

Bristol Conference 1964 (Apostasy) - Part 4

by William MacDonald

Peter warns of the rise of false teachers who will deny the Lord and propagate immorality and greed, leading to God's judgment.

Duration: 52:28

Scripture: 2 Peter 2:1

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the rise of false teachers and their impact on society. He begins by discussing the judgment of God upon apostasy, using the example of the angels who sinned and were cast down to hell. The preacher emphasizes that when a person's view of God deteriorates, their morals also decline. He then outlines the predicted rise of false teachers, highlighting their false doctrines, immorality, and greed. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God is able to deliver the godly and punish the ungodly.

Transcript

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, we are the survey study of the scriptures, seeing how the various books fit together. And if you ever want that thrill, take the course on Old Testament Survey by Mr. Tatum. If Mrs. Price doesn't have it, I know she'd be glad to order it for you and have it sent to you.

Then he also wrote the course The Holy Spirit at Work. It used to be called The Other Comforter, but now The Holy Spirit at Work, and I know we have copies of that on hand. He wrote a lovely course called Messianic Psalms.

I remember the joy that came to my heart when I studied that course during the Second World War. And then there's another course, Bible Prophecy. Unfortunately, it's been so popular we can't keep it in print, so you won't be able to buy that one right now, but if you'd like to order it, we'd be glad to take an order and we expect it to be off the press soon again.

And then he's presently writing a course on the Gospel of Matthew, and we'd be glad to take advance orders for that, too, or at least notify you when the course is ready. Have I skipped any, Brother Ernie? He's in an uncooperative mood this morning. Now, shall we turn in our Bibles to 2 Peter, please? 2 Peter chapter 2. We'll begin reading with verse 1 down to verse 10.

2 Peter chapter 2, verse 1, But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

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 Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example 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 godless out of temptation, 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, self-willed, they tremble not to speak evil of dignity. Now if you'd like to look at your outlines, we'll review the ground we've been over.

We're reminded that this epistle has to do with false features arising in the latter days, and so Peter started his epistle with the wonderful provision that God has made for us as the people of God, and our responsibility to grow in the Christian faith to become strengthened in the faith that we might be able to meet this false teaching. Last night we heard Peter express his determination to continually remind the people of God of these truths, and then we have that wonderful passage in the last verses of chapter one, the trustworthiness of the message that has been delivered to us. Closing with a wonderful statement as to the inspiration of the Old Testament scriptures.

Now at the bottom of the page you'll notice the outline for today, the rise of false teachers predicted, verses one through twenty-two. First of all, their doctrine in verse one. Secondly, their immorality and their greed.

Verses two and the first part of verse three. Then their doom, the latter part of verse three. And then he gives three Old Testament examples of God's judgment on apostasy, and draws certain lessons from that.

The Lord is able to deliver the godly and to reserve the ungodly to punishment. Now we'll turn to the passage itself. He begins with verse one and says, but there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you.

You say, now what is the connection here? Well, in the previous verse he had been speaking about the prophets of God who had been raised up in the Old Testament period to give us the word of God. These men who pointed forward to the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus. But having spoken of the prophets of God and of their inspired writings, he remembers, yes, but there were false prophets back there in the Old Testament too.

There were men who stood up and professed to speak in the name of God, but they were false prophets. And they didn't speak the word of God, and the net result of their ministry was to draw people away from faith and dependence in the living God. And so that's the connection in chapter two.

Peter says, there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you. Now I think that's a very interesting shift there. He says there were false prophets, there will be false teachers.

Why did he say that? Why didn't he say there were false prophets, there will be false prophets? Well in a very real sense, the prophetic ministry was associated with Israel in the Old Testament, and the ministry of teachers is associated with the church in the New Testament. Now somebody will say to me, just a minute, there were prophets in the New Testament, and that's true. He gave some apostles, and he gave some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

There were prophets in the New Testament period, but why doesn't Peter speak of them here? There were false prophets in the Old Testament, even as there shall be false teachers among you. Well I wonder if this isn't an indication that the prophetic ministry of the New Testament would cease after the word of God came in complete form. Of course that's exactly what I believe.

