



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 2:17-22

“The Apostasy of False Teachers”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We're grateful to Thee, Lord for the opportunity to again meet in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And to look into the Scriptures which reveal not only the person and work of our Lord Jesus but also warn of the machinations of the evil one, and of those who are associated with him in his attempt to thwart the work of our great God. And we pray as we study again in 2 Peter that Thou wilt make plain to us the word of God and enable us to understand it and profit from its teaching. We also ask Lord that through the Scriptures we may be built up in our faith and in our personal relationship to the Lord Jesus. Deliver us from error and enable us to understand truth and respond to it. And may this hour contribute to that end we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Message] When Israel came out of Egypt, she came out of Egypt with the mixed multitude. The coming out of Egypt with a mixed multitude on the part of Israel is an apt illustration of collective Christian experience. As a general rule, when a group of Christians begin to meet together and begin to take that journey through the present world system of which we have become a part and are now no longer a part through conversion. The tendencies are for those who are not believers but attracted nevertheless by Christianity to begin to associate with the true believers. And it's not long before the companies of the believers the gatherings of the true saints are also gatherings

of some who form part of the mixed multitude. And so when Israel came out of Egypt it's not surprising then for us to read that a mixed multitude came out with them who had been attracted evidently to the faith in Jehovah which a great majority of the Israelites had. And this mixed multitude formed a very difficult group of people for Israel to deal with throughout their wilderness experiences. And likewise in the Christian experience and the collective Christian experience it is often this unbelieving mixed multitude which is the cause of the difficulties which the saints have as a group of people.

Sunday morning in the ministry of the word here I was speaking on the subject that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and I made reference to the fact the light is not only an attractive light to which people come in order to have illumination but as is true of most light, there also gathers to them moths and insects. And that it is characteristic of the Christian light that it should gather not only those who are looking for divine illumination, but also some moths and insects gather. They are not really true Christians, but they are attracted to the light. And evidently part of the motivation is motivation that comes from Satan himself.

The Apostle Paul when he was speaking to the Ephesians elders in a passage to which I have already referred once, in addressing them warned them of the fact that not only would outsiders be difficult for them in the future, but some from their own small group of people. He said to them, “For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.” So he warned them that from the outside, the wolves would come in and furthermore that from their own company there would arise men who would be speaking perverse things. We should therefore not be surprised when in the midst of a professing Christian company we have evidence of the presence of individuals who might well of been part of the mixed multitude that troubled Israel.

Just a few weeks ago, I read in one of the periodicals that I take about the Episcopalians who this year will have the issue of women's ordination coming to a head in their next general convention which meets in September. Just the other day I also saw about a dozen or so Episcopalian ministers

who had spoken out against women’s ordination, so the lines are being drawn for a battle which will reach its climax in that particular meeting. But the Reverend John M. Hines, a Kentucky pastor in the Episcopalian Church, the son of the presiding bishop of the Episcopalian Church, Bishop Hines, is announcing that he is willing to debate anyone in the Episcopalian Church on the subject of women’s ordination. But he says that he is laying down two requirements for this debate and they must be these: First of all his opponents will not try to argue from Scripture. [Laughter] Now if they’re going to argue from Scripture he is not going to debate with them. And then second, they are not to try to make their case by quoting the church’s constitution. So if they’re willing to argue just on the basis of human reason, he’s willing to argue with them. But he will not argue if the argument is based on the church constitution which seems a reasonable thing to argue on in the Episcopalian Church, or if they argue on the Bible, from the basis of the Bible. And then he went on to speak to one of the news reporters with a smile and said, “When you get an Episcopalian quoting the Bible, you’re getting into pretty shallow ground, our church has never been too strong on the Bible.”

Now the Reverend, Mr. Hines is wrong about one thing in addition to those other things. He’s wrong in the statement that the Episcopalian Church has never been too strong on the Bible, it is true that in its past history, they had a number of men who were very strong on the Scriptures and it’s unfair to say of them that they have never been too strong in the Bible. But the point that I wanted to make is simply this that the Reverend John Hines, the son of the presiding bishop is really part of a spiritual mixed multitude and one of the reasons why that church sits in such a turmoil today.

