:6; cf. 2Pet.2:4), and that is part of the punishment for these quondam creatures of light. And darkness is a punishment in and of itself not only for them: consider Revelation 16:10, where men gnaw their tongues in the kingdom of the beast during the plague of darkness. Those who love darkness in this world are therefore destined to be condemned to the darkness of the lake of fire forever, a just and fitting punishment "reserved" for these false teachers who darkened counsel with their lies and turned others away from the light of the truth.

'And cast the unprofitable servant into *the outer darkness*. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matthew 25:30 NKJV (cf. Matt.8:12; 22:13)

Enticement of False Teachers (v.18):

(18) For by pouring forth [statements] of outrageous folly, [by appealing to] fleshly lusts, and by making use of every [sort of] sensuality (Gr. *aselgeia*), [these false teachers] entice those who [previously] had truly escaped from those who live [such] lives of deception (i.e., the false teachers).

2nd Peter 2:18

The primary means of deception employed by these false teachers is precisely their false teaching. The power of words should never be underestimated.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love its use will eat its fruit.
Proverbs 18:21 NET

While false teachers make use of words, "pouring forth [statements] of outrageous folly", to seduce and suborn the vulnerable into believing lies in order to exploit them, pastor-teachers who

are truly serving the Lord make use of the same medium to teach and promote the truth. That has always been the case and remains so today, regardless of what medium is employed to spread said words.

(10) As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, (11) so is **my word** that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
Isaiah 55:10-11 NIV

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing **the word of truth**.
2nd Timothy 2:15

(7) In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness (8) and **soundness of speech** that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.
Titus 2:7-8 NIV

For **the Word of God** is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.
Hebrews 4:12

True teachers of the Word encourage believers to follow the example of Christ (1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21), to pursue sanctification, holiness, in all our ways (2Cor.7:1; Heb.12:14), to strive to please our Lord and win eternal rewards that glorify Him (2Tim.4:8; Jas.1:12; 1Pet.5:4). False teachers such as these Gnostics, on the other hand, encourage those who have the bad judgment to give them a hearing to focus instead on themselves and, regardless of what Christ wants from them, on what they personally want – and lust after.

For certain men have slipped in among you unawares, men who long ago were destined for this very doom, ungodly men who substitute **lasciviousness** (Gr. *aselgeia*) for the grace of our God and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.
Jude 1:4

As we saw earlier, the Greek word *aselgeia*, translated earlier as "lasciviousness" (as well as in the passage from Jude quoted immediately above), refers to sensual excess and is the same word used in our present verse (2Pet.2:19) and translated as "sensuality". The reason for the difference in translation in our context is because Peter deliberately pairs *aselgeia* here with "fleshly lusts", and we need to distinguish between the two: "fleshly lusts" (as opposed to "sensuality/*aselgeia*") embraces all manner of sinful behavior, including depraved asceticism as well as rank fleshly excess or "lasciviousness". Greek *aselgeia*, however, refers exclusively to the latter, lascivious sort of offensive behavior which Jude made his sole point of emphasis (cf., Rom.13:13; 2Cor.12:21; Gal.5:19; Eph.4:19; 1Pet.4:3; and already employed twice by Peter in this same chapter: 2Pet.2:2; 2:7).

From this we may easily glean that promising their converts license to engage in all manner of sexual sin and deviance and in all manner of orgiastic and gluttonous behavior and in all manner of substance abuse constituted a very large part of the Gnostic appeal throughout the apostolic period (as we saw in our previous installment of this series), but that while this "gate of fleshly excess" was apparently still very popular at the time, the "ascetic gate" of entry into Gnostic combat with aeons (which, it was falsely claimed, "pleased God") was now also not lacking, at least with this second wave of converts whom Peter was trying to rescue – as well as to prevent others from joining their ranks.

We can also see from this verse that some believers had already departed from the local fellowships to which Peter wrote. They are described as having previously "truly escaped" the negative gravity of this movement and the false teaching of these individuals, but have now allowed themselves to be "enticed" back into this disastrous, faith-destroying movement and its behaviors, deceived by the same false teachers whose falsehoods they had previously successfully fled, no doubt in part through Jude's teaching and the ministrations it prompted.

Herein we see the terrible danger of being lukewarm and of failing to use the opportunities the Lord gives us to grow to spiritual maturity and beyond, passing the necessary tests that strengthen our faith and give it the resilience to endure pressure along with the spiritual perspicacity to detect lies. This has ever been of the utmost importance for Christians, as our passage affirms. How much more so today when we stand on the brink of the most difficult time in human history wherein humanity will be subject to the most effective deception the devil has ever launched? Being lukewarm and not red hot for our Lord renders a believer vulnerable to these pressures – and vulnerable faith is often merely a step away from no faith at all.

(13) "And those [seeds which fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but in time of *testing* (or "*temptation*") they fall away [from the faith] (i.e., they apostatize)." Luke 8:13

Freedom versus Slavery (v.19):

(19) [These false teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. 2nd Peter 2:19

The world is a very busy, very distracting place. Even for those of us who are doing our best to walk closely with Jesus Christ, the demands of job, family, homestead, health, finances, etc., have a way of distorting or at least temporarily clouding our perspective, especially if we become careless about our spiritual growth, progress and production. If that is true of those who are on the right road, how much more will it not be the case for those who turn off onto a false path? Anyone who forsakes the truth will soon be open to believing lies in its place. No doubt for many who bought into Gnosticism it seemed at first merely a small modification of what they had previously accepted as true, when in reality it was an abandonment of the one Way of salvation and an embarking instead on the road to perdition.

