

Sermon 15, Audacious Arrogance Assailed, 2 Peter 2:10b-13a

Proposition: The audacious arrogance of those who despise authority will be repaid in full.

- I. The Root Sin: An Authority Problem, v. 10a
- II. Some Particular Fruits, vv. 10b-12
 - A. A Cavalier Attitude Toward Angels
 - B. Irrational Behavior
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw last Sunday that two particular sins of false teachers especially stink in the nostrils of God. He is absolutely and definitely going to punish those who follow flesh in the lust of defilement and those who despise authority. Well, Peter doesn't just mention those two categories and then drop them. Instead, he expands on them in reverse order. Look at the passage: The part of it before us, through v. 13a, is clearly denouncing those who despise authority, while the next part, through v. 16, describes those who follow flesh in the lust of defilement. Well, it doesn't take a Ph.D. in sociology to know that our culture, too, has a problem with authority — a problem that most of us share, in one way or another. Remember, the point of these sermons is not primarily to warn you against bad people out there in the world, outside the walls of our church, but primarily to warn you against bad people in here, and specifically against the evil within your own heart. So let's let the word of God dissect our hearts, exposing for us the characteristics of people with an authority problem and warning us about the God who will not tolerate rebellion. Ultimately, we will see that the text encourages us to embrace the authority of Christ, and thus of His human and institutional representatives. Otherwise we too will receive injustice as the wage of our injustice.

I. The Root Sin: An Authority Problem, v. 10a

So again, the root sin is described here as thinking very little of lordship, or despising authority. Commentators discuss whether some particular lordship is in view, and often settle on the idea that it's ultimately Christ's lordship which is despised. No doubt that's true. But to despise Christ's lordship will ultimately result in despise authority in general. As we saw last week, to despise authority is to take lightly the authority of others over you or to take lightly your own authority over them. An authority problem specifically refers to bridling at and fighting against the lawful commands of lawful authorities in your life. It means an outright refusal to obey those whom God has placed over you, a refusal driven by your own unwillingness. We can call it "daddy issues" or an "authority problem" or rebelliousness, but the Bible calls it sin and lists it as

one of the main characteristics of false teachers. True teachers are good at submitting to those over them. False teachers always have to do it their own way.

Do you have an authority problem? When your boss tells you what to do, do you listen or do you quit? When your pastor rebukes you, do you listen or leave the church? When your husband says “We’re going to do it this way?” do you quietly cultivate bitterness toward him or cheerfully adjust your own preferences to match his?

II. Some Particular Fruits, vv. 10b-12

Well, Peter describes for us some of the fruits that grow on this root of an authority problem.

A. A Cavalier Attitude Toward Angels

The first of them is a cavalier attitude toward angels. The false teachers are described as not trembling to revile angelic majesties, or “glorious beings.” They don’t give a rip. As one of my Marine friends once told me, out on night marches, sleep-deprived, he’d “seen angels and crap like that.” Now, what in the world were these false teachers doing? One commentator suggests that they were being warned that their sinful lifestyle was opening them to demonic influence and control. They, naturally, scoffed at such an idea, only to later find out that the occult is real and that if you call a demon it will come.

Such a hypothesis makes a lot of sense in one way, and of course we know from Scripture that it’s true: If you mess with evil, you are opening yourself to demonic power. If that sounds unpleasant, well, stay away from evil.

Another commentator dares to suggest that speaking evil of angels could be paraphrased into the contemporary parlance of “binding” or “throwing down.” Have you ever heard someone do this, or read about it? Basically, abroad in Christian circles today is this movement that teaches that every place is ruled by a particular demon. Thus, you might identify the demon who has control over the city of Portland, Oregon, and then announce that in the “name of Jesus” you are “binding him and throwing him down.” This sounds a little absurd to good Presbyterians, but an awful lot of our fellow American Christians think differently. Yet is it any stretch to look at what they’re doing and say that it could fairly be described as speaking evil of glorious beings, reviling them without trembling? I think not. Angels themselves, far greater in power and might than any human false teacher, don’t carelessly pronounce judgment on demons, not even in front of God Himself.

