



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 18 Issue 34

September 15, 2019

A glorious Appraisal

The most common struggle of pastoral ministry in the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries was depression. This surprised me for when I think of the ministry and legacy of the Reformation and later the age of the Puritans, I think of the incredible, life-changing teaching about God, Christ, Salvation, body life, and so much more. It is easy to think that with all this great instruction, THE problem God's people faced would NOT have been depression, BUT persecution and so the temptation to shrink back! And yet the fact of the matter is that during the period of the Reformation onward, God's people remained sinners who were no

different from their brethren who lived before or after them.

Think of it. With a European life-expectancy of 30-40 years of age amongst the average person during the time from 1500 thru 1800 (in the early 1900s it only rose to 46), for most, life was a struggle! Excluding the optimism that accompanies youth-- as they looked forward to such things as growing up, becoming adults, getting married, having children, and the like -- reality set in rather quickly, "Life in this world is horribly difficult!" Think of the diseases during this era -- the plagues that wiped out entire cities! Think of the class structure which oppressed the lower class out of which none could rise. Think of the poverty, the archaic medicine, the lack of education, and the medieval mindset that believed in superstition, goblins, ghosts, and witches. Talk about a hopeless existence!

With the Reformation onward, pastoral ministry therefore had a distinct flavor as it challenged God's people to live NOT by sight (and so according to the things of this world), BUT by faith in an unseen God!

And yet truthfully speaking, it wasn't just during the time of the Reformation and following that this challenge confronted God's people, the calling and the responsibility has been there since the Fall. Accordingly, we are exhorted time and again in Scripture:¹

Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."

Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

Romans 12:2a, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

At any given moment we have a choice! We can live according to the delusion of this world and so allow ourselves to be governed by the thinking and teaching of the fallen mind. Or we can live according to the thinking and teaching of the word of God concerning ourselves, this world, and God's Kingdom.

This is the issue Peter addresses in 1 Peter 2. Yes, God's people had become outlaws on account of Christ, such that they were attacked, abused, ridiculed, imprisoned, and some even martyred. Accordingly, Peter confronted them with a simple question: Will you live according to the world's valuation of you and despair? Or will you live by God's valuation of you and thrive?

We pick it up with Peter's description of the universal human condition where Peter tells of Christ and His cross-work.

1 Peter 2:7-8a, "This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner *stone*,' and,

‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’;”

Peter references the fact that though Christ is precious and most valuable to the believer, nevertheless to the non-believer He is altogether rejected (which is why they persecute Christians). Yet this rejection is their ultimate undoing. Quoting from Isaiah 8, Peter says two things:

1. NOT ONLY is Christ a “stone of stumbling” which means the non-believer trips over Christ (theologically and philosophically)....
2. BUT Christ also is “a rock of offense” which speaks of the ground upon which the non-Christians falls when they trip. This being “a rock of offense” and so solid rock, the result is that their inward parts are splattered on the ground (cf. Judas, Acts 1:18b)! This is euphemistically speaking, for the horrible fate of the non-believer goes beyond our ability to comprehend (at least on this side of the grave).

Luke 8:28 speaks of hell as a place of “torment” which in Christ’s day spoke of “testing by means of torture.” In Matthew 8:12 Christ described hell as a place of “...darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” This speaks NOT of pain, BUT of anger and rebellion! So not only is hell a place of torment, but it is a place of unending and ever-increasing anger! Mark 9:48 speaks of hell as a place where, “...their worm [that eats their flesh] does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” This speaks of never-ending pain! Now putting it all together Revelation 14:10-11a speaks of hell as drinking, “...of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; [there the non-believer]... will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence² of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night...”

This ultimately is in mind when Peter wrote of the non-believer “stumbling over Christ unto their destruction.” Such is the future of every individual outside of Christ! Christian, never look upon a wicked person the same. Now speaking of this destruction, Peter gives an explanation for why the non-believer perishes.

1 Peter 2:8b, “...for they stumble [which now we understand is a reference ultimately to hell] because they are disobedient to the word...”

