**2 Peter 2:1-9** September 15, 2019

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 *Revelation 2:1There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

 *4For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 5if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—9if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 We live in a nation of human diversity. I consulted no publication, but my guess is that there has never been a nation of such diversity as the United States of America. Not only are we diverse in background, but all these different people are afforded an equality never before offered so evenly.

 Our nation’s constitution was written 230 years ago with the goal of working toward a “more perfect union.” Our nation has been working toward that for decades and centuries. Trying to be more and more consistent in offering uniform rights to all its people, no matter who. Even accused criminals have rights of due process and fair trial! How much more so peace-loving people of different races, religions and yes, even personal preferences we take issue with. We thank God to live in a place that has a basic respect and toleration for all, no matter who they are.

 But this basic respect for all people and their opinions and beliefs and whatever else – as long as it is not criminal – it leads to a problem. In such a tolerant society it becomes difficult (not impossible, but difficult) to respectfully identify things as better or worse, right or wrong. In our lives, because we don’t want to rock the boat of tolerance we are often left saying, “If it works for you… If that is your truth…” Tolerance *can* lead to an inability to cling to something the truth or to publicly identify what is false.

 With this thought, I would suggest that the main concern in our reading is, if anything, more relevant in our day than when the Apostle Peter wrote this!

 His concern in our reading was false teaching. In the New Testament as a whole, false teaching is a spiritual threat discussed more than any other. Not any particular false teaching, but false teaching in general. Purity of faith and doctrine is a vital concern to God. But we live in a day when getting picky about “false teaching” or “doctrine” is looked down upon as quibbling over details, like arguing about punctuation. These days a great many differences in Christian teachings are resolved with a sentence like,

**“Can’t We Just Agree to Disagree?”**

**1. No, It’s Too Important to Agree to Disagree!**

 Peter would say, “No! When it comes to matters of God’s Word, we cannot agree to disagree.” When God’s Word is clear about something, and we take issue with it, it is an insult to God.

 Comparing the times of Old Testament Israel to his own New Testament ministry, Peter says, ***“There were false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.”***

 False teachings, “heresies” as he calls them, are ***“destructive.”*** A once-saving faith can be poisoned. You have known people like that, who once acclaimed Jesus as their Savior, and now think of that as a childish and naïve stage of life. Now they have grown up and left their childish ways behind them. False teachings are destructive because when faith has been destroyed then the hope of eternal life is also destroyed. Then there is only God’s sentence of hell waiting for those people after death.

 If the danger is so imminent, then we may want to know: What false teaching was the Apostle Peter concerned about? We are not told. Peter indicates that there are many, but there is one more dangerous than the rest. ***“They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even*** *[here’s the biggy…]* ***denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.”*** Even denying Jesus as their Savior. All false teachings are a corruption. But when people drink in *that* false teaching, when they refuse to see their need for a Savior, when they refuse to believe that Jesus has supplied their need, they are forever lost. The ship is sunk. The plane has gone down.

 Any teacher or church, whether it calls itself Christian or not, which looks to Jesus as a teacher or do-gooder or fable, and not as the Savior, they are lost.

 Go to the main web sites of some very large church bodies and you will realize that more of the so-called Christian Church has been poisoned than we perhaps realize. Search their sites to find clear statements of faith in Jesus as our Savior from the guilt our own personal sin. You will be surprised how many dodge the issue. (I could give you examples, but my purpose is not to name names. I want you to learn what you should be looking for.) It’s almost like they want to say, “Well, if you want to believe that Jesus paid for your sins on the cross, we won’t stand in the way. A lot of people have believed that over the years. But, you know, that’s the old way of looking at things. We’ve moved on since…” If you ever visit other churches, listen for explicit statements about ***“the sovereign Lord who bought [us].”***

 Anyone who denies it must be avoided, and anyone who gets mealie-mouthed when it comes to Jesus as Savior is suspect. Those are all paths to the same place: the wide gate that leads to eternal destruction (Mt 7:13).

 Any faith or tradition or faith tradition (or whatever the fashionable name) that does not have Jesus as Savior at its core is unacceptable to God.

**2. God Will Not Overlook These Disagreements**

 Peter’s intolerance of different viewpoints is not the Apostle Peter’s doing. In verses 4-9 of our reading he points out that God has a history of judging those who don’t buy in to his ways. Peter calls to mind three acts of divine judgment.

