

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part twelve

Studies in 2 Peter - Sunday, May 12th, 2019 - Teaching #2130

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WHEN SIN BECOMES FATAL (Part 2)

2 Peter 2:10-16 - “....and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, [11] whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. [12] But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, [13] suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. [14] They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! [15] Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, [16] but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.”

Last week we studied the most destructive sins that can ever be committed. And we studied what *makes* sins especially deadly and damning. Sins become all the more carcinogenic when they are persisted in against knowledge of the truth - **2 Peter 2:10** - “....and *especially* those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and *despise authority*. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones....”

Today we continue with three more points (numbered 2 through 4):

2) **SIN BECOMES FATAL WHEN PEOPLE ACTUALLY BEGIN TO BOAST IN THEIR WICKEDNESS**

2 Peter 2:12-13 - “But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, [13] suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. *They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime*. They are blots and blemishes, *reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you*.”

Again, note the *boldness* in their sinful activities. They revile, even in areas where they're demonstrating nothing but their *ignorance* - “....blaspheming about matters of which they are *ignorant*....”(12). They do the wicked things they do with no attempt to hide their sin from others. That gives them a false sense of righteousness in their sin - a false feeling of honesty. Far from feeling shame, they “....count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime....” (13).

I don't know when it happened, but we now live in a world where people feel sin is acceptable as long as the sinner is *open about his or her sin*. Sin isn't wicked as long as I'm proud of it. If I'm proud of my sin, then you should all be proud of me for being so honest and true to myself. It may not be the way *you* want to live, but at least I'm open and transparent about how *I* live. It's those who are *condemning* of my sin who should feel shame.

Let's be clear about it. The Bible never looks at *openness* about sin as a virtue. It looks at *repentance and contrition* over sin as virtuous. But the fact that some people sin proudly and openly - as Peter says of these people - “*in the daylight*” - is only a sign of their hardness of heart. Even if you won't *forsake* your sin, at least have the minimal standard of decency to be *ashamed* of your sin.

Do you remember *Michael W. Smith's song, “I Believe?”* Remember that line - “....and fools who march to justify their sin....” I doubt you could even write a line like that without Christian's complaining you were being judgmental.

Peter says when sinners lose the ability to blush, it's only a sign of the lowering of their moral level to that of the animal world - **2 Peter 2:12** - “But these, *like irrational animals, creatures of instinct*....”

The Bible says this kind of sin reserves a special form of God's righteous judgement:

Jeremiah 8:10-12 - “Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. [11] They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. [12] Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, *they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush*. Therefore they shall fall among the fallen; when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord.”

This is so fitting for our times. Look around you. Read the signs they carry. Look at the causes they march for. We've become a world that admires sinners who try to justify their wickedness.

Philippians 3:18-19 - "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

That's what Peter has in his heart as he warns these churches. It gets harder and harder to stand up for truth and righteousness when others ***promote the cause of sin with such pride and effectiveness***. Christians who used to take their stand with a host of other believers are suddenly forced into the closet - to stand on their own. It's one of the most successful ploys of the devil.

And that leads to one further warning from Peter in the next verse:

3) **IT IS BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE CAN NO LONGER QUIT SINNING THAT THEY COMFORT THEMSELVES BY LURING OTHERS INTO THEIR SAME HOPELESS SITUATION**

2 Peter 2:14 - "They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!"

Recruitment is the last comfort of those plunging hopelessly into eternal darkness. Recruitment is ***hell's final protest against a holy, judging God*** - **Romans 1:32** - "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." This is Paul's echo of the truth Peter states in our text.

So Peter warns these churches that these people will prey on ***unstable souls*** - "**They entice unsteady souls...**"(2:14). They look for people who are going through particular times of ***trial, discouragement, and fear - people who fear the growing social price of counter-cultural discipleship***.

They look for people who may just be on the edge of ***becoming impatient*** with God about something. They look for people who ***have been genuinely hurt or wronged by others in the church***. They look for people who ***face great financial set-back***. They look for people who really aren't sure of what they believe or why because circumstances or perhaps temptation have knocked them off stride.

That's what Peter means when he says ***unsteady souls***. He doesn't mean they are mentally deranged or handicapped. He means people who are, right now, ***having their souls shook up - who are knocked off stride - who are beginning to doubt or question - who will be particularly vulnerable to a tempting compromise that will offer a quicker, easier way out of their dilemma***.