I believe that the apostles and the prophets who were given were for the early days of the church. The apostles were men divinely commissioned by God, and their message was authenticated with signs and wonders and diverse gifts of the Holy Ghost. We don't have apostles like that today.

We don't need them today because we have the word of God, and God doesn't authenticate his word today with signs and wonders and diverse gifts of the Holy Ghost. There were prophets in the early days of the church. They would get up in the local assembly, and they would speak, and what they spoke was the word of God.

But supposing a man got up in your assembly today and said, now brethren, I have a message from God. It's not found in the Old Testament, and it's not found in the New Testament. In fact, this is something fresh.

This is something new. This is something that nobody's ever heard before. What would you say to him? You'd say, well I hope you'd say, sit down brother, we don't want to hear it.

We believe that we have in the word of God the faith once for all delivered unto the saints. Jude verse three. And so the prophetic ministry has ended as far as the New Testament period is concerned, and we have teachers today.

There were false prophets in the Old Testament. There will be false teachers among you. Notice that.

There shall be false teachers among you. I'd like you to notice that the men of whom we're going to speak this morning, they're not gangsters, they're not hoodlums, they're not outrageous sinners as we think of it, or men grumbling down in Skid Row. These are professed ministers of Christ.

These are men who have supposedly taken what they call sacred vows, and here they are undermining the authority of the word of God. You know, when I read these verses this morning, earlier this morning, I had to chuckle to myself. I thought of the great ecumenical movement that's going on today, and I thought, poor Peter, he surely wouldn't have fitted in very well in the ecumenical movement today.

As they would say, Peter didn't have the ecumenical spirit. That's true. And I hope we don't have it as far as this movement that's going on in the world today.

There is a true ecumenical movement, the unity of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, but of course this ecumenical movement is an outward unity produced mechanically and by human skill at the expense of the great truth of the word of God. There's inevitably a compromise of divine truth. So there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.

These men are clever. Don't take that away from them. They're subtle, they're tricky, a way of coming in with their damnable heresy.

Now, just let me give you some illustrations of that, and I think it'll make it very, very clear. Last night I referred to a book written in 1963 called *Honest to God*, written by the Bishop of Woolwich, one of the bishops of the Church of England. I'd like to read to you two more quotations from that book.

Denying the Lord that bought them. He says in one place, in practice, popular preaching and teaching today presents a supernatural view of Christ which cannot be substantiated from the New Testament. He says, it says, this preaching today, it says simply that Jesus was God in such a way that the terms Christ and God are interchangeable, but nowhere in biblical usage is this so.

The New Testament says that Jesus was the Word of God. It says that God was in Christ. It says that Jesus is the Son of God, but it does not say that Jesus was God.

Simply like that. This book, *Honest to God*, is one of them. Well, I guess it's the best selling book as far as religious titles in secular bookstores today.

It's going over like wildfire. Let me read you another quotation from Bishop Woolwich. As far as I know, he's never been put out of the Church of England.

He's still sailing along magnificently and people are bowing at his shrine. Here's another quotation, but even when it is Christian in content, the whole scheme of a supernatural being coming down from heaven to save mankind from sin in the way that a man might put his finger into a glass of water to rescue a struggling insect is frankly incredible to man of this age. The idea of a God coming from outer space and invading this planet of ours to save mankind, he compares it to reaching down into a glass of water and picking out a struggling insect.

And he said that will never do for man come of age. Yet church people continue to explain the atonement in some such terms as this, picturing the interplay of two personified parties. And now he's going to give us an account of the way fundamentalists still think.

And of course, then he's going to ridicule it. Here's the way we think. The relationship between God and man has been broken by original sin.

