

Excerpts from Life-Study of 2 Peter, Message 9

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT (1)

Bible Verses:

2 Pet. 1:1-2 But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, because of whom the way of the truth will be reviled.

The first chapter of the Epistle of 2 Peter is on the divine provision. This provision includes two matters: life and light. The first part of chapter 1 emphasizes the divine life, and the second part emphasizes the divine light. The divine life is contained in the faith that has been allotted to us, and the divine light is contained in God's word, in the word of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Therefore, life and light are the two components of the divine provision.

Chapter two and three of 2 Peter are on God's government. In the messages on 1 Peter we had much to say regarding God's governmental judgment. Chapters two and three of 2 Peter continue to show us how God exercises His governmental judgment. In 2 Peter 2 we see God's judgment on the false teachers (2:1-3), God's judgment of old on both angels and men (vv. 4-9), and the evils of the false teachers and their punishment under God's judgment (vv. 10-22). In this message we shall cover 2:1-9. Let us consider these verses one by one.

Second Peter 2:1 says, "But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." After presenting to the believers the rich provision of the divine life and the shining enlightenment of the divine truth, thus providing for the maintenance of life and inoculating against the poison of apostasy, the apostle Peter faithfully indicates as a warning to the believers in this chapter the awful contents of the apostasy and its dreadful

result. This warning is a close parallel to that given in Jude 4-19.

The Greek words rendered “secretly bring in” may also be translated “bring in by smuggling.” Literally, the Greek means to bring in alongside, to bring in sideways, to introduce a new subject for which the hearers are not prepared. Here it denotes the false teachers bringing in and introducing their false teachings alongside the true ones. These false teachings are called destructive heresies, or, literally, heresies of destruction. Heresy involves three matters: opinion, the causing of divisions, and the producing of sects. Therefore, opinion, divisions, and sects are the three constituents of heresy. Heresy, of course, is not constructive. Instead of building up the church, heresy destroys the church. For this reason, Peter speaks of destructive heresies, or heresies of destruction. Peter says that the false teachers will bring upon themselves swift destruction. No doubt, this means that destruction will come upon them.

In verse 2 Peter continues, “And many will follow their licentiousness, because of whom the way of the truth will be reviled.” The way of the truth is the path of the Christian life according to the truth, which is the

reality of the contents of the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18; Titus 1:1). Because of the false teachers, the way of the truth will be reviled. Since the way of the truth is the way of reality, and the way of reality is the way of God's economy, this means that the false teachers will cause the entire revelation of the New Testament to be reviled.

In verse 3 Peter goes on to say, "And by covetousness with fabricated words they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Peter's first Epistle stressed God's governmental judgment (1 Pet. 4:17-18). This is continued in the second Epistle. Under God's government the fallen angels were caught and are being kept for judgment (2:4), and the age of the deluge and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were all judged (vv. 5-9). But God will especially mete out serious judgment to the New Testament heretics (v. 10). And all the ungodly will be judged and destroyed at the day when the heavens and earth will be burned by fire (3:7). Because of this, the God of justice and holiness has begun His governmental judgment from His own household—the believers.

In verse 3 Peter indicates that as God exercised judgment upon the false teachers of old, that is, in ancient times, as illustrated in 2:4-9 , so He will also exercise judgment upon today's false teachers. Peter says that for such ones the judgment is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber. God's judgment is not idle. This judgment will come upon the false teachers, and they will be destroyed.

In 2:4-9 Peter speaks concerning God's judgment of old on both angels and men. Verse 4 says, "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but delivered them to gloomy pits, having cast them down to Tartarus, being kept for judgment." These angels are the fallen angels (see notes 19-2 in 1 Pet. 3 and 4-1 in Rev. 12), who were the first fallen ones in the universe in the sequence of historical facts recorded in this chapter. In Tartarus the fallen angels are being kept for judgment or kept unto judgment. This will be the judgment of the great day (Jude 6), which will probably be the judgment of the great white throne, executed upon all the dead, upon the demons, and probably also upon the fallen angels (Rev. 20:11-15).