The same is true today as well, of course, for any and all systems of false teaching (of which the devil's world is filled to overflowing). And the awful irony, as evidenced by Peter's words here, is that by desiring freedom from the constraints of godly behavior believers then as now are in fact handing themselves over to be enslaved by the devil, his henchmen, his lies, and the corrupt things of this world which promise happiness but are unable to deliver it in truth.⁶ Only the truth can ever really make us happy; only the truth can really ever set us free.

(31) Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. (32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (33) They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free?'" (34) Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. (35) And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. (36) Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

John 8:31-36 NKJV

Freedom *from* God, however, freedom to do what a person lusts to do without any concern for God's will, is precisely what the devil lusted for, and he has been tempting men and angels both to follow him in his fatal course ever sense – by means of false promises never delivered upon and by lying about the consequences.

(4) "You will surely not die," the serpent said to the woman. (5) "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God (or "gods"), knowing good and evil."

Genesis 3:4-5

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

John 8:44 NKJV

Apostasy of those who once Believed (vv.20-22):

(20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".

2nd Peter 2:20-22

⁶ See the discussion on "myth happiness" in SR 4: Satan's World System, section I.2, "The Vanity of Life".

The principle above is true of all unbelievers, of those believers who followed the Gnostic teachers back into unbelief – and also the false teachers themselves who seem to have been at one time, in at least some cases, believers themselves. The "Righteous Way" is the way of salvation provided by following Him who is the only Way to life eternal, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6); the "holy commandment" is the command to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!" (Acts 16:31; cf. 2Pet.3:2).

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

1st John 3:23 NIV (cf. Matt.22:34-40)

During the soon to come Tribulation, the entire church visible will be swept up into antichrist's false religion, and former preachers, priests, pastors and teachers will become spokesmen for the beast's counterfeit Christianity – in a manner very similar to these apostate Gnostic teachers. The consequences for them personally will be grave. As Peter tells us here, they will be "worse off than they were before", and "it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than . . . to turn their backs on it now". Since the lake of fire will be equally unbearable for all unbelievers, whatever they did in this life, we have to conclude that the suffering such apostates brought down on themselves before physical death – and the suffering the turncoat clergy will end up inflicting on themselves during the Tribulation – will be horrific indeed. That will be some small comfort for those of us who grieve to see the loss of any of our former brothers and sisters in Christ. But it is a sobering thought that ought to give anyone who is even contemplating straying from the Lord – or engaging in any sort of behavior or listening to any sort of false teaching which might tend to apostasy – serious food for thought.

No doubt the believers of Peter's day who had gone astray after these false teachers had begun their spiritual decline only incrementally, but eventually they, in common with their new leaders, covered in fairly short order the entire journey into apostasy, the death of faith – in this case through substituting different objects of "faith" in place of Jesus Christ (cf. v.1: "even denying the Master who bought them"). That will be the case during the Tribulation as well wherein fully a third of all those who believe today will allow themselves to be deceived into following antichrist as if he were *the* Christ. Peter was no doubt hopeful that some, at least, of those on the fringes who had not yet completely apostatized would be shaken awake by his stern words here and in this epistle generally, whether hearing them directly or through the good offices of the believers who received the epistle. And he certainly was desirous of nipping in the bud any tendency on the part of those still in fellowship to follow the same false path – just as Jude had been, on both counts.

(22) Be merciful to those who doubt; (23) save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.
Jude 1:22-23 NIV

By comparing involvement in this false teaching to vomit and the filth of a pig sty, Peter like Jude in the verse above was doing his utmost in the Spirit to blunt any attractiveness of the Gnostic appeals to sensuality. These teachers promised freedom. But that was a lie. They

provided slavery instead. They promised wisdom. But that was a lie. They taught folly instead. And they promised happiness – through indulgence in all manner of behavior from which any Christian with the slightest notion of holiness would be repelled. They were lying about this too. There was no happiness. There was only self-abasement, disappointment, frustration, and a frantic and ever accelerating search for a pseudo-happiness, a "myth happiness", which does not in fact exist. The same is true today. And the same will be true in the coming Tribulation to a heightened degree, where the push and pull of intensifying temptation and increasing distress will put an inordinate amount of pressure on faith which some will not be able resist or bear up under.

But whatever privations and whatever trouble we are called upon to suffer in this world, in Jesus Christ we have overcome the world, its worthless pleasures and its temporary pressures (Jn.16:33; 17:16; Rom.8:37; 1Jn.5:4). For all who make it their heart's desire to stay close to Jesus Christ and His teachings, we can have peace and joy here and now, even should it be our lot to live into the Tribulation (Phil.4:4; Col.3:15), looking forward to our blessed hope (Tit.2:13), the presently inconceivable ecstasy of being part of one united Church in resurrection with life eternal in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior forevermore. No mess of potage is worth risking that.

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17