So it is not surprising then that Peter in this epistle in which he speaks so sharply about apostasy should warn about the false teachers who are troubling the saints. In this 2nd chapter, verse 17 through 22, he will conclude his description of the false teachers, hoping his readers will not be sitting ducks for the clever cultist who pushes for a piece of the action in yesterday’s religious scene. Now let’s read, beginning at verse 17 through verse 22. These last verses of chapter two, for that’s the subject for the ministry tonight. Peter continues:

“These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever. (That text incidentally is not too well translated in the Authorized Version and probably should be better rendered something like this: these are wells without water, mists that are driven by a tempest; to whom the blackness or the gloom of darkness has been reserved.) For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that are just escaping from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in 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 it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

There are three points that I want to make in the description of the apostates tonight, and first of all, Peter speaks of the emptiness of the false teachers in verse 17. Then in the 18th and 19th verses he speaks of the immorality of the false teachers, dealing again with that subject which has been one of the themes of this chapter. And finally, in verses 20 through 22 he speaks of the apostasy of the false teachers and the perils of that apostasy.

Let's look now at verse 17 in which the emptiness of the false teachers is expressed in such beautiful language. He has just finished his excursus on Balaam, the false prophet, and so now he returns to the attack. And his phraseology is poetic and grandiose, “These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest” or “mist that are driven by a storm or a tempest. For whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever.” Let me say a word first about that phrase, “Wells without water.” It's evident that the thing that Peter wants to stress here is that these false teachers

are giving people the impression that they really have something to say. Water was a very important commodity in the ancient world, and for someone to be a seller of water, well it was of necessity he was a very important person. So they were like wells. They were supposed to be those who distributed to people the refreshing doctrine of the truth. But instead, they were the disappointing type of wells that have no water in them. They are those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. And so Peter speaks of them as wells without water. False teachers and their heterodoxy often seem very attractive in the classroom but it's very unsatisfying in the church of Jesus Christ. We are not fed by the latest theories of the theological professors as a general rule. We may be attracted by it, we may be made curious by the novelties of the imaginations of religious men, but we are not fed by anything but the simple truths of the word of God that have to do with the life and ministry and work of the Lord Jesus. And I don't want you to misunderstand that word simple, I do not mean by that that we should dispense with all of the things of the word of God that seem to be difficult, I mean simply that the truth of God in the ultimate sense is always clear and lucid. And when it comes home in the power of the Holy Spirit, even though it's the deepest kind of truth, it comes home with a great deal of force and meaning and clarity. In fact that's one of the amazing things about the Bible that the deep truths of the word of God can come home to us with such clarity through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But heterodoxy is novel in the classroom; it's very unsatisfying in the church of Jesus Christ.

Some years ago when I was in the land of Scotland doing some graduate study, I sat in the classroom for a long time of a man who was one of the outstanding theologians of that time. He himself was a strong Barthian in his theology, that is he was a follower of Karl Barth. And in fact I studied under Professor Barth at the University of Basel in Switzerland. In the course of the time that I was there, one of the most significant New Testament professors who was probably as widely known at that time as any other was professor Bultmann of Germany. Now Bultmann's influence was very strong, and many of the professors who were teaching in the theological institutions in Europe were followers of Professor Rudolf Bultmann, and he was especially well-known for his

demythologizing of the New Testament. The professor that I listened to was not a very scintillating lecturer, but a very very intellectual man. And in the course of the discussions in class, he every now and then would get off on Professor Bultmann who he could not follow in his theology. He himself was a Barthian, but he could not follow the Bultmannian theology of Professor Bultmann.

And one day one of the criticisms of Professor Bultmann that he made was that Professor Bultmann’s theology was not preachable, that in the churches, it could not be proclaimed because people could not understand it. And when the class was over as we were walking out, and I had some conversation with some of the Scottish students thereafter, they thought that was a rather interesting thing, because they said that the professor himself had, to use their terminology, had already emptied more than one church in Scotland before he was appointed Professor of dogmatics at the University. So novelties in theology may seem to be very attractive because they tickle our imagination and curiosity, but they are very unsatisfying. And individuals who go in for the novel in theology are going ultimately to come under the judgment of this phrase of Peter’s, “They are wells without water.” You listen to them, but you do not really get any substantial spiritual food.