Brothers and sisters, if a demon is attacking you it’s fair to counterattack by commanding it in the name of Jesus to depart. But to attempt to single-handedly take on high-level demons is the hallmark not of a strong Christian but of a false teacher. Treat these being seriously. Respect them. We don’t worship angels; we don’t pry into their secrets; and we definitely don’t treat them like juvenile humans. To do so is asking for trouble.

An authority problem can manifest itself in a cavalier attitude toward angels. If you aren’t willing to submit to God, then you just might bite off way more than you can chew. The results of this attitude and its accompanying actions will not be good for you.

B. Irrational Behavior

Secondly, though, an authority problem makes you stupid. In fact, you become like an “aloga zoa,” an irrational beast. Now, why is this? Well, think about it. “Experience is a dear teacher, but fools will learn from no other,” as our English proverb goes. If you have an authority problem, you blow off your parents. You blow off your teachers. You blow off your boss. And guess what: you don’t know anything because you were unwilling to learn anything. To have an authority problem is to become an idiot. Everyone will know it except you. You won’t listen to them when they tell you that you’re an idiot. Why not? Because you’re an idiot, that’s why.

The false teachers are as smart as cows. They have as much intelligence as your average tomcat, or goldfish. That’s what Peter compares them to: irrational animals.

Why are they so irrational? Because they have departed from Christ, the Logos, the source of intellectual light for every human being born into the world.

Have you ever talked to someone whose mind literally seemed to be rotting away because of their sin habits? I just read this week that it’s all but proven that marijuana causes mental illness. You cops in here don’t need to me to tell you that when people have been using drugs long enough they literally become blithering idiots. But drugs are not the only thing that will do that. Peter’s point is that any sin, and especially the sin of despising authority, will produce this result in the lives of people who persist in it.

So turn from your sin, brothers and sisters, I beg you. Walk in repentance. When your sin is brought to your attention — by your wife, by your boss, by the garbage man or janitor — don’t double down; back down. Admit that you are wrong and that you sin is just as deadly as they say. Then flee to Christ for help with it!

C. Being Born for Capture and Killing

Well, this next quality of the false teachers is that they are for capture and killing. The text is a little ambiguous here in Greek. Every English translation that I know of (except one) and every commentator removes the ambiguity by assuming that Peter is describing (at least some) animals as existing to be captured and killed. Animals exist for hunters; chickens exist for Colonel Sanders. Now, you don’t need me to tell you that such an idea is deeply troubling, even at the animal level. Do any of us believe that the life of at least some animals, perhaps big game animals or useful animals like the chicken and the swine, is given them solely so humans can use them for our own purposes? Does nature exist for us in such a strong sense? But far more troubling is the idea when applied to the human realm. Do false teachers exist solely to be fodder for hellfire? As the devil says in one of Dostoevsky’s books, he would be quite happy to be a nice guy. It’s solely on account of his professional position that he is forced to be so negative. God made him do it; left to his own devices, he would have been happy to serve the Trinity with the good angels.

In other words, is this text really teaching the idea that animals, and thus some humans — the wicked, the false teachers, the blots in Christ’s spotless bride — are only here because they are worth hunting down and killing?