Peter says there will always be teachers, counselors, mentors, study leaders, there will always be some new group meeting down the street, some book - ***there will always be something, or someone offering a quick fix***, someone to justify an unrighteous compromise with sinful desire of some kind.

Notice the wording of **verse 14**. Look at the way these teachers are glued to instant gratification of desire: "***They have eyes full of adultery,***" and, "***They have hearts trained in greed.***" Everything in their message is geared to giving people what they want, right away. It's all glued to human satisfaction. There's no cost. There's no waiting. There's no self-denial. There's no mention of the holiness or glory of God.

That's why Peter has already likened them to ***animals*** in **verse 12** - "***But these, like irrational animals...***" The whole thrust of those words is these people ***live by blind instinct***. They don't ***govern themselves*** by anything beyond the immediate moment. So Peter says, "***Don't follow them in their enticing words.***"

4) **LEARNING A LESSON FROM BALAAM'S DONKEY**

2 Peter 2:15-16 - "Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, [16] but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness."

The story of the prophet Balaam is told in **Numbers 21-24**. In a nutshell, Balaam is sought out by Balak, king of the Moabites. Balak has a huge problem. A massive army is advancing against him - too big for him to handle. Like most people who face a huge problem, Balak gets very religious, very quickly.

He sends for the prophet Balaam to come and, under the power of God, put a curse on the enemies. Balaam takes this request to God and God says, "No, you aren't to go to King Balak. At first Balaam's sense of faithfulness to God causes him to refuse Balak's offer. But then Balak sweetens the pot with all sorts of riches. Balaam says he'll pray about it again. Later, he agrees to accept the job. Compromise usually comes about in degrees.

On the way to see Balak the donkey on which Balaam is riding suddenly comes to a halt. Balaam is in a hurry and is furious at his donkey's hesitation. He yells and shouts and swats the donkey. And then something amazing happens. The donkey turns, and in a human voice says, "Listen, you pinhead, why are you hitting me? Can't you see the angel of the Lord in our path with that sharp sword? Use your head!"

Then, finally, God opens up Balaam's eyes to see what the donkey saw all along. That's the only thing that saves Balaam's life. He was actually prepared to sit there and argue with this talking donkey (you would think that in itself might cause a person to stop and think about what he was doing!). ***Balaam would sit and argue with his own talking donkey before he would change his mind.***

Now, stop and consider Peter's point in telling this story. He's talking about how people can become almost animal-like in the pursuit of their own desires. He's talking about how people can fill up their lives with so much sin and dishonesty that they lose the ability to turn to God and be freed from their sins.

Balaam was told by God not to go to see King Balak. But, in his greed for wealth and fame, he gave in to pressure, forgot the true way of the Lord, and went off to see Balak. He just willfully pushed God aside and did his own thing.

God can't get through to ***Balaam***. But God ***can*** get through to the ***donkey***. In fact, the angel doesn't have to say a word. The angel just stands and holds up his hand. That's all. ***And the donkey instantly responds obediently by coming to a dead halt. Balaam, the prophet, argues and disobeys. The donkey instantly obeys the will of God.*** What's wrong with that picture?

Now, Balaam does finally have his blindness "***restrained***" - ***2 Peter 2:16*** - "***....a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.***"

Peter pleads with these churches. He warns them about lowering the bar in their holy commitment to staying true to the Word of God. He warns them not to tolerate anyone who would attempt to distract them, or bribe them, or cause them to doubt either God's ***available mercy and grace and help*** to those who stay loyal to Him, or the ***fierceness of God's wrath and judgement*** on those who turn from following Jesus to satisfying the desires of their own hearts.

And here's the closing point. Peter is saying, quite simply, ***if you willfully turn from the truth you eventually lose your ability to respond to God in repentance.***

That's when sin becomes fatal.

Hebrews 4:6-7 - "***Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, [7] again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.***"

We sing song after song and pray prayer after prayer about hearing the voice of God - ***about having the Spirit of God speak to our hearts.*** It's easy to leave church with the impression that was the whole goal of our spirituality - as though "***hearing God speak***" was an end in itself.

It isn't. ***Encountering God*** is never enough. And it's never the goal. In fact, never ask God to speak to your heart until you're absolutely sure - with your whole being - your deepest desire is to do exactly what He says.

I sang it all the time as a kid in church - "***Trust and obey - for there's no other way - to be happy in Jesus - but to trust and obey.***"

And everyone said....