In verse 5 Peter says, "And did not spare the ancient world, but guarded Noah, the eighth, a herald

of righteousness, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.” Noah did not preach the gospel, but he preached God’s righteousness over against the corruption of his generation. As we have pointed out, Peter speaks of righteousness because his emphasis is on God’s government. Noah’s preaching of righteousness was related to God’s government. God told Noah that He would wipe out the world and that Noah should preach righteousness to his generation. God exercised His judgment upon that corrupted generation by bringing a flood upon the world of the ungodly.

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Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

[Commentary]:

Introduction

CW: The Apostle Peter had a strong reaction to the apostasy that was spreading into the church near the end of his life. In fact, he wrote his two epistles largely as an inoculation against the heretical teachings that were gradually corrupting the faith of the saints, especially regarding the matter of the Lord's second coming in glory. In 2 Peter, he first gives an eyewitness account of seeing the Lord Jesus revealed in glory as a foreshadow of his promised return. Then he points the believers to the word of God, specifically the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, as he says in chapter 1, verse 19, *“And we have the prophetic word made more firm, to which you do well to give heed as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”* But after these two strong encouragements, he goes on to speak of the coming judgment of the righteous God, especially on those false teachers who were defiling the saints and leading them astray.

Bill Lawson is with us today. We come to chapter 2 of 2 Peter and we take a hard right turn. This chapter 1 of 2 Peter which we've been laboring on is all full of things pertaining to the divine life with some elements of the truth there also. But mainly we see this full provision, this full supply that God is providing us to be those who can live under His government. A very encouraging chapter, but all of a sudden now, as I said, it takes a hard right turn here, doesn't it?

BL: It really does, Chris. In chapter 1, it's very, very positive, full of the divine provisions to enable us to live the Christian life and the church life, and all of a sudden in chapter 2, it's like it's full of judgment. So in a sense, chapter 2 is somewhat on the negative side, yet there is some real light and truth that we need to realize from this chapter also.

CW: Let's talk about it a little bit and set the background for what we're about to hear, not only today, but really for the balance of these programs in 2 Peter now. We saw in the first epistle, 1 Peter, that this is a book dealing very much with God's government and the dealings, the sufferings, that Peter recounts there and speaks about related to God's government even for those of us, his people, that we live under His ruling and even we live under His judgment. Well, He has a kind of judgment also for those who are not counted among His people, and that is a severe judgment, and we're really looking more at that aspect of judgment as we come to 2 Peter. So the thought of God's government continues in 2 Peter, but we have this nice insertion of chapter 1 that we've just been speaking about, all these positive things, all these things related to our experience of the divine life. And now what's happening historically is that the apostasy or the degradation of the church is taking place, and these very positive things are somewhat threatened, aren't they?

BL: That's true. As you mentioned, there is such a thing as a divine government, just like we have a human government. God has His government, and if we do not correspond to the things involved with God's government, then there are penalties, there are judgments, as you might say.

If you look at the background here of this second epistle, Peter wrote it, I think, historians say, around 69 AD, two or three years after Paul's martyrdom. So it's in the same situation with the Apostle Paul when he wrote his two epistles to Timothy. First Timothy is very, very positive concerning what is the church, the church of the living God. He talks about God's economy, and then the second epistle, he really inoculates his young co-worker Timothy about the degradation and the slide of the church into apostasy and degradation. And this is exactly what has happened here at the time of Peter. The saints, the believers, are sliding into decadence, into spiritual decay, and Peter is trying to, in a sense, shore up the situation so that God's move on the earth can continue.

CW: Bill, as we prepare to join Witness Lee, we'll hear this word, I think, today and on the coming days we'll hear it frequently. I've already used it a couple of times. For those who may not understand or be that familiar, just define quickly for us this word *apostasy*.