Man could not pull himself up by his own shoestrings, and thus the only hope of restoration was from God's side. This isn't what he says. This is what he says we say, and of course it's true.

Yet it was from our side that things had to be put right. It appeared hopeless, but God found the answer, for in Christ he himself became man, and as man reconciled us to himself. Now listen to what he says about that.

This construction, no doubt, gives expression or projection to genuine and deep-seated reality, and as myth should not be thrown out, but as an objective transaction supposed to have been accomplished outside us in time and space, it speaks today to remarkably few. To fewer, indeed, than the Christmas myth. This is exactly what Peter is speaking about in verse one of chapter two.

There shall be false teachers among you who shall bring in damnable heresies, denying even the Lord that bought them. Well, if that isn't a denial of the Lord, I don't know what you'd call it. But you know, this is popular today.

This is what people want to hear today, and I guess you're not well read in many theological circles unless you understand Bishop Woolwich and take a patronizing view toward his book. All right, now it says, denying even the Lord that bought them. What do you think about that? Does that mean these people were saved? No, it doesn't mean that at all.

There's a difference in the Bible between purchase and redemption. All men have been bought, but not all men have been redeemed. You remember in Matthew chapter 13 and verse 44, we read about the man who found a treasure hidden in the field, and he went and sold all that he had, and he came and bought the field.

Well, we believe that that man is the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that the treasure hidden in the field is Israel. We believe that the field is the whole world.

And he bought the whole world. It doesn't mean all the world is safe. All are purchased, but all do not have the brand mark of redemption upon their forehead.

Only those who have been saved by the grace of God, who have known the cleansing value of the blood of Christ, are redeemed to God. So this doesn't even suggest that these people were ever converted, these false teachers. In fact, the passage proves quite conclusively that that is not the case.

Even denying the Lord that bought them, and shall bring and bring upon themselves swift destruction. Now, secondly, we notice their immorality and their greed. Verse two, it says, and many shall follow their pernicious ways.

And that word pernicious means lascivious, and it has to do with the low standards of morals that they propagate. Well, you say to me, surely the Bishop of Woolwich doesn't propagate low standards of morals in his book. May I read you a third quotation? This is what it says.

It says, For nothing can of itself always be labeled as wrong. One cannot, for instance, start from the position sex relations before marriage are wrong and sinful in themselves. You can never say that.

They may be in ninety-nine cases or even a hundred cases out of a hundred, but they are not intrinsically so, for the only intrinsic evil is lack of love. In other words, premarital relations, well you just can't say that they're inherently wrong. The only inherent wrong in the universe is lack of love.

In other words, if you go out and murder a man and do it in love, it's perfectly alright. That's really what it boils down to. That's really what it boils down to.

And that's a quotation, page 118 from the book *Honest to God*, by a Bishop of the Church of England. And he still has his title and still wears his frock. It says, And many shall follow their pernicious ways, their

lascivious ways.

He's teaching people that this is alright. And so the congregation goes out and they live it up, fast and loose. And the rest of the people in the community look on and say, Oh, I see those people are Christians, are they? Well, thanks very much, I'd rather have my dog.

And it brings reproach and contempt upon the name of Christ. And that's exactly what it says in this verse. It says, Many shall follow their lascivious doings, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

The people in the world don't distinguish between born-again Christians living in purity and chastity, and between these ungodly people who have only a veneer of Christianity. Well, then the third thing is their greed. It says, And through covetousness shall they, with feigned words, make merchandise of you.

I'll tell you, that's really accurate description. Through covetousness. What does that mean? Well, it means that they're in it for the money.

That's what it means. It means that they've chosen the ministry as a lucrative profession. It means whose God is their belly.

That's what it means. Or as F. B. Meyer once said, Their life is all kitchen and no chapel. And listen to that expression, Through covetousness shall they, with feigned words.

