

2 PET. 2:10b – 3:18

By Ashby L. Camp

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3. Sins of the false teachers (2:10b-16) – *Brazen, arrogant men, they do not tremble when they revile glories, ¹¹whereas angels, though being greater in strength and power, do not bring against them a reviling judgment before [the] Lord. ¹²But these men, like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct born for capture and destruction, reviling [those] about whom they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, ¹³suffering harm as wages of unrighteousness. Considering indulgence in the daytime a pleasure, [they are] blots and blemishes, indulging in their pleasures while feasting with you, ¹⁴having eyes full of [desire for] an adulteress and that do not cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having hearts trained in greed, [they are] accursed children! ¹⁵Abandoning [the] straight way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam son of Bosor who loved [the] wages of unrighteousness ¹⁶but had a rebuke for his own transgression: a speechless donkey, speaking with a human voice, restrained the prophet's madness.*

a. The false teachers are so arrogant that they do not fear when they blaspheme or revile "glories," meaning when they mock, ridicule, belittle, or speak contemptuously of them.

b. It seems clear, as most commentators recognize, that "glories" refers to some kind of angelic being. Though angels are not referred to as "glories" in the O.T., they are linked with glory and actually called glories in some extrabiblical Jewish texts (see Moo, 121, fn. 4). It is less clear, however, whether Peter is referring to fallen, evil angels (demons) or to good angels. Some think fallen angels could not qualify for the label "glories," but perhaps, as many believe, that label reflects the glory of their original state rather than their present condition.

c. In Jude 8-9 the archangel Michael is contrasted with the false teachers in that they "revile glories" whereas he refused to bring a "reviling judgment" against *Satan*, saying instead, "The Lord rebuke you." Given the relationship of 2 Peter and Jude, the statement in 2 Pet. 2:11 that angels do not bring a reviling judgment against "them" most likely means that angels do not bring a reviling judgment against *fallen angels*, of which Satan is the chief. That means that "glories" in 2 Pet. 2:10b refers to fallen angels.

d. So I think Peter is saying in 2:10b-11 that the false teachers are so cocky in their error that they react to warnings that their immorality is playing into the hands of the spiritual forces of evil by scoffing at the idea and speaking of demons in skeptical, mocking, and scornful terms. The recklessness of this arrogance is evident in the fact that, even though good angels are more powerful than demons (e.g., Rev. 12:7-8), they still have respect for their power (and perhaps the greatness of the station from which they have

fallen) and thus do not speak contemptuously or insultingly of them.¹ They oppose them but do not underestimate them.

e. Though they see themselves as the epitome of rationality and insight, they are, in their ignorant dismissal and reviling of evil spiritual powers, acting like unreasoning animals, creatures of mere instinct that lack the intelligence to avoid capture and destruction. As wages of their unrighteousness, they are going to join the demons in their destruction.²

f. The false teachers are so shameless that they have no qualms about indulging their sinful appetites in broad daylight. They are "blots and blemishes" in the church, living in sin while continuing to "feast" with the church.

(1) This is probably a reference to the early Christian "love feast," which Jude mentions explicitly in v. 12 and which is presupposed in Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11:17-34. The love feast was a fellowship meal in conjunction with which the church often, if not always, celebrated the Lord's Supper proper, meaning the symbolic bread and fruit of the vine.

(2) The love feast was a permissible rather than a commanded practice. It was separated from the Supper by the second century and then eventually dropped, at least as a regular practice.

(3) In 3:14 Peter exhorts his audience to be the opposite of the false teachers. Whereas the false teachers are "blots and blemishes," they are to strive to be found "spotless and blameless" by God.

g. The false teachers have eyes full of desire for an adulteress and that do not cease from sin. They were always on the hunt for the next partner in adultery, constantly viewing women from that perspective.

h. But they not only were immoral; they were through their teaching actively enticing or seducing the spiritually unstable to join them in their sin. They offered a theological rationale for their lawless living.

i. The false teachers have hearts *trained* in greed, meaning they had worked at developing hearts that desired without proper restraint, hearts that put money (2:3) and sexual pleasure above God. They are accursed children, meaning they are destined for condemnation.