BL: Okay, *apostasy* is a Greek term. We know this. "Apo" in Greek means *away from* or *apart from*, and "stasi" is a Greek term which means *to stand*, or that means you have a standing apart from the orthodox truth in the Bible. So anyone who stands apart from the truth in the Scripture concerning the Triune God, the person of Christ, the work, the redemptive work of Christ, His salvation for man, all of these things, anyone who gets

involved in these things is considered to be an apostate, a person. And the actual act of leaving the fundamental Christian faith is called apostasy.

CW: Good. Very helpful, and I appreciate that. Let's join Witness Lee. I'd like to read now verse 1. That verse I read in the opening concerning the prophetic word made more firm, that was the last verse of chapter 1. The first verse of chapter 2, and you'll hear this distinction now between the two directions that we have been talking about, says, *"But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."*

Part 1

CW: Boy, that was about a two and a half, three minute overview of this whole book, wasn't it Bill?

BL: It was really so marvelous.

CW: As we are going to focus on the matter of judgment related to God's government, primarily for the rest of this program and the coming programs, let's take a minute though and go back and spend a little time to linger on these positive divine provisions in chapter 1, because I think we all have been encouraged, nourished, strengthened, and really helped by these things.

BL: That's true Chris, I think we like those divine provisions more than judgment.

CW: That's safe to say.

BL: The divine provisions, as Brother Lee is talking about, is mainly of the divine life and the divine light. Of course, these are provisions, in other words, God in His salvation has provided the redeemed man with these two marvelous provisions. When we were redeemed and saved, of course, God's divine life, through faith, entered into us, enabling us to now have a Christian life and to live the Christian life by the divine life that we received. Of course, the life, when it operates, when it works in us, it shines. It shines away the darkness and brings us into the divine light, and that comes from the truth, the divine reality in the Word of God. That's why I was considering why God's judgment is so heavy-handed on the false teachers, because once we get into the heresies and the false teachings, that cuts God's people off from enjoying the divine life and keeps us from experiencing the divine light.

CW: You mentioned in the introduction or opening of the program today, actually Paul was in a similar circumstance, wasn't he? He had been martyred now a year or two, three, something like that prior to Peter's writing this book. Paul was, in one of his last books of 2 Timothy, very similar in that he's also consumed with this matter of the apostasy, the heresies that were creeping in and the effect that was having. So both Peter and Paul, interestingly, at the end of their lives are confronted with a similar situation, and their efforts to counter it, very similar as well, aren't they?

BL: Really so. You mentioned Paul in his second epistle to Timothy. Paul is talking about the healthy teaching. He's talking about the healthy words. He's talking about the healthy speech. He's talking about all the healthy things of the Word of God, the life of God, that enabled the believers to grow in the divine life and be God's expression to church on the earth at that time. So these two are very similar. Both Peter faced the same thing that Paul faced. And, of course, both were martyred, but we still have their epistles, which is a marvelous thing.

CW: And as you pointed out, it's the false teachers now in the New Testament that were threatening to divert God's people away from the experience of the divine life and these wonderful divine provisions. So Peter is reacting in a strong way. And then we see, as this book unfolds now, the extent, the ferocity of the judgment of our righteous God. Verse 2 in chapter 2 says, *"And many will follow their licentiousness, because of whom the way of the truth will be reviled."* This, of course, speaking again of the false teachers. Let's go back to Witness Lee.

Part 2

CW: Once again, Bill, I can't help but think back to Timothy and Paul's situation. Paul refers to this term *God's economy* to avoid those who teach anything differently. Again, he and Peter are tracking right together, aren't they, as they face this challenge. Really, God's enemy's subtle hand working almost within the church but right on the fringes and having a devastating impact, doesn't it?

BL: Right. As we talked about earlier, you have a devastating work of false teaching and false prophets. They are so pernicious and so evil because they cut people off from the enjoyment of God's life and the experience of the shining of the light. So that's why His judgment on those ones, Chris, is so severe. Of course, even today, we have such ones who fall into the same category, denying the glorious deity of Christ and also rejecting and denying His redemptive work. If that is rejected and denied, then we have no

Christian faith. We lose everything. So that's why it's so serious that when we listen to these false prophets and teachings, this can permanently damage our Christian faith.

