

“Falling” - Part 2

2 Peter 2

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2 Peter 2 *1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. 4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; 6 and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; 7 and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) — 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, 11 whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, 13 and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. 15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. 17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. 20 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*

Paul warns us in Acts 20 of “wolves” that would come into the midst of the community of believers. Our text then tells us that these wolves will attempt to operate “in secret.” They will come in amongst the churches and pretend to agree with the teachings, the doctrine and the spirit of a particular church fellowship, but over time they will slowly and subtly move to undermine the heart and soul of that body of believers.

We ourselves have had people come in amongst us and join us in all appearances and then strategically pass a book of false teaching, or drop a comment in a conversation to 'test the waters' of division and to plant seeds of doubt. Hyper-Calvinism, hyper-dispensationalism, oneness doctrine, King James only teaching, home church movement, anti-church office structure, subtle accusations of legalism or shepherding, accusations of favoritism or pastoral elitism, spiritual abuse, etc. I think I have seen it all.

Some have come seeking position and power, not opportunity to serve and grow. Some have sought membership and when told they were not ready, they were gone the next week, proving thus that they were lying and we were correct in our summation of them. So many have come to *get* and have no intention to *give*. And all of these eventually have one thing in common: *they all leave angry*. Angry because they did not get what they wanted.

Today we live in a political climate that is all about us specifically and individually. We want a candidate that will give us what WE want, and there is little concern what is good for the greater country as a whole. Of course that paradigm then creeps into the church, where it is all about us alone, not the church as a whole. And we then depart because we individually have been slighted or we perceive that we have.

No one is insinuating that to be a good member here is to 'sit down and shut up.' Yet one of the 'give aways' that we should look for is the way any issue or debate is handled. Is the matter conducted over social media, or in secret behind closed doors? Dark alley whispers, junior high note passings, and quiet phone calls and texts? Or is the issue out in the open for all to see? Did Jesus work in secret? Matthew 26:55 records the opposite saying "*Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me."*

Of course the way to handle these things is the "Jesus way." Certainly there is a righteous place for personal and quiet discussion...one on one conversations where clarity is both sought and given. But we must always check our hearts. For so often such back alley conversations are not with the intent to seek clarity and understanding, but rather to sow gossip and doubt. A church...*and its members*, must always seek transparency in all they do. It is hard to hide when the lights are on!

John 3:19-21 tells us "... *God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.*" It doesn't take a lot to sow seeds of doubt that eventually grow into full blown poison. I call it the "mercury effect." It only takes one drop of mercury to kill a whole lake. It's some nasty stuff. It can happen the same in a faith community, and has so often!

One naturally asks "why?" Why would someone do such a thing? The obvious answer is they are working for the "other side" either unwittingly or with purpose. It is highly likely that these folks do not know Christ and never have. But verse 3 gives us another reason: *jealousy*. They either covet your position, the spiritual success of the church you attend, etc. It's not fancy, but it's true. You have something they do not have, and they want it. And if they can't have it, neither can you!

Sadly, their number is legion. So many individuals who have got caught up in flesh, pride, and sin and have thrown it all away. Often even years of gracious history and awesome experiences and relationships. And then when it finally dawns on them what they have lost...what they have done, instead of repentance they exude bitterness, resentfulness, and wicked hatred and will move to try to tear down everything for everyone else. It is nothing more than the classic situation of a child throwing away a toy until someone else picks it up and then suddenly they want it back, and if they cannot they at least want to make sure no other child gets it!

So they seek out those they perceive to be weak, faith young, or not quite 'on board' with the church direction, and thus begin the emails, the texts, the phone calls, the *whispers*. Today things are seemingly designed for such an attack. The onslaught of social media has presented the opportunity for anonymous google reviews and the "trial by public opinion" has rid us of all the pesky bothersome stuff like evidence. But God is not amused nor is He frightened!

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked... then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"

We must remember that while every attempt should be made to make peace with such folks, baring a full repentance, they are in the hands of God. "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...*" Romans 1:18 "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...*" 1 Timothy 4:1-2.

God is not inept or out of the loop. None of us are ever out of His realm of correction, discipline, or even destruction. Our text says that the "*Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.*" Meaning He 'has our back.'

Scripture tells us clearly that judgment is coming, usually sooner than later. While we can often attempt in reaction to move toward a personal and unilateral counter offensive, in truth this is God's area alone. This does not mean that we are not to speak up and condemn such practices, but it is God who knows the truth and God who brings down the mighty.

10 -18 "*and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.*"

Around midway in this chapter, Peter begins to get personal and he begins to get blunt. Peter says "*let me tell you what these men and women are really like...*"

Peter puts up the sign of warning concerning these that "walk after the flesh." Our tendency is to think of such warnings merely in terms of physical sins like sexual and carnal acts. But this passage speaks of the flesh as really anything that I want...that I *desire*, that is geared to please me or fulfill me emotionally or physically. It's what *I* want verses what *HE* wants! Some of these 'flesh' issues may indeed be overt issues of blatant sin, but they can also be just simply a matter of what Paul calls "weights" in our spiritual race. (See Heb 12) Things that will slow me down, eventually wear me out, and finally put me out of the race. Sometimes folks will even put a spiritual spin on it, feigning that they are ministering, but of course in such scenarios, they do so alone, without accountability, without support and of course *without fruit*.