Intuitively we reject that idea. An animal that exists solely to be hunted is no prize; someone who can walk into a chicken barn and shoot three birds is not going to win any sportsman's awards. A human being created to be a false teacher and existing solely for this purpose is a contradiction, for humans were created not only to glorify God but to enjoy Him. We were made for Him. A false teacher is such a lamentable character because he has swerved aside from his true end and embraced a lesser goal, a lesser purpose. He could have been serving the worthiest, best, noblest, and greatest of beings. He could have been loving Christ and walking as the Father's child. Instead, he turns away from that and hates Christ and repudiates the Father, creating in their place some false image of deity that will not and cannot love him back. "Lips that would kiss form prayers to broken stone." Brothers and sisters, if we really believe that humans are created to enjoy God forever, then we cannot believe that the correct translation of this verse is "born to be caught and destroyed." Anyway, the passive "to be" is not in the Greek. Just as likely, grammatically speaking, is the translation of the Lexham English Bible, "irrational animals born *only with* natural *instincts* for capture and killing." Remove the "only" (which the translators added for some unknown reason) and you have a very fair account of what Peter is actually saying. Some animals are born, in the fallen world in which we live, with very strong instincts for catching and killing their prey. These false teachers are like that. They have almost an inborn ability to snare and beguile needy Christians, and then to rapidly move in for the kill. Just as leopard or a wolf or a shark is a near-perfect hunter, motivated not by reason but by instinct, so these false teachers are too. In fact, I think the text warrants us in asserting that they will feel good about their role. They will say "I was made for this!" The false gospel they proclaim, the false Messiah they serve, the false authorities in the church that they put forward, will strongly motivate them and satisfy their inner drives to catch and kill. They won't put it to themselves in those terms, likely enough. But the result will be the same. They will do what they are very good at, what their instinctive abilities fit them for. They will catch and kill unstable souls.

How might we be guilty of this? Again, by an insincere profession, or by a tolerated and enjoyed sin. You can destroy a lot of people by what you allow yourself to do. You can wreck a lot of people's faith by having an affair. Obviously doing so is not as extreme as the full-blown apostasy of a false teacher like Judge Russell or Joseph Smith. But it moves in the same direction.

Even as the false teachers get stupid because they can't stand authority, they get cunning. Their natural predatory skills come to the fore, and they develop talents they maybe didn't even know they had as they recruit new members for their cult and make them twice as much children of hell as themselves. No wonder Jude calls them accursed children! They are predators. Think of a false teacher as someone with all the brains of a chimpanzee but all the cunning and sheer predatoriness of a wolverine or great white shark.

It's a nasty combination. And that's why Peter spends so much time warning us about it. Not only is it nasty, though. It's also yet another reason why the false teachers will be destroyed,

punished by God for their sins. The Greek here is a little ambiguous. In whose destruction will the false teachers be destroyed? Some say the destruction of the evil angels, some say in the destruction of the animals. It appears to be a point on which grammar offers no help. Most English versions that specify say that it is the destruction of the animals. Either way, though, I think it's clear that an end-time destruction is in view. The animals will perish in the final conflagration when the Earth is burned up and the elements melt with fervent heat. It's at that same time that the wicked angels will receive their end-time just deserts too.

You see how Peter can hardly go for more than a sentence without mentioning the punishment of the false teachers? Why is that? Because we are so reluctant to believe in it! We have a hard time getting this truth about the character of God into our hearts and lives. We foolishly live as though God is a big marshmallow who won't judge anybody. We turn away from our knowledge of coming judgment because it's uncomfortable. So Peter repeats it in just about every sentence to get the point across: these people, who live like a cross between a wolverine and a chimp, will emphatically be destroyed in God's good time.

Again, though, the problem, the wickedness, more than being out there, is in here. We can become this. You can be a false teacher. Indeed, you might already be this. How do we know? Sincerity is part of it. Obedience to authority is a huge part of it too; that's the theme of this section of the letter. How well do you obey those over you? The more poorly you respond to authority, the more likely you are a false teacher. But in addition to sincerity and obedience to authority, we have to look at the theme of the whole letter. The true knowledge of Christ is the rest of how you can know you're not a false teacher. How do you get to know Him? In His word. Is the Christ you worship the one portrayed in the Bible — the whole Bible? If not, then you are at least an inchoate false teacher.

D. Reviling without Knowledge

Well, the final fruit of this root of having an authority problem is the activity of blaspheming what you don't understand. "I don't know what it is, but I think it's terrible." Peter does indeed use the Greek word *blasphemeo*, but it didn't have the specific nuance of saying evil things against God in his day. Instead, it was a general word for reviling, for dissing, for detracting and running down. In the parlance of the street today, Peter would have said "Throwing shade." These false teachers say bad things regarding stuff they know nothing about.