This passage is layered theologically. Not only do we have before us the point Peter is making, BUT then there are the theological implications arising from Peter’s point which have disturbed many. Let’s consider the point Peter is making in this passage...

Why is it that non-believers “stumble” over Christ? Why do they hate and reject Him? Why ultimately do they go to hell? It is because “...they are disobedient [literally ‘rebellious’³ -- a present tense] to the word!” Did you get that? People who “stumble over Christ” do so because of an active choice which they make every moment of their lives! THEY hate, reject, and so refuse to live according to God’s word! It began in the Garden of Eden. There Adam and Eve

were in Paradise prior to the Fall, and they were given God's word which called them to obey the Lord (actually it was Adam as our Covenant Head who received the exhortation).

Genesis 2:16-17, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.'"

This is the first word God gave mankind! Now what did they do? With the influence of Satan, Adam and Eve placed themselves as judge over God's word and so made a determination as to whether or not God's word should be obeyed.

Genesis 3:1, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden"?'"

With this, Adam further made the determination that the "forbidden fruit" was desirable and so in their best interest to eat (cf. Genesis 3:6)! This plunged mankind into ruin such that now all are born with a sin nature which at all times is "disobedient to the word."

Romans 1:21, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Ephesians 2:3, "among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

In broad strokes what constitutes the mind of fallen man and how would one summarize it? Would it not include the following:

- When it comes to our purpose, the fallen mind believes that we exist for ourselves-- that life is about us: our pleasure, joy, and gladness.
- When it comes to God, the fallen mind believes that He is all-powerful, yet petty. Because of this, He is a being that must be placated by righteous living or religious sacrifice.
- When it comes to life, the fallen mind believes therefore that we can never know what grief lies around the corner as we can never know if the gods are fully satisfied with us.

This is the mindset that no doubt was prevalent in Peter's day and into which at times God's people fell. No doubt, it was from this mindset that the Romans persecuted Christians, telling them that their gods had abandoned them!

So why is the non-believer in rebellion against God? Why do they continue to "stumble" over Christ? Why do they go to hell? Because "they are disobedient to the word"! From this we conclude that their eternal destruction is their own doing, which is Peter's point here!

This is the universal condition of mankind outside of Christ. They are born as God-haters. They live their lives in rebellion against God. And when they die, they will suffer for eternity the wages of their sin!

And so again, rather than seeing an enemy when you look at a persecutor, consider the horrible future that awaits them and be merciful! That being said, Peter here is seeking to comfort God's people (not necessarily move them to pity). As such, he wants his brethren and us to know that the unbeliever's rejection of Christ and so their hostility toward us is subject to the plan and will of our Sovereign God! Accordingly, he continued...

1 Peter 2:8c, "...for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed⁵."

Don't blush when you read this! If God is absolutely sovereign (which He is), then everything that occurs in this life (including the destruction of the wicked) ultimately is according to God's sovereign will! The Bible is filled with examples of this.

- Joseph declared that the wicked treatment which he had received at the hands of his brothers was accordingly to God's sovereign plan, "...you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 45:7-8; 50:20).
- God informed Moses prior to Moses' return to Egypt that the Lord would "harden Pharaoh's heart" in order demonstrate His omnipotence and glory (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).
- During the era of the Judges we are told that Samson's lustful infatuation with the Philistine woman of Timnah "was from the Lord," Judges 14:4.\
- Eli's wicked sons did not listen to their father's advice which would have saved them, "for the Lord desired to put them to death," 1 Samuel 2:25.
- Such examples illustrate the truth of Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."
- The Wise Man of Proverbs 16 proclaimed God's sovereign rule over mankind when he declared...
 - v. 4, "The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."
 - v. 9, "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

- v. 33, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”
- In Isaiah 45:6b-7, God declared that it is He, the Lord, who forms and creates darkness, “...causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.”
- Solomon made the incredible statement, “In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider- God has made the one as well as the other...” (Ecclesiastes 7:14a)
- Perhaps no declaration sums up the attitude of the Old Testament witness to God’s sovereignty over man more majestically than Isaiah 40:15, 17, 22, 23, “Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Before Him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by Him as worthless and less than nothing. He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers... He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.”