 First, he reminds us of a time when the first angels, of whom Satan was the first and foremost, rebelled against God. God judged them. God pronounced their sentence of eternal fire, which will be fully carried out at the final judgment.

 Second, Peter reminds us of the world in the time of Noah. That world had lived in opposition to God’s truth as preached by His ***“preacher of righteousness.”*** You know well the world-wide destruction from which only eight survived in an ark.

 Third, Peter reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities lived in blatant opposition to the natural law of God. Finally God burned them to ashes ***“as an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.”***

 Three succinct examples, not to be dwelt on, but to serve as a bullet-point examples of what God has consistently done. With those who time and again refuse to humble themselves before his plan, God has a consistent and final reaction. There is judgment. Not a slap on the wrist, a final and terrible judgment.

 The Apostle Peter’s point to his people was that false teachings are dangerous. And God will not put up with them. Therefore we should not put up with them. God does not look favorably upon people who consider themselves open-minded, accepting all sorts of theories about God and humanity. He has told us the truth. Ours is simply to accept that.

**3. God’s Encouragement to ID Disagreements**

 The Apostle Peter warned his people against false teachings. Why? What was his reason? I have an answer, but I would like you to think about another question first.

 Let’s go back to the opening thoughts of living in a tolerant world—which I must repeat is in many respects a very good thing! If you were to speak to a very sincere unbeliever and to tell them that their belief system is going to land them in hell, what would they think you think about them? In our day of tolerance, you can hear it already. “You are so intolerant! You are so anti-\_\_\_!”--whatever. If you voice a genuine Christian concern about homosexuality, about the Islamic faith, about pornography, about anything else that God’s word has spoken clearly against, people will assume that your concern is caused by a hatred, a phobia, an anti-something-or-another attitude. There is the challenge of our day. How do we speak to that?

 Perhaps we find it easy to agree in our hearts that false teachings are bad. But what happens when you are a Noah preaching for decades and nobody listens except your own family, and you sometimes wonder if even they aren’t just humoring an old man. What happens when you are Lot (who admittedly had his issues), but who day after day, when he saw and heard what was going on in his town was ***“distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men.”*** What happens when you try to gently point out our Scripture based practice of closed communion, and the person you speak to will have nothing of it? Take one of those tongue lashings and you will think twice the next time you open your mouth. Mention to your children whom you brought up in the Lord, that you wish they would be seen more often in God’s house, and see if they don’t start coming around less often.

 We love God’s Word, but there is so much opposition. We can guess pretty accurately the people who are going to get upset with us, those who will mock us, and those who will ignore us. And so when we realize that we just can’t agree to disagree, that at some point we need to say something, the Apostle Peter encourages us. Maybe you missed that. There was so much dark stuff in our reading that maybe you missed the encouragement. Let me read again, selected parts of verses 5-9: ***“If [God] did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood… but protected Noah… and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah… and he rescued Lot… if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials.”***

 Look at what God did for Noah and Lot! God knew them. He protected them and theirs. Even though they were only single households in oceans of iniquity, God never took his loving eye off them. He sustained them. He protected them as they refused to be taken in.

 Oh, to be sure, they knew difficulty. Their difficulties spanned years and decades; long expanses of time with little in the way of affirmation. But God knew them, protected them, rescued them, and finally took to them to heaven. He was faithful to those who stood firm in all the things that the unbelieving world scoffed at.

 Look at your life, your spiritual conflicts, those places where you feel a tension within your family, your co-workers, your peers. Listen again to the word of comfort from our reading, ***“If [God] protected Noah… and seven others; if he rescued Lot… if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue [you] from trials.”*** He will rescue. Not when you mimic today’s spirit of toleration, but when you speak the truth of God with integrity and concern, especially confessing ***“the sovereign Lord who bought [you].”***

 Can’t we just agree to disagree. Well, what does that mean? If you mean that I should still respect others, in spite of differences of opinion and even faith, as those for whom Christ also died,—then yes, we can agree to disagree. Christians live at peace with all.

 But if you mean that I am to accept another moral code as of equal authority or validity before God—God does not allow such. He calls us to be more discerning and loving than that.

 Lord, help us to be faithful to you, in all things. Amen.