Then Peter says that they are clouds that are carried with a tempest or as I have suggested this clause should be rendered, mists driven by a storm. So you can just imagine a stormy day like this morning was here in Dallas and see the misty clouds floating hurriedly across the sky. What is that intended to suggest? Well it can be taken in the same sense as the preceding. We could in a land in which water was so important think of mists that were flying across the skies as potentially being the source of water for us, but since they’re flying across the sky, being carried by a tempest, they do not pour out their water or moisture upon us. We might think of it that way. On the other hand, it’s probably much more likely that this phrase by reason of the fact that the picture is of mists that are flying across the sky driven by a storm refers to the instability of the false teachers and the transitory and short-lived nature of their teaching. In other words, their teaching comes on the scene just like a mist which is being driven by a storm and you look up and you expect something, but it’s gone

before you can really get acquainted with it. So it's the short-lived, the transitory character of their teaching and the instability of it.

Now anyone who has ever gone into a secondhand theological bookstore knows exactly what I'm talking about. I love books, in fact one of the big problems of a little bit of remodeling that we have been doing at our house has been those hundreds of books that I have. And I'm so grateful for some of the saints in Believers Chapel who came and helped me take my books out of my library and then take them back in. I'd like for you to know they're all back in and Marshall and Ray Covall and Bob Nixon and others who have helped me. Now I have collected these books over a number of years, I started collecting those books when I was in the insurance business in Birmingham Alabama because the moment I was converted God gave me a desire to know something about Scripture, so I began to collect these volumes. And some of them I have, still have with my name in them S. Lewis Johnson Jr. Nineteen hundred and forty-two, just a year after I was converted, long before I ever was out here in Dallas Texas at Dallas Theological Seminary. So I used to frequent second hand theological bookstores, and they are very depressing places. Book after book, hundreds of old books that are absolutely worthless, but at one time, not to many years ago some of them, twenty, twenty-five, thirty-five, forty years ago they were the latest thing in the theological world. And the theological students in the seminaries were clamoring to buy them and put them on their shelves. Now they are totally unsalable. You just move them aside in order to see if there is some old tome there that was written by some godly man who may have lived a hundred or two hundred years ago. So the teaching of the false teachers is unstable and it's ephemeral, it's transitory, it's short-lived.

Was it not Dean King, of the Anglican Church who said, “The man that is wedded to this generation will find himself a widower in the next.” Because the truth that is predominant today will not be predominant in the next age if it is not the teaching of Holy Scripture. Just think of all the heresies of the past, we could start right now at five minutes to eight, and just begin to say the words of the heresies like Arianism and Gnosticism and Sabellianism and Euticianism and so forth and we

probably could go on to eight-fifteen, or perhaps the end of the hour just saying the names of the various heresies that have come on the Christian scene and after a time have either moved off without any comments by the church as a whole or have become sources of controversy and as a result of some Christian council somewhere have been declared to be heresies of the Christian church. And we have all of those slings still coming across the scene, Arminianism has been with us for a long time now, and it probably will be with us until the second coming of Christ unfortunately. I'm sure that the Arminians would say of course it is. That's when of course we'll find out that Arminianism is correct. No we won't. We shall find out what it really is at that time, but it's with us. Armstrongism—we have that, it probably will not be not be with us too long. All of these other things come on the scene, they are popular for a while, they mislead some simpleminded Christians who do not study the Scriptures as they should and occasionally they're torn into pieces by the false teaching and then it moves off the scene.

They are, these false teachers, men like Garner Ted Armstrong and the rest of the lot, they are as Peter puts it, they are mists driven by a storm, they are unstable and their teaching will be short-lived, it is not permanent. And furthermore, there is something else that is even more solemn, Peter says, “To whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved.” That word incidentally is an interesting word, that word reserved, because it's the same word that is used over in 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 4 where we read concerning our Christian inheritance that “we have been begotten again to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you.” Now for the believer, we have an inheritance that is reserved in Heaven for us; wouldn't you like to know what it is? The Bible never tells us what that inheritance is; in fact the Bible describes this inheritance in negatives. It's incorruptible, it's undefiled and it does not fade away. It does not really tell us what it is; it just tells us what it is not. And the reason for that's very simple, you couldn't understand it if it were to be told as it really is, you would not have the powers of comprehension by which you could grasp it now. So he simply says it's not like anything down here on the earth. It's incorruptible, it's undefiled and it does not fade away. Our inheritance is reserved in Heaven for us.