Believe you me, they really know how to talk. They are clever in the use of words, and they know how to trick people and to deceive them. And the net result of their ministry is to make merchandise of people.

There's a modernistic church right near the school, and the man who used to be the pastor of that church was very glib, a great orator, a master of rhetoric. And one of the men in the assemblies was talking to him one day, and this pastor said to him, he said, You know, he said, I could preach the gospel just like you fellows, but he said my people wouldn't have it. Exactly what he said.

That man has now found his niche. He's a public relations man for General Motors. Make merchandise of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

You know, that's a very expressive language there, and I don't think we catch the full force of it here in this English. But what it really pictures is judgment like a sword hanging over them, and it says their damnation slumbereth not. Their damnation isn't sitting over there on a chair, nodding its head.

It's wide awake, and it's ready to pounce upon them like a panther. That's the thought behind a verse of scripture like this. Very expressive.

Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. And then in the verses that follow, the Apostle Peter gives three Old Testament examples of God's judgment upon apostasy. Three examples of men or beings who left the bounds that God had assigned to them, went beyond them, apostatized in a very real sense in God's judgment upon them.

The first is the example of the angels that sinned. It says in verse four, for if God feared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment. Now, Mr. Tatum has already mentioned this and has identified this with the events in Genesis chapter six.

And we might just turn back to Genesis chapter six. Now, this is an interpretation. I believe that it's the correct one myself, but not all good men are agreed on this.

So let's just turn to this passage, Genesis chapter six, beginning with verse one. It says, And it came to pass that when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born unto them that the sons of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with men, for that he also is flesh, yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.

There were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bear children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, the men of renown. Now, the first thing you want to ask yourself is, who were these sons of God? Perhaps the usual interpretation is that they were the sons of Seth, who married the ungodly daughters of Cain. But actually that expression, sons of God, is distinguished in this portion from men.

It says in verse one, It came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born unto them that the sons of God. And it seems to make a contrast there between the sons of God and men. Well, if you turn over to the first and second chapters of the book of Job, you'll find that that expression, sons of God, is used as applying to angels, not to men.

And it's very clear in Job chapters one and chapters two. Chapter one, verse six, and chapter two, verse one, that the sons of God there are angelic beings. If that's the meaning here in Genesis six, it means that angelic beings left the habitation that God had ordained for them and came down to the world and intermarried with the daughters of men.

You say, but just a minute, doesn't the Bible say that angels don't marry? Well, it really doesn't say that. It says that in heaven they don't marry. Mark chapter twelve and verse twenty-five.

Mark chapter twelve and verse twenty-five. It says, For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are the angels in heaven. But I don't believe that the Bible explicitly states that angelic beings are incapable of marriage, and there are indications in Genesis chapter nineteen, the first five verses, that angelic beings are capable of this type of relationship or similar.

So if that is the case, what is being taught here is a terrible instance of abnormal sexual relationship. And mind you, that's the context through here. Two out of the three illustrations use linked apostasy with immorality.

Two of the three link apostasy with immorality. It's wonderful, isn't it, how the word of God probes and gets behind the scenes and sees what the eye of man could never see. And so that's the first illustration of a terrible apostasy upon which God reigned judgment.

It says, 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. The second illustration of God's judgment upon apostasy is what took place in the days before the flood, or the flood, the antediluvians. It says, And spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

This is very graphic and very expressive. We look about us today upon a scene where the name of the Lord Jesus is being denied, and where men seem to get away with it. They seem to be able to shake their

fists in the face of God, and nothing seems to happen to them.

But what we're reading here is God's attitude toward that. God did it once. God did it twice.

God did it three times, and God's going to do it again, too. He's going to reign out his judgment upon a scene where his son is so dishonored. The second illustration is the people of Noah's day.

Just think of that. Everyone in the world but Noah and seven members of his family destroyed. What is God's attitude toward it? That tells it very clearly.