¹ The translation "before [the] Lord" at the end of v. 11 assumes *παρὰ κυρίου* is the original reading (see NET note).

² With Bauckham (p. 263-264), I take *ἐν οἷς ἀγνοοῦσιν βλασφημοῦντες* in v. 12 as a reference to the glories in v. 10 ("the masculine *οἷς* is natural despite the fact that *δόξαι* is feminine"; see also NET) and understand "their destruction" at the end of that verse as a reference to the destruction of those evil powers.

j. These heretics follow Balaam's way of disobedience to God for the sake of financial profit. He gave advice on how to lure the Israelites into sexual immorality at Baal Peor (Num. 25:1-3, 31:7-8, 15-16), which effort was linked in Jewish tradition to his greed (e.g., Gene Green, 285). Jesus describes Balaam to John in Rev. 2:14 as one "who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality." The false teachers were likewise seeking to lure the church into sexual immorality, presumably also motivated by financial gain.

(1) The tradition of Balaam's greed may be rooted in Numbers 22, which contains hints that he was motivated by the hope of financial gain.

(a) According to Walter Kaiser in *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 88-91, God's permission to Balaam in v. 20 was conditioned on the *emissaries* coming to Balaam (rather than Balaam going to them) after Balaam told them in v. 19 to stay for the night. In other words, God told Balaam that *if* the emissaries sought him out again (instead of leaving in disgust) after being put off when Balaam told them he needed to consult the Lord, *then* he could go with them. (For this view, v. 20 is translated as in the KJV: "If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them.") But instead of waiting for that condition (the emissaries coming once more to him), Balaam took the initiative in v. 21 and rose to go with the emissaries. Perhaps Balaam feared the emissaries would not return and was not willing to give up all hope of financial gain in the situation. There are indications that Balaam was torn: he failed to mention in Num. 22:13 God's reason for refusing to let him go and curse Israel (that Israel was blessed - Num. 22:12) and he continued to press God for permission when it had been clearly denied. We know that he later succumbed to the temptation to harm Israel (Num. 31:7-8, 15-16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14).

(b) Despite Balaam's disobedience, God in his mercy did not kill him. Instead, he allowed the donkey to see the angel. This donkey possessed sounder prophetic vision than the prophet whose moral sense had been perverted by greed or other impure motives. In that encounter, the angel warned Balaam in 22:35 that he must speak only what he was told, and having been chastened, he refused to curse Israel but instead blessed them four times.

(2) Peter's reference to Balaam as "son of *Bosor*" rather than "son of *Beor*" probably is a word play derived from the Hebrew word for "flesh" (*basar*). Balaam was not a man of the Spirit but a man of the flesh, which is true of the false teachers.

4. Warning against false teachers by elaborating on their fate (2:17-22) -
¹⁷*These men are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm, for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved.* ¹⁸*For while uttering high-sounding [words] of nonsense, they entice with lusts of [the] flesh, acts of licentiousness, those who are barely escaping from those who live in error,* ¹⁹*promising them freedom while themselves being slaves of corruption – for by what someone has been overcome, to this he has become enslaved.* ²⁰*For if, after escaping the pollutions of the world by [the] knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are overcome by again becoming entangled in these things, the*

last [state] has become worse for them [than] the first. ²¹For it was better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing [it] to turn from the holy commandment that had been passed on to them. ²²It has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to its own vomit and a sow, after being washed, to wallowing in the mud."

a. Peter describes the false teachers as waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. Both metaphors describe circumstances that suggest the provision of refreshing and life-giving water but which prove false and thus are bitterly disappointing. Mists driven by a storm probably refers to mists that are dissipated or blown away by winds without producing any rainfall. Schreiner states (p. 356), "The mists promise water that is so desperately needed in a dry climate, but the wind sweeps through and drives the hazy mists away, leaving the land parched." The false teachers promise the refreshing and life-giving truth of God, but whoever is drawn to them will be bitterly disappointed.