It has your name on it, it's something that is in lay away for you and it is yours. But for the false teachers, for them the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever. So in place of the momentary darkness of their false teaching, and that which is in their minds and which they purvey as the truth of God. In the place of that momentary darkness, there is prepared for them a much thicker and eternal one in the ages and ages of an eternity that is to come. You can see that Peter is a master of the ironic. Here are men who are purveying darkness, and so what shall they have? Why they shall have darkness forever. That's what they shall have. Calvin says that that darkness is a much thicker and an eternal one.

Now we turn to the immorality of the false teachers in verses 18 and 19, “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity.” Their words are ponderous but they have no significance, they are great swelling words of vanity, they do not really mean anything. They think that for them they mean something, but they do not really have any truth to them, so they are great swelling words of vanity. You know what they are? Well they're words like eschatological used in the sense in which modern theologians use them. Eschatological means simply prophetic, that's a very good word. Unfortunately it doesn't mean that when the teachers of today, contemporary theologians use it. They have their own special jargon. That's why when you read their literature you do not understand it. Now eschatological, form criticism, redaction criticism, ecumenical theology, renewal theology, secular theology, process theology, revolutionary theology, celebration theology, whatever that means, now these are the terms that are used by our contemporary theologians, these are just illustrations of what Peter means when he talks about the false teachers using “great swelling words of vanity.”

I remember Dr. Chafer telling us at the seminary many years ago that one day he was walking down the street in the city of Dallas and he came by a Christian Science reading room and he said, he stopped and he looked at that reading room and right in the center of the window in which the materials were set there was Mary Baker Glover Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, and he said he began to read it a little because it was open. And I remember him saying to us, “You

know men I read that and I must say it made no more sense to me than if I had started at the back of the dictionary and had read toward the front of the dictionary instead of beginning at the end and reading to the back.” And I think he said if I had started at the bottom and read to the top from the end to the beginning, it made no more sense to me then that. And then he said he remembered that the Lord Jesus had spoken about something like this when he said, “And a stranger will they not follow but will they flee from him for they know not the voice of strangers.” And he said, “And I bowed my head and I said thank you Lord that I cannot understand this nonsense which is on the pages of this book. I do not hear this voice, and evidently you have made it and made me so that I do not hear it.”

So if you do not understand the deep things of Satan, there are such things remember, John says in Revelation chapter 1, then thank God that he has kept you from that error. They are those who use ponderous words, but they do not have any real content to them, they are, “vain ponderous words.” They speak great swelling words of vanity, then he says, “They allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that are just escaping from them who live in error.”

Now let's stop and analyze some of these expressions. First, “allure through the lusts of the flesh.” Now evidently in ancient times the deeply spiritual people were urged to express their religion sexually and so as a result of the evil of the false teachers, many of the simpleminded were misled. They were just in the process evidently of coming into the Christian faith and had given up some of the moral corruption of the paganism out of which they were coming that's what he refers to when he refers to them who live in error. Those are the pagans, and these young believers or professing believers as we shall see, were just in process of being delivered from the pagan corruption and the false teachers come and allure them through the lusts of the flesh saying to them, “Now one of the ways in which you express your newfound spirituality is through the lusts of the flesh. And so grandiose sophistry was the hook and filthy lust was the bait, and the unstable and the young were the objects of their teaching.

Now you must not, you must not think that this is something that has no reference to us today at all, it does. This very thing happens today. This very thing happens to young person's faith wise who are in process of being drawn toward the Christian faith. We have illustrations of this kind of thing in the case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* many of you of course have read the things that have been said about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the various court trials that have taken place particularly in Britain over this book. A bishop in England has publicly described the adulterous liaison in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as quote, “in a real sense an act of holy communion,” unquote. And a theological don of one of the great schools in Britain can defend fornication in certain circumstances as a form of charity. It's no wonder that Calvin says, “This letter can therefore be of considerable advantage to our times” because we are living in days in which the absolutes of the word of God are no longer accepted by society. And unfortunately, that wouldn't be too bad except that the Christians have been swayed by the philosophies and human reason of the men who are outside the church of Jesus Christ. Clement of Alexandria back in the third century attacked heretics who called their fornication mystic communion, so it should not surprise you that there are people who allure through the lusts of the flesh and who at the same time parade as teachers of biblical truth. Amazing thing, but it is true.