This is just the Old Testament, consider the New Testament

- Jesus expressly taught that no one can come to Him unless the Father (1) “draws” him (John 6:44), (2) “teaches” him to come (John 6:45), and (3) “engifts” him with a saving approach to Jesus (John 6:65).
- Peter declared unequivocally that the treatment and death by crucifixion perpetrated on the Son of God by godless men were in accordance with the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God,” Acts 2:23.
- The entire church in Jerusalem gladly affirmed God’s sovereignty over life, and specifically reaffirmed that all that Herod, Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and the Jewish religious leaders had done to Jesus was in accordance with “...whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur,” Acts 4:24-28.
- Paul taught that “God has chosen [the Christian] from the beginning for salvation” (2 Thessalonians 2:13), and that God saved the Christian “not according to works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted [to the Christian] in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Timothy 1:9).

In light of all of this we are NOT shocked that Peter here traces the rebellion of man and their continued rejection of Christ to God’s sovereign will- a “doom to which they were appointed.” The question is, “Why is Peter stressing this?” So that God’s suffering people might have comfort in knowing that where they were was NOT because

- Of their sin.

- The weakness of their God.
- A capricious Lord.
- And evil deity.
- The strength of a man.
- The neglect of God.

RATHER, at all times we learn here that where we are as Christians is according to the wise counsel of a good God (cf. Romans 8:28)!

This brings us to the question of the hour and the second “layer” which I referenced earlier: Does this make God the author of Sin?

For the Biblical answer to this we might turn to James 1:13-14. Yet for Peter’s answer, we simply reference the verse before us! So Peter, “Why does the non-Christian go to hell? Why is it that the unbeliever today is in rebellion against Christ, hates His word, and so deigns to live according to their own way?” What is the answer? “[Because] they are disobedient to the word” (1 Peter 2:8b)!

You say, “But we just saw that it ultimately is on account of God’s sovereign will!” And that is correct. Yet we must also see that it is on account of the sinner’s rejection of Christ! Both are equally true!

How can that be? How do these two truths fit together? Answer: We Don’t Know... which doesn’t make either statement untrue! Listen, there are many truths in Scripture which go beyond our ability to comprehend:

- The Virgin Birth!
- The Inspiration of Scripture!
- The Incarnation!
- Miracles!
- God turning His back on the second member of the Godhead!
- The incommunicable attributes of God: His infinite, eternal, and unchangeable nature
- The Trinity!
- God’s Mercy, Forgiveness and Grace!

Does anyone other than God understand these incredible truths? Does any man feel the need to explain them away? Why then do we do this when it comes to God’s absolute sovereignty over all things? Why does God’s greatness make us blush?! It most certainly shouldn’t!

Non-Christians go to hell because of their rebellion against God! Yet we also confess that this is according to God’s providential care of this world!

That being said, when Peter set out to encourage his persecuted and imprisoned brethren, he

began by referencing the universal human condition of mankind. And what is that condition? They are doomed because they are in rebellion against Christ which manifests itself in the rejection of Christ's word! And so, though they

- May look smart.
- May be the envy of mankind.
- Have power, wealth, success, privilege, and the like.

Nevertheless, they are at enmity with God on account of which someday they will be completely and irrevocably destroyed! And at one time such were you and I!

This brings us to 1 Peter 2:9 and two of the most glorious words in the Bible, "But you..."!

1 Peter 2:9, "They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. But you..."

What a contrast! Unlike the non-believer who today lives in ease and happiness BUT tomorrow will live eternally in everlasting torment and pain, WE, God's people, have such a bright and glorious future on account of what we have become today in Christ.

In light of this, today and every day we have a very important choice. Your mind can be governed by the universal condition of mankind which is "disobedience to the word" -- and so hold and profess many false views of reality. Or your mind can be governed by what you have become in Christ!

Peter's exhortation here is for you and me to be governed by what we have become in Christ.