I will give a quick example here. A few weeks ago I read Keith Mathison's *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*. I wrote to him, saying "in the book you comment something to the effect that Aristotelian metaphysics has about as much to do with reality as Ptolemaic astronomy does. As an avid reader of Thomas Aquinas and his contemporary heirs (J. Budziszewski, John Finnis, etc.), I have been largely persuaded that key features of Aristotle's metaphysics are in fact correct. So here's my question: what led you to say such a thing about Aristotle's metaphysics, where do you suggest I go to find a better metaphysic?"

Dr. Mathison humbly replied, within the hour, “Regarding that statement, my own views have changed since writing that book. I don’t think I had a solid enough grasp of Aristotelian metaphysics at the time, and I went along with the majority view too easily. In the years since writing that, I too have become persuaded that much of his metaphysics is correct.”⁶ Now, Dr. Mathison wrote the book in 2002; seventeen years on from that, he has grown in his understanding. Even then, of course, he didn’t say that Aristotelian metaphysics was stupid; he just repeated the conventional wisdom that it had been superseded.

A genuine false teacher would go farther. He would say something like “I know nothing about the church father Origen, but I know that he was a bozo.” “I know nothing about [insert denomination here], but I know they’re all unbelievers.”

Don’t do this, brothers and sisters. Uttering opinions, especially negative opinions, on things you don’t know anything about it is the mark of a false teacher and of someone with no respect for authority.

III. The Harvest of Judgment: Receiving Injustice as the reward of Injustice, v. 13a

Well, finally, Peter rounds off his statements on what despising authority looks like with a message about what its results will be. He has a great three-word one-liner here, which is essentially in English “wrong rewarding wrong.” But the first “wrong” is actually passive. In Greek, you can put something into the passive voice while keeping it only one word; in English, without case endings, we have to use helping verbs to make a verb passive. So a more accurate English translation (with regard to the meaning rather than the form of the phrase) is “receiving injustice as the reward for injustice,” or “suffering wrong as the wages of wrongdoing.”

Now, some commentators and scribes don’t like this because it sounds like it’s saying that God will do wrong to the false teachers. Obviously, that’s not what it’s saying. Rather, the point is that God will return evil, return punishment, onto the heads of those who do evil. It will not technically *be* wrong; that is, it will not violate justice or involve God in any sin whatsoever. I would think that even a commentator would find that obvious. Rather, Peter couldn’t resist a good rhetorical device and so he uses “injustice” in a metaphorical sense in its first occurrence in this phrase.

False teachers will be punished. Anyone who leaves the pure doctrine of Christ and substitutes foolishness for it will be punished. Anyone who has an authority problem will be punished, because what they do in despising authority is wrong!

Again, brothers and sisters, two points. First, behold the character of your Lord. He is love. He is compassionate. He has mercy on sinners. He gave His life for us, and we can never doubt the sincerity of His love and care. But allied with that is a perfect hatred of evil and a perfect willingness to punish those who give their lives over to it. The character of God is such that He will punish those who have an authority problem.

⁶ Mathison to Caleb Nelson, personal communication, April 12, 2019.

Point two: don't presume that mercy will triumph against judgment in your case. Don't excuse your evil with the thought of God's mercy. After all, I mentioned the death of Christ a moment ago. That is the supreme testament to God's mercy, but also to His wrath. He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all — how will He spare those who are children of a curse and reject the sacrifice of His Son? The Gospel contains threatenings, and some of them are right here in 2 Peter 2. Don't miss this. It's part of the knowledge of your Lord and Savior and Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of the world, but *He is also its judge*. Both functions are united in Him, for He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the one who created the world and the one who will destroy it by fire. Be diligent, then, to be found in Him. Take refuge from His wrath in the arms of His mercy. Otherwise, you too will be destroyed. Amen.