That expression, Noah the eighth person, some people think that means Noah the eighth person since Adam, and of course that doesn't add up. But it really means Noah with seven others. Noah was the eighth in the sense that there were seven other people saved with him.

And I think that's very expressive, the eighth being the number of new creation or new beginning. Now we find out something in this verse that we never would have known otherwise. It says Noah was a preacher of righteousness.

Isn't that lovely? Who told Peter? Well, the same spirit of God who wrote the Old Testament told him here in New Testament times, and he put it down for us. And it's a lovely picture of Noah preaching to the then known world as he was building the ark, as he was hammering away at the ark. He was preaching righteousness.

He was vindicating God. God was acting in righteousness and calling men to repent and to come into the ark. And so that's a beautiful little touch there.

Noah, a preacher of righteousness. And then the third instance of apostasy was a terrible sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. Two cities of the plain down by the Dead Sea.

Cities that were guilty of the most vile forms of sexual immorality. And it says here that God turned those cities into ashes. He condemned them with an overthrow.

He made them an example unto them that should after live ungodly. These cities were guilty of the terrible sins of homosexuality. And the name Sodomy comes from the name of Sodom.

And so complete was the destruction of those two cities that the archaeologists can look and they can think that they can see them down through the waters of the Dead Sea, but the fact of the matter is nobody knows exactly where those cities were. This is God's judgment on men who leave the bounds of propriety, who leave the bounds that he has set up for them and who apostatize. But then we find something else here, and that's the information that we get about Lot.

It says, "...and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. For that righteous man dwelling among them, and seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." Now, you never would get that impression reading the Old Testament. If you were to go back to the Old Testament and read about Lot, it would appear to you that he was a status-seeking profiteer who was trying to make the best of both worlds.

And what a comfort it is to know that God saw his heart, and that daily as he was living there and trying to sweeten up the scene in Sodom and Gomorrah, trying to make the world a better place to live in, yet God saw that deep in his heart there was a hatred of sin and a love of righteousness. He speaks of him here as

that righteous man. He speaks of him as righteous or just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.

And what happened? Well, Lot and his wife and his daughters were taken almost by force out of the city before the judgment fell. And even then, his wife, although her body was out of Sodom, her heart was still back there, and she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Now, the lesson that the Apostle Peter draws from this is that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust under the day of judgment to be punished.

It's a day when God isn't acting in instantaneous judgment upon all the evil and immorality that we know to be about us today, and men seem to get away with it. But God is working behind the scenes, and his judgment, as we said, is not nodding its head. It's not slumbering.

His sword is about to awake. This is such a vivid description of the days in which we live that we can only believe that we are in the days prophesied by the Apostle Peter. And then the first half of verse 10, he says, "...chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government." Now, mind you, if you and I were writing the Bible, we would never dare to take men who were wearing clerical garb and speak in terms like that about them, would we? The Bible doesn't.

Why? Well, there's a very good reason. There's a very good reason. That is that when a man's view of God deteriorates, a man's morals deteriorate, too.

You become like what you worship. And you show me a man who has low thoughts of God, and I'll show you a man who's living a low life. J.B. Phillips wrote a book some time ago, and the name of it was Your God is Too Small.

And I believe the trouble with the world today is that God is too small. And that's man's heart. He rejects the knowledge of the true God, and he starts to carve out idols for himself.

Four-footed animals, other men, flying things, creeping things. So the lower he goes, the lower his morals go, too. And the word of God is clear, and the word of God is incisive, and the word of God gets to the root of things.

The word of God knows that when these false teachers come along and start to downgrade God, that their morals go down, too, and they're preaching immorality to the people in their congregation. And this is exactly what's going on today. I have a quotation from a publication put out by the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

I wouldn't care to read it here to you, but it's a publication written for young people, and it condones immorality. Put out by the National Council of Churches. This is the type of thing that Peter is speaking about in this second chapter of his epistle.

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