Notice how he describes these who are affected, “Those that are just escaping from them who live in error.” This present participle just escaping suggests a smaller degree of Christian attainment than as if they had already escaped. They are in process of escape or as that present tense I think should be rendered, they are trying to escape from the corruption. So what he has reference to is individuals who have made a profession of faith who have given up some of the outward trappings of paganism but who may not yet have really become Christians, and they have become the prey of these false teachers who are misleading them. Isn't it an interesting thing that the Bible speaks of Christians who are born again, truly born again as new born babes? Isn't that an interesting thing? Because you see, the characteristic thing of a new born babe is that a baby desires food. All healthy babies love food. You know that and I know that. Characteristic thing about an

infant is it knows it wants food. And it lets its mother know when it does. So the characteristic of young believers is that they love the Bible. And in fact that's characteristic of all healthy people, they love food. When a person doesn't love the Bible, doesn't love spiritual food, he gives no evidence of being born again, something's the matter. Usually when a person doesn't want food, they are sick or sickly.

Now there are certain things that characterize infants. Infants have certain childhood diseases, measles, what are some of them, chicken pox, mumps, that can be some; I had mumps when I was growing up. What are some of the other childhood diseases? You can think of them, there are diseases that characterize a childhood of a physical person. Now there are childhood diseases in spiritual life too. And one of those is just what Peter is speaking about here. That is in the nursery years of the Christian life, professing believers become the prey of individuals, false teachers often, who desire to lay hold upon them because they've become interested in spiritual things and to make them their own converts. Some of them are truly Christians, and yet they're misled. And I've often seen this happen, it disturbs me very greatly to see a young person who is full of the life of Jesus Christ growing in grace fall into the hands of older Christian who has reached a lower level of maturity and desires to stay there for the rest of their lives. It's one of the saddest things that can possibly happen, when a person is deterred by some older believer out of fellowship with the Lord in that respect. One of the ways in which this often takes place is some older Christian will get hold of a younger Christian and say “now” if they're interested in spiritual things and in growing and might even be interested in a little theology, the older Christian says, “Now you ought to be careful about that, after all in the final analysis, it's the simplicity of the gospel that really is the important thing. And if you get much beyond that, you'll get into the realm of controversy and it's not edifying and many people have been misled by that kind of thing and furthermore it's caused division in the church, so you want to beware of anything more than the simple truths of the gospel.”

Now I have something I want to read to you tonight. I think it's excellent, it's written by Dr. J. G. Vos and it's entitled, *The Simplicity of the Gospel*. And I want to read it because I think it expresses just so beautifully the importance of really going beyond the simplicity of the gospel.

“Too often (he says) the plea for simplicity in religion is merely an excuse for mental laziness, an alibi for not thinking, an evasion of the depth and richness of divine truth, we should realize that we are commanded to love the Lord our God, not only with all our heart and soul and strength, but with all our mind. We do not want any deep theological doctrines many people say; just give us the simple gospel of Jesus Christ and that will satisfy our soul. This sounds very pious. But when considered closely, it will be seen to involve an irreligious contempt for a large portion of the truth which God has revealed in his word. What is this simple gospel of Jesus Christ? How is it to be stated or defined? Perhaps the answer is given that John 3:16 is a sufficient statement of it. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. But is the thought of this verse really very simple? Alas, this favorite verse of millions of Christians fairly bristles with theological questions that have to be answered if the verse is to have a definite meaning for us. Does the first clause For God so loved the world describe the extent of God's love for mankind of the intensity of it. In other words is the stress on that he loved so many people, or is the stress on the intensity of it that his love is so strong it would even love such a vile thing as the world? Is the idea of universality or that of wickedness? What is meant by saying that God gave his Son? Does this mean that God gave his Son to become man to live a perfect life under the law, to suffer and die as a substitute for sinners on the cross, to rise again the third day? If that is what it means then does not this little word gave involve in it's meaning here the whole doctrine of the incarnation, the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, the atonement, Christ's active and passive obedience in the covenant of grace? Again why was it needful for God in order to put his love for the world in action to give his Son? Was this because of the lost guilty and sinful condition of the human race? If that's the meaning then does not this verse in it's true meaning