b. He describes the judgment that is in store for them as "the gloom of darkness." They will for eternity suffer in a dreadful environment away from the presence of God and all that is good. Other texts, of course, portray that judgment in terms of fire. Both depictions are true because neither is intended to be a literal description but a picture that communicates the truth of suffering and dreadfulness.

c. They will endure that fate because they are opposing God by luring immature Christians, those barely escaping the pull of the world, into a lifestyle of sexual sin. They promise them freedom, meaning freedom from moral restraints, but the reality and irony is that they themselves are enslaved to sin, to moral corruption, especially to their sinful sexual appetites. They are preaching freedom to others while being unable to extricate themselves from sin.

d. The false teachers probably supported their case for freedom from moral restraints by denying Christ's return and the future judgment associated with it (3:3-7) and by distorting Paul's gospel of freedom (3:15-16). Their appeal was wrapped in high-sounding nonsense, which too often is able to draw the gullible.

e. Peter elaborates further on their condemnation by explaining that their repudiation of their conversion to Christ by returning to the sinful lifestyle from which they escaped at the time of their conversion makes them worse off than those who never converted. It would have been better for them never to have converted, never to have entered the way of righteousness, than to have converted and turned from the holy commandment, the call to walk in faithfulness to Christ. Their situation is worse than one who never converted because they will for eternity know that they had once been saved, had once known the love and mercy of the Savior, but chose to abandon that precious state for the fleeting glitter of sin.

f. The false teachers are examples of a proverbial statement that was a modification and expansion of the first part of Prov. 26:11: "A dog returns to its own vomit and a sow, after being washed, to wallowing in the mud." In returning to the moral

corruption of the world after having been cleansed by Christ and delivered from that filth, they are like a dog returning to its vomit and a washed sow wallowing in the mud. That is getting pretty high on the rebuke scale!

C. Hold fast to the promise of Christ's return (3:1-13)

1. The false teachers deny the return of Christ (3:1-7) – *This [is] now, beloved, [the] second letter I am writing to you in which I arouse your pure intention with a reminder² to remember the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the command of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. ³Know this first [of all] that in the last days scoffers will come with scoffing, proceeding according to their own lusts⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For from which [time] the fathers fell asleep, everything continues as from [the] beginning of creation!" ⁵For this is concealed [from] them wishing [concealment], that by the word of God [the] heavens existed long ago and [the] earth was formed from water and through water,⁶ through which things the world then [existing], having been deluged with water, perished. ⁷And by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

a. Peter mentions that this is his second letter to them. His first letter may well have been 1 Peter, but it is possible that he is alluding to a letter that God chose not to preserve, like the letter to which Paul refers in 1 Cor. 5:9.

b. Peter wants to arouse their pure intention by having them recall the prophetic word about the Messiah's coming in judgment, to which he referred in 1:19-21, and having them recall Christ's insistence that they live righteously as his disciples, which command "their" apostles had passed on to them.

(1) As Jesus made clear in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, those who are participants in God's revolutionary activity on earth, those who have submitted to the reign of the King, are to live lives that reflect his righteousness.

(2) The reference to "*your* apostles" is to the particular apostles who evangelized and taught his audience, as distinct from the full set of apostles. This apparently included Paul, but the reference does not necessarily exclude Peter.

c. He indicates that they are seeing in the false teachers a fulfillment of earlier predictions that mockers would arise in the last days. New Testament writers emphasized that the last days had begun with Christ's redemptive work (e.g., Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2), and the false teachers were people who, while indulging their own lusts, scoffed at the idea of Christ's return in judgment. These two things go together: indulging lusts and scoffing at divine judgment.

d. They asserted that the physical world had always been characterized by continuity and stability and thus that it was foolish to expect the kind of

radical transformation of the world that was taught would occur in conjunction with Christ's return.

e. Because of their desire for sin, they chose to be unaware or unappreciative of the fact God by his word previously had a dramatic effect on the physical world.