CW: Bill, even under the guise of genuine Christianity, are those who take a—he referred to this, used this term— modernist kind of teaching, which denies much of the divine aspects of the faith and explains away all of the so-called supernatural things and really denying the deity of Christ from that sense as well. This also can be a real threat, can it, to the Church?

BL: Yes, very much. So this is quite subtle. And, of course, just as Peter talked about a couple thousand years ago, he was on the scene. There were false prophets in the Old Testament time. He realized there were false prophets at his time. And this we surely know through the course of the history of the Christian Church, that through the ages, these false teachers and prophets have arisen again and again to cause a real damage to the Lord's economy. This Greek word, *Chris*, is interesting. In Watchman Nee's ministry, he mentions at least four or five different shades of meaning in the word destruction and ruin. It can mean the ruin of our Christian life, but also it can mean an eternal perdition. And here, the sense of the Greek word is eternal perdition, not just a temporary ruin of a person's life. So you can see how serious Peter was here in dealing with these heretical people.

CW: The severity of the judgment seems to ramp up in these next few verses. Let me just read these. And these are sobering, there's no doubt. Beginning at verse 3 in chapter 2, *“And in covetousness, with fabricated words, they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber. For if God did not spare the angels who sinned but delivered them to gloomy pits, having cast them to Tartarus, they being kept for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world but guarded Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.”* So he is referring back to the Old Testament again, to the judgment there. We have the false prophets in the Old Testament, the false teachers in the new. So Peter is really doing his best to sober the people of God and really provide a stern warning here that we better give heed to. And here's Witness Lee with our last portion.

Part 3

CW: You know, Bill, it strikes me reflecting back to the Genesis and the account of Noah. There was a kind of a condition that existed in the world in Noah's time. And here he was

speaking God's righteousness and proclaiming a kind of judgment. And there wasn't much appetite for that kind of speaking. Today, we find a situation where in the world in which we live, there isn't much of an appetite for this kind of speaking today, is there either?

BL: No, you're right, Chris. The evil things are almost glorified. And today, if anyone takes a stand for things of righteousness, they are mocked, ridiculed, reviled, and so on. So, no doubt Noah really took a stand in his age against the corruption. Of course, the corruption there, if you really get into it in Genesis 6, is quite something because you had those fallen angels in the time of the pre-Adamite universe. When one-third of the angels went with Satan and his rebellion against God. And then, of course, when God created man and human history developed, those fallen angels at the time of Noah, they actually took on human bodies and committed fornication with the daughters of man, developing these kind of, you might say, freaks or mutations called these giants that we even read about in Greek mythology. And God was so upset with that kind of mixture, He had to destroy the human race and just preserve Noah and a few others, that in a sense, He might start over again with the proper humanity that He could use.

CW: So, that is some of the background behind the story of Noah. I think this is a part that is not that well-known or understood. But these are all things that are found in the scriptural accounts of the Old Testament, aren't they?

BL: Really so. Chris, if you get into the book of Jude, the book of Revelation, Matthew 25-41, you have an idea of what Peter was talking about when God had to come in and judge these fallen angels. And, Chris, He had to judge the men, the mutation that was formed from this. So, you really have a strong history here of God's judgment upon all kinds of people, upon the ungodly people at that time, upon the angels and so on. So, He's also saying that there's a judgment also on these false prophets that's also very serious.

CW: Interesting that the Lord would put the false teachers of the New Testament dispensation era in the same kind of category as the judgment that He evoked on these horrible, evil creatures from Old Testament times. It is very sobering. Bill, you refer to the kind of trail or the puzzle and the pieces. I would say if you get a recovery version with the footnotes and the cross-references there, you can follow this trail all the way through. Typically, we talk about the printed life study messages, and I don't want to ignore those, but I think it's a good time to mention the recovery version, what a tremendous asset it is.

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