The issue of the flesh is the crack in the wall that Satan seeks to exploit. Because we lack understanding and/or truthful handling of this matter, we tend to often run to the far fringes of the property line under the auspices of grace. Whenever the abuse of grace is present, so is the icing of pride on top of it all. We become unsubmitive, self-reliant, and self-assertive. And most of all we become blind. It's not about my church or church family, but rather it all comes down to being about me and what *I'm* doing. We can put a spiritual spin on it, and in our biblical ignorance and overt pride we can take the high road. But the facts remain evident, albeit to everyone else but that individual.

One of the greatest universal traits of "the flesh" is its tendency to fight against all authority. It is the overwhelming fleshly spirit that says "*you can't tell me what to do.*" It says, "*I don't have to listen to you.*" Such a heart is fueled by our innate fallen nature of *pride*. Peter speaks of those that are "*presumptuous and self-willed.*" Simply put, man's fallen nature encourages pride. When the ego is at stake, some folks will stop at nothing in order to promote and protect themselves. That is the direct opposite of the life and ministry of Jesus, who willingly emptied Himself to become a servant, and then died as a sacrifice for our sins.

Peter says they are "self-willed." Their living is encompassed with "what *I* want." "*My will be done*" in contrast with "*thy will be done.*" (Matt 6:10) The passage includes an implication of obstinacy in that they stubbornly insist on doing that which pleases themselves. It is a state of being where one is so obsessed with his or her own wishes that nothing else can be taken into consideration, nothing can stand in the way of their own self-gratification. Their "motto" is "I do it my way." Even my idea of personal mission.

The words "self-willed" in the original text is "authadeis." The commentator Barclay say that:

*"The man who is **authadeis** is stubbornly and arrogantly and even brutally determined on his own way. The bad man is he who has no regard for either human appeal or divine guidance." MacArthur adds that "The false teachers identified with Christ outwardly, but they would not live under His lordship. The two major characteristics of false teachers are emphasized in this verse: 1) lust and 2) arrogance."*

Peter bluntly calls them "brute beasts" or "unreasoning animals." They are ultimately religious hypocrites who profess to have deep religious insights when in reality their natural sense and cravings guide them rather than spiritual truths. 2 Timothy 3 speaks of such as those *"having a form of godliness but denying its power....always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth...from such people turn away."*

Peter cuts these folks no slack. Their danger is to be posted. The warning sign is up, because the peril of their operations are so real to the body of Christ. It would be bad enough if their actions destroyed just themselves, but the danger is that they invariably come looking for **you**. They seek out the weak, the uncommitted, the wavering, the young in faith. They "entice unstable souls." With *"great swelling words of emptiness, they allure...they "entice," ...they seek to gain followers. They seek position. They desire prestige and standing. They fail at being a student but feel they should be the teacher.*

19 -20 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

Peter uses a bit of sarcasm here emphasizing the ridiculousness of the possibility that people who are slaves of sin themselves could ever set anybody else free! So be careful when someone promises you freedom with "no strings attached" ...or that the freedom we experience as a child of God means I am free of rules, authority, responsibility or accountability.

21-22 "For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'"

Finally, for those that have attempted to embrace Christ and a sanctified life...and then to return to the world they left behind, it is invariably worse than it was before they looked to Christ in the beginning. This is a **scriptural** fact, but I have witnessed it also as a very real **experiential reality**. Many have tried such a run, but all have fabulously failed. And it is a sad thing to watch, as they go back to the very "vomit" that they previously left behind. Whether it was drugs, illicit sexual practices, alcohol, and rebellion against authority, pride or whatever. It seems they merely pick up where they left off, and then move to make up for lost time. It has *killed* some we know, and returned others again to incarceration. It has destroyed marriages, essentially condemned their children, and brought shame to God's kingdom. It is a sad but amazing thing to witness!

As Peter packs up to depart this world via his impending martyrdom, this message is his priority message: *"Don't let these folks steal your crown. Build your house 'on the rock'. And when the storms come...and they will come, you will remain firm."* But Christian, that foundation must be built **today**...not when you see the storm clouds gathering. For at that point it could quite possibly be too late.

God is in control! Firmly and forever in control. Our part is to stay alert and humbly remain 'on our knees' before Him. We must continue to *learn*. To grow in head knowledge and heart knowledge. To grow in experiential 'gnosko' knowledge. To engage in practical manifest of mission in a full body relationship. To remain alert and attentive. Not paranoid, for God is your protector. But not stupid and child-like either. We must grow up. Move beyond the milk bottle and on to the steak! Always remembering where you came from and how far you have traveled in the midst of a family of God. And never ever let your guard down. Always asking "what does God have to say about that?" And most of all...the most critical act we can conduct, is to "humble myself in the eyes of the Lord..."