(1) By that word he brought into being the heavens and formed the earth from water and by water in the sense he made the dry land from under the water by gathering the waters into a place called seas. (Peter probably is emphasizing water in the creation account because of the following clause dealing with the flood which reverses the process of making land.)

(2) Through that same word and water, the world of Noah's day perished in the flood.

f. The same mighty word that dramatically affected the physical world in the past has reserved the present heavens and earth for fire in the day of judgment.

2. Christ will certainly return with cosmically transforming results (3:8-10) – *⁸But do not let this one thing be concealed [from] you, beloved, that with [the] Lord one day [is] like a thousand years and a thousand years [are] like one day. ⁹[The] Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some regard slowness, but is patient toward you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But [the] day of [the] Lord will come like a thief, at which [time] the heavens will pass away with a roar, and [the] elements will be dissolved by being burned up, and the earth and the works in it will be exposed.*

a. Peter cautions his readers not to allow the apparent slowness of Christ's return to become a cause for doubting the certainty of it. He tells them that God operates in his own dimension of time – with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day – so that he cannot be judged by human perceptions of slowness. Moo remarks (p. 186), "God views the passage of time from a different perspective than we do. We are impatient, getting disturbed and upset by even a short delay; God is patient, willing to let centuries and even millennia go by as he works out his purposes."

b. The Lord is not slow in fulfilling the promise of Christ's return in the sense the passage of decades (and now millennia) does not have the connotation that the false teachers apparently attached to it. God is not slow concerning the promise *as they regard slowness*, as they interpret his not having already sent Jesus back. Rather than indicating an intent to leave things as they are, it is a reflection of God's deep concern for human beings. "For in God's patience, he is waiting for people to repent before it is too late. He does not want 'anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance'" (Moo, 187).

c. However long God chooses to wait before sending Jesus, he is definitely going to send him. Peter emphasizes that certainty by placing the verb "will

come" at the beginning of the sentence in v. 10. God is patient, but the day of the Lord will come, and it will come "like a thief," meaning at a time not specified beforehand.

d. At Christ's return, creation will get the ultimate makeover, passing through a purifying fire (3:7). The heavens as presently constituted will pass away with the roar of a cosmic conflagration, and the elements,³ the stuff of which the physical things in this world are made, will be burned up. Somewhere in connection with that process, all that has transpired on the earth will be exposed,⁴ laid bare, before God in the judgment.

3. Living righteously in light of Christ's transforming return (3:11-13) –
¹¹Since all these things are thus being dissolved, what sort of [people] ought you to be with regard to holy forms of conduct and godly deeds ¹²while awaiting and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which [the] heavens will be dissolved by being set on fire and [the] elements will melt by being burned? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we are awaiting a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

a. Given the certainty of the final, consummating, history-ending judgment he has just described, what kind of people should they be with regard to godly living as they expectantly wait for and hasten that day?

(1) The question is, of course, rhetorical. The understood answer is that they are to live godly lives, lives that reflect their allegiance to God, so as to be on the desirable side of that judgment. Living by the standards of this fallen world is a fool's move because it is aligning oneself with the old age or order that is doomed to destruction.

(2) Peter does not explain how disciples can hasten the coming of the day of God while they await it. My guess is that he has in mind the endurance of the persecution and suffering that come with living for God in this sinful world. (Remember that he is about to be executed, and 1 Peter, which may have been written to these same Christians, says much about enduring persecution for the faith.)

(a) It seems from Rev. 6:9-11 that there is a predetermined quantity of Christian suffering that will occur before Christ's return. So with each episode of Christian persecution there is that much less of the set quantity of righteous suffering to be experienced, and thus the day of judgment draws closer to that extent.

