

Dear Friends,

Although I was not in a situation to engage the person in conversation, some time back I overheard a sad hurting person say he didn't believe in God because of all the pain and injustice in the world. As I pondered this sentiment, it dawned on me. I believe in God for the same reason! When I ponder the incomprehensible expanse and beauty of this universe, to think that God doesn't exist, and the final result of all intelligent life ends with pain and injustice seems so illogical to me.

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be good, or whether it be evil.* (Ecclesiastes 12:14 KJV)

This present world abounds with pain, sin, and bad things, yes, even to good godly people. We observe wicked people and wonder why they do not experience the kind of divine intervention and judgment which Peter teaches in our study passage for this week. Remember. God told Noah of the coming flood and directed him to build the ark, but that judgment was delayed for over five hundred years. This passage from Ecclesiastes assures us. Despite long delays and present wickedness, God shall have the last word against all sin. Many years ago a cliché, "I'm okay, you're okay," was popular. During that era, I heard a preacher remind his congregation, the wicked shall not be "Okay" when they realize that God "K-O-ed" them in hell.

When we study the life of Lot in Genesis, we leave him with a despicable opinion of the man. Justly so, because of his final chapter in Genesis 19. The idealistic belief that all people who are "Truly born again" shall, with certainty, "Persevere," repent and honor the Lord before they die, even if they didn't do so during their life, fails the Biblical test based on its record of Lot's life. Inspired Scripture, our study passage, honors him as "just Lot." It mentions that he was vexed daily with the wickedness he observed during his time in the wicked city where he lived. But inspired Scripture also reveals the "Sins of the saints," no less than it contains their godly conduct.

As distasteful as the theme of 2 Peter 2 may be to us, false teachers, their character--or lack thereof--and how to avoid them, this chapter also contains strong encouragement. Contemporary Christianity is subdivided into several thousand different subgroups, each sincerely believing they have the right view of God and of Scripture. They can't all be right. Jude described the truth of New Testament teaching as the "faith (A body of accepted teachings) which was once delivered to the saints." Scripture never mentions thousands of different ideas and doctrines, all equally acceptable to the Lord. False teachers have splashed their divisive and unbiblical ideas across the centuries, just as Peter warned at the beginning of this chapter. We need this chapter and all of Scripture's teaching to avoid being enticed by those false teachers. And residing at the heart of our defense against false teachers and their ideas is the bedrock principle set forth in our study passage for the week, "**The Lord knoweth how....**"

Our only hope for avoiding false teachers and their errors is to invest regular and long seasons of time in serious study of our Bibles, coupled with a strong respect for Scripture as given and preserved by the Lord for our need in this effort, and in all good works. That need has been my passion in writing these weekly lessons for over forty years. My prayer has been that some thought here and there might encourage tired pilgrims, as well as instruct them against the steady onslaught of false teachers which Peter reminds us shall be ever present.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Righteous Judgment: “The Lord Knoweth How”

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. (2 Peter 2:4-10 KJV 1900)

In the first three verses of Chapter 2, Peter twice mentioned the Lord’s speedy judgment. In some cases, His speedy judgment may refer to chastening judgment against His people. I believe those passages dealing with the “Judgment Seat of Christ” refer to chastening. Quick judgment in the form of chastening opens the door for the chastened child of God to repent and reform his/her conduct. In the cases Peter mentions in this week’s study verses, he also references the Lord’s immediate intervention against evil, in some cases quick chastening of an erring believer and, in others, His providential intervention to protect and care for His people or to manifest His righteous indignation at grave sin.

Each example Peter names richly instructs us to know the Lord’s comprehensive care for His people and His present intervention against those who threaten their peace and safety. His major point appears in his summary statement, **“The Lord knoweth how....”** Often, we simply cannot know enough to righteously judge another person. For example, we observe someone who disagrees with our beliefs. We honestly think we are right in our thinking. How significant is our disagreement? How wrong is that person’s ideas? What is our basis for our beliefs? An idea a respected friend taught us? Tradition? Or Scripture—and Scripture alone? What is the other person’s motive? How honest and sincere are they in their beliefs? Do you get my drift? We can’t factually and correctly answer most—if any—of these questions. How then can we judge them? But Peter reminds us. **“The Lord knoweth how....”** Let’s study the examples Peter mentioned to see the severity of the false teaching and the Lord’s assessment of their sins.

1. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment. We hear and read a lot of speculation and misinterpretation of Scripture regarding this event. That Peter states it affirms its truth. And just to clarify. Isaiah 14 does not teach about this event. The multi-chapter context contains Isaiah’s narrating the Lord’s judgment against the king of Babylon. (Isaiah 14:4 KJV) The context thoroughly rejects the idea that this lesson is about the fall of Satan, a fallen angel. Verse 9 ridicules the King of Babylon by reminding him that hell beneath stirs up the dead who are already in hell to greet him upon his arrival there. If this lesson is about the fall of Satan, hell would be empty, not be populated at the time. The reference to the king of Babylon as “Lucifer” (Isaiah 14:12 KJV) is more a taunt than an affirmation. He likely thought himself a god, but God’s prophet reminded him that he was a mortal who would die like other men. Whatever the occasion, the Lord knows how to wisely judge the sins of angels—or humans—and to punish them appropriately. If He can rightly judge angels, surely, He can judge anyone or any occasion I might face.