really involve the whole doctrines of the creation of mankind, the covenant of works, the fall, original and actual sin, total depravity and total inability? If God gave his Son in order to save men from sin, must we not know what sin is in order to grasp the real meaning and force of the word gave? Again, what is meant by referring to the Son as the only begotten? Does that mean that Christ is the Son of God in a unique sense? If so does not the phrase, his only begotten Son involve the doctrines of the eternal sonship and deity of Christ? And do these doctrines not in turn involve the doctrine of the Trinity if they are to mean anything? Once more, what is the meaning of the phrase believeth in him? Does this mean what is called saving faith? If so, what is the nature of saving faith, and how does it differ from other kinds of faith such as mere historical faith, temporary faith, *et cetera*? If this expression believeth in him is really to mean anything to us, do we not have to know the biblical doctrine of saving faith? And what is the force of the words in him in the phrase believeth in him? Does this phrase involve making Jesus the object of the believer's faith? If so, what is the difference between making Jesus the object of one's faith and making Jesus one's example as a man of faith? In short, what is the difference between having faith in Jesus and having faith in God like Jesus' faith in God?"

Well, I won't read the rest; he takes up a lot of the other parts of that verse and analyzes it the same way. I wonder if you understand much about John 3:16, I wonder if I understand everything about it. Then he concludes by saying,

“The person who rejects theology and says that he wants only the simple gospel of Christ only deceives himself. What he calls simplicity is not really simplicity, it's only vagueness, that's what he wants, vagueness. The person who wants to take John 3:16 just as it stands without facing any of the theological questions which this verse raises, may think he is insisting on simplicity and is religiously superior to other Christians who want definite and clear-cut knowledge, but in reality he is only hiding his head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich, and saying the truth is not important.”

How true that is, how true that is. And to me when an older Christian gets hold of a younger Christian who is full of fire and vigor and who wants to know the truth of God and wants to study it and wants to grow and wants to get a hold of the deep things of the word of God and misleads him by saying, “Don’t get off in that, that’s the subject that is controversial, that’s difficult, that is not practical.” That person is one of the worst of the workers in the professing church of the Lord Jesus Christ; it’s sad, very sad, sad because it’s so common.

So Peter says, “Allure those that are just escaping.” Now in the 19th verse he says, “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” There’s a profound psychological insight in this verse, “They promise liberty to those,” but they themselves do not have it. They are in bondage to Satan, and so when they promise them liberty, they promise them the license that will bring them into bondage to sin just as they who promise it are in bondage to sin. You can be sure of this, if you sin; you bring yourself into bondage to sin. And the only freedom that is true freedom is the freedom to follow the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Now we must come to the last three verses which are controversial, perhaps we should skip them and say well we want to stick to the simple gospel. And we will let some other Bible teacher handle these verses here, but I do not think that we ought to succumb to vagueness and certainly we do not want to say that these words are not important. Do you realize what you are saying when you say that part of the word of God is not important and other part is important? Or part of the word of God is to be skipped and the simple things are to be studied and the other things are to be left alone, do you realize what you are really saying? You’re not only saying that you want to rest in vagueness, and you’re not only saying that the truth is unimportant, but you are saying that God has made a mistake in that he has let slip these passages of the word of God which actually are hurtful or harmful to the church.

As John Calvin many years ago about the doctrine of election, he said it should be preached, it should be taught and I use that only as an illustration, because there are many other doctrines that are just as difficult as election, and he says, “We cannot say that this is not important, and we cannot avoid it because we would be saying that God has let slip something hurtful to the church.” Now then, what does Peter say here? In the 20th verse, he says, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world” now we have to ask ourselves first, what does this word they mean? Does it refer to the young unstable professors of truth that he’s just referred to? Or does it refer