³ With many commentators (e.g., Moo, Schreiner, Neyrey) and with most English translations, I take στοιχεῖα here to mean "elements" rather than "heavenly bodies" or "spiritual beings."

⁴ With NIV, TNIV, NRSV, ESV, and NET, I accept εὑρεθήσεται ("will be found") as the original text and per Bauckham understand it as virtually equivalent to "will be disclosed" or "will be manifested." Other translations (KJV, ASV, NAS, RSV, NJB) assume κατακαίσεται is the original text and thus read "will (or shall) be burned up."

(b) I think this lies behind the exhortation in Heb. 10:25 to encourage one another *all the more as they see the Day approaching*. They see the day of judgment drawing nearer each time they see Christians suffer for their faith, so the writer is telling them to be more diligent in encouraging the saints as they see them experience hardships.

(c) This almost certainly is the idea behind Paul's statement in Col. 1:24, "Now I rejoice in the sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church, . . ."

[1] Obviously Paul's filling a deficiency in "Christ's afflictions" does not mean that Christ's death lacks anything in atoning or reconciling efficacy (see Col. 1:20, 22). Rather, "Christ's afflictions" refers to what in Jewish apocalyptic literature was called the "woes (or birthpangs) of the Messiah."

[2] The Jewish idea was that the Messianic Age would be preceded immediately by the suffering of God's people. This concept continues in the N.T., but it is modified. The "coming age" already has been inaugurated, but it overlaps with the "present age." This dual state will continue until Christ's return. The woes of the Messiah, the afflictions of Christ, continue as the sufferings of his people (Acts 9:4) throughout this dual age until they reach their *appointed limit*. Then Christ will return, consummating the "age to come."

[3] Paul rejoices because his bodily sufferings contribute to the total of sufferings to be endured before the consummation of the age to come. By helping to fill up this predetermined measure, Paul brings the end so much closer. By personally absorbing a disproportionate share of the affliction of Christ, the predetermined measure of suffering the righteous must endure, he reduced the amount of suffering left for fellow Christians.

b. The new heavens and new earth that will come through this purifying fire is described as a reality in which righteousness dwells, which implies the exclusion of the false teachers and their followers. Moo comments (p. 200):

We live in a world where wrong often prevails; a world in which faithful Christians are often persecuted for doing God's will, while evil people enjoy the rewards of their sin; a world in which innocent lives are ripped from wombs and God's laws are flaunted [sic] and mocked. All that will be eradicated in the next world. As John puts it in Revelation 21:3-4:

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

c. Rather than annihilating the first heaven and earth and replacing it with something entirely new, the idea is that the first heaven and earth will be reduced to another form by fire and then reconstituted as something radically different. It is analogous to the transformation of our bodies in the resurrection; there is both continuity and discontinuity between the seed and what God brings out of that seed (see 1 Corinthians 15).

(1) The continuity aspect is suggested by Jesus' reference in Mat. 19:28 to the "renewal of all things," by Peter's comment in Acts 3:21 that God would "restore everything," and by Paul's statement in Rom. 8:21 that creation would be liberated from its "slavery to decay."

(2) It is also suggested in many Jewish apocalyptic writings. Bauckham says (p. 326) of the relevant Jewish and Christian literature, "Such passages emphasize the radical discontinuity between the old and the new, but it is nevertheless clear that they intend to describe a renewal, not an abolition, of creation (cf. 1 Enoch 54:4-5; Rom 8:21)."

III. The Letter Closing – Strive to live right and be on guard against the false teachers (3:14-18) – ¹⁴*Therefore, beloved, since [you are] awaiting these things, strive to be found spotless and blameless by him, at peace, ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord [as] salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, ¹⁶as indeed [he does] in all [his] letters, speaking in them about these things. In them are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist (as [they] also [do] the other scriptures) to their own destruction. ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, since you already know this, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of lawless men, you fall from your own stable position. ¹⁸But grow in [the] grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him [be] the glory both now and to [the] day of eternity. Amen.*

A. Since they are looking forward to Christ's return and the things associated with it, they need to live in light of that expectation. "They need constantly to look beyond the circumstances of this life and to gauge every thought and every action in light of the eternal state that Christ's return in glory will introduce" (Moo, 207).