2. And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly. Scripture provides much more information regarding Noah and the flood than it does about the fallen angels. In this case, the whole culture turned away from God and plunged itself into sin. Only one righteous man remained with his family. How could such a man survive in such a wicked world, much less survive the judgment the Lord promised to send against it? How can a little band of devoted believers in Jesus survive in today’s dark and sinful culture? The Lord appeared to Noah and gave him specific instructions to build the ark, the

means by which Noah and his family would escape the coming judgment. He also provides us today with full instructions to protect and deliver ourselves "...from this untoward generation," (Acts 2:40 KJV) the writings of Scripture. For Noah or for that little church, the encouraging refrain applies, "**The Lord knoweth how....**"

3. And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly. The whole question of sinning/fallen angels is something of a mystery. However, the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah is well known to most Bible students. In the example of Noah and the flood, we learn that the Lord knew how to send speedy judgment against a wicked culture and to deliver righteous Noah and his family. In this lesson, we learn a similar lesson. The Lord announced His judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah to Lot, Abraham's nephew. God's judgment against the wicked in Noah's day was a broad judgment against a whole culture. His judgment in Lot's time was against two adjacent cities. Broad or focused, **God knows how** to send His righteous judgment against many or few. For us, the greater lesson is that, whether broad or focused judgment, our God knows how to deliver His people so that they escape that judgment. Well-meaning Christians occasionally pronounce their assessment of natural disasters as a divine judgment. I always question how they know that such an event is the Lord's judgment against sin and not a natural disaster of "...time and chance" which happens to all. (Ecclesiastes 9:11KJV) I personally do not accept that every disaster is a divine judgment, and the Noah and the Lot lessons before us document my reason. In both cases, Peter makes a point of describing God's precise judgment against the wicked, along with His deliverance of His righteous servants. When whole regions or communities, righteous and wicked alike, suffer disaster, they fall short of this precision of the Lord's righteous judgment which Peter describes.

4. And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;). If we follow Lot to the final chapter of Scripture's history of the man, we read of his conduct in the cave, and we righteously and strongly disapprove of his sinful conduct. However, Peter, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, describes Lot's attitude while living in Sodom and Gomorrah. This lesson serves as a powerful instruction for us. We don't honor our God and our faith by joining the wicked world around us. We better serve the Lord by faithfully holding to our faith and standing apart from ever-changing cultural norms. "Conversation" in Scripture normally refers to lifestyle, not merely to the words people speak. To exemplify the point, Peter tells us that Lot was vexed with the "...filthy conversation of the wicked" people in his community. In the parenthetical explanation that follows, he describes the specific meaning he intended by "conversation." He was vexed "...with their unlawful deeds." Lot's vexation was not an occasional outburst at the worst of the culture, but rather he experienced it "...from day to day." It was a state of vexation, a stable moral objection to the wicked conduct he observed. In this point, Lot serves as a lively example for us. Do we live our daily life in lock-step agreement with the world in which we live, and then feign vexation against it sitting in our Sunday morning church pew? Or do we live our life with an abiding vexation against the wicked culture and find our meaning and direction in our God with His faithful people?

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Sincere confession. Sandra and I raised three daughters. During their teen years, we wrestled with many of the same issues that challenge most parents. You care for your child, but sometimes they venture into ideas and conduct that gives you concern and fear for them. Now that our three daughters are adults with their own children, I have looked at the world we live in today. I've commented that I do not envy godly parents raising children in today's culture. We thought it was bad when our girls were young, but it seems oh so much worse today. In this attitude, I confess that I failed to embrace Peter's lesson. The same Lord who knew how to deliver us and our daughters is no less able to give wisdom and grace to His people today as they live and raise their children in this world. When I study the history of the Roman Empire during the first century, in many ways, it reads as if the historian was writing about today's culture. But we must add the greater ordeal of first century Christians being persecuted and killed for their faith with the full support and approval of the Roman Empire. In that culture, Peter wrote, "**The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations.**" He also knows how to deliver godly parents and their children today.

...and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Our God is equally able to know the wickedness of evil people and the faithfulness of His disciples. When you grieve that the wicked people in our world seem to avoid righteous judgment for their sins, take heart. The Lord shall righteously judge every sin—and sinner—either now or on Judgment Day. Children of God face present judgment in the form of chastening, lovingly balanced to urge us to repentance. The wicked may not face judgment now, but they shall face the Lord on Judgment Day. And Peter reminds us of a third providence. On occasions when His people are in jeopardy from wicked people, the Lord may intervene and send judgment now.

Take special note of the three traits that Peter names to describe the wicked who shall face the Lord's final and eternal judgment. 1) They are "unjust." They despise Biblical Christian values and lifestyle. 2) They "walk after the flesh," craving morally despicable things. And 3) they "despise government." Why—what moral rational reason—should believers in Jesus want to imitate the lifestyle and conduct of wicked people whom the Lord teaches shall spend eternity separated from Him? It isn't a popular thought in our day, but both major political parties in our country have hijacked various segments of "Evangelical Christian" culture and people. The hatred which people in both parties demonstrate toward the other party, including professing believers who subscribe to one or the other party, is precariously close to Peter's "despise government" idea. If your party is ruling, you approve almost everything they do, but, if the other party is ruling, you despise almost everything they do. New Testament teaching on civil government as a divine institution says nothing about political party-ism. Regardless the party in the majority at the time, godly Christian people have a New Testament obligation to respect civil government as the Lord's institution, and to pray for those in positions of power. We have much to learn in our pursuit of Biblical godliness. Rather than join either hate group, godly believers should stand above this hatred and exemplify a better, a Biblical, lifestyle. Lord, have mercy and guide us more toward You and Your ways and less toward anything that imitates the wicked who shall be finally and righteously judged.

Elder Joe Holder