References

Grudem, W. A. (2009). *1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP Numbered))*. Chicago: IVP Academic.

Morris, L. L. (2009). *Revelation (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

End Note(s)

¹ Cf. also Philippians 2:5; Romans 12:2b.

² To increase their suffering, Christ and the angelic hosts (obviously not all of them) will be privy to the non-believer's anguish in hell (Psalms 139:7-8); as one man wrote: the wicked will suffer while 'utter purity' looks on! Cf. (Morris, 2009, p. 174)

³ "Though disobey (*apeitheō*) often means simply 'not obey', it sometimes has the connotation of active or entrenched opposition to God's word (cf. Acts 14:2; 19:9; Romans 2:8; 10:21; 11:30-31; 15:31; Heb. 3:18; 1 Peter 3:20; 4:17; also Hort, p. 122, who says, 'On the whole ... the biblical use is best expressed by "rebel" or "be rebellious" '). Although some have argued that this term can mean simply 'disbelieve, be an unbeliever' (especially in John 3:36), such a sense is not required in any of the word's occurrences.

Thus, because they disobey the word means not just that they refuse to believe the gospel—though it certainly includes that—but that they are living lives of disobedience and rebellion against God generally. (This wider sense of ‘disobey the word’ fits the context of the Old Testament quotations best as well.)” (Grudem, 2009, pp. 112-113)

⁴ There is more to be said here regarding non-Christians being “disobedient/rebellious to the word.” For what specifically is involved in this rebellion? While their rebellion is legion, nevertheless consider the following...

- a. When it comes to God’s chief end, what does the non-believer say? God exists to make man happy.
- b. In this regard, what is the purpose of life? Why are we here? We are here to be fulfilled and so to actualize our potential.
- c. When it comes to heaven or paradise, who in the non-believer’s estimation goes there? All people- except really, really bad people!
- d. On what basis do all people then go to heaven? What determines if they go to heaven or hell? Their own righteous efforts... their works!
- e. When it comes therefore to rewards both in heaven and on the earth, what determines how much we get? Our conduct/virtue!
- f. Therefore, when things don’t go our way, who is to blame? The sinner!
- g. What must a sinner do in order to make the gods bless them? They must sacrifice (their children, their time, their money)!
- h. Why is it when at times and after great sacrifice the individual still can face trial and difficulty (which happens a lot)? Because the gods are fickle, capricious, and so unable to be trusted!

...this and much more is how non-Christians “rebel against God’s word.” In rejecting Christ and His word, they have created their own religion and so live in a fantasy world of their own making.

⁵ “The word destined is *tithēmi*, a term which elsewhere is also used to speak of God’s appointing or predestining a particular event or situation long before it happens (Acts 1:7; Romans 4:17; 1 Thess. 5:9; Heb. 1:2; probably also John 15:16; Acts 13:47), or of God’s establishing someone in a certain situation not long beforehand but at a certain point in time (cf. Matt. 22:44; 20:28; Romans 9:33; 1 Cor. 12:18, 28). It is used in a passive form here (‘were destined’) without mentioning God specifically, but it clearly speaks of God’s activity (as it does similarly in 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11; and Heb. 10:13). Here Peter uses it in direct contrast to its use in verse 6: there, God established (RSV: ‘I am laying’) Christ as a chosen cornerstone in Zion, but here, by contrast, God has established (or ‘destined’) the rebellious to stumbling and disobedience.

The RSV (with all major Eng. translations) correctly represents this appointment to disobedience as a completed event in the past (they were destined), for that is the force of the aorist indicative here. It is impossible exegetically to say that God appointed not persons but the fact of stumbling as the penalty for disobedience (so Bigg, p. 133) for the verb is plural (‘they were appointed’), and the subject must be the persons who are disbelieving (v. 7) and stumbling and disobeying (v. 8). The time of such destining is not specified, but elsewhere in Scripture related passages about predestination view it as occurring before creation, or ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Ephesians 1:4; cf. 2 Peter 2:3; Jude 4; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29–30; 9:14–24).” (Grudem, 2009, pp. 113-114)