1. Specifically, they need to strive to be found spotless and blameless by God on that day. Moo states (p. 208):

Peter's point is clear: Motivated by the Day of the Lord that is coming, believers should work hard to be found perfectly pure and blameless when God in Christ assesses their lives. They should strive to be the opposite of the false teachers, who are "blots and blemishes" (2:13). Remember, however, that this is a goal we are to strive for, not a condition that we will finally be able to achieve. For the New Testament makes clear that the believers will always have sin to confess (1 John 1:8) and that our struggle with sin will never finally end until our bodies themselves are "redeemed"

(see Rom. 8:23). But this realization should not diminish our sincere effort to get as close to that goal as possible.

2. In other words, they are to strive to be found at peace with God, meaning to be found living in submission to him rather than in rebellion against him. They must guard against the false teachers' lie that it does not matter how one lives.

B. They are to regard the patience of our Lord, which 3:9 makes clear refers to the time he waits before bringing the final judgment, as salvation. They are to recognize the time before Christ's consummating return as an opportunity to repent of rebellion into which they may have been drawn by the false teachers. Regarding the time before the final judgment as salvation also may imply a responsibility to bring others to a knowledge of Christ while the door is still open.

C. He notes that Paul, whom he calls "our dear brother," also had written to them about the need to live holy lives in light of Christ's coming. He probably cites Paul's agreement because some were distorting Paul's teaching (v. 16), presumably twisting his views on salvation by grace and turning them into a license to sin.

1. We do not know the letter to which Peter is referring, other than that it was directed to his audience, but as Moo states (p. 210), "Paul touches on this subject in virtually every letter he wrote."

2. Peter notes that Paul wrote to them according to the wisdom given to him, meaning given to him by God. It is recognition of God's working through Paul in the things Paul wrote. He adds that Paul writes by that divine wisdom in all his letters and speaks in them about these things, about holy living in light of Christ's return. Peter is referring to all Paul's letters that he had seen, not necessarily to all letters Paul had written.

3. He says that Paul wrote some things that are hard to understand, probably meaning that some of his statements easily could be misunderstood if removed from their context. In other words, Paul wrote things that when isolated from their context seemed to mean something Paul never intended. Indeed, his own letters document people twisting his words (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:12, "Everything is permissible for me"; Rom. 3:8, 6:1). James also was probably dealing with this phenomenon in Jas. 2:14-26.

4. Peter labels those who so twist Paul's teaching as "the ignorant and unstable," no doubt referring to the false teachers, whom he referred to in 2:14 as "unstable." They apparently cited Paul in support of their error, perhaps twisting his teaching on grace into a license for immorality.

5. Peter says their twisting of Paul's writings was in keeping with how they twist the *other scriptures*, so he clearly recognizes Paul's writings as having a status equal to that of the Old Testament scriptures. The end of these scripture-twisting false teachers will be condemnation in the final judgment. Moo states (p. 93), "As a metaphor for judgment, the word [destruction] does not carry the literal meaning of 'annihilate' or 'cease to exist' but,

with 'salvation' as its opposite (2 Cor. 2:15), denotes the eternal loss of fellowship with God (see also John 12:25; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18; 8:11; 2 Cor. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10)."

D. Since they know the certainty of the coming final judgment, the kind of lives they should live in light of that judgment, and the fate of those who deny those truths, they must be on their guard so as not to be carried away by the false teachers and fall from their stable position.

E. Rather than being pulled away by the error of the false teachers, they are to grow spiritually, grow in their responsiveness to Christ's transforming grace and in their knowledge of him.

F. He ends with a doxology, an expression of praise, directed to the Lord Jesus. May he have the glory both now and in the day of eternity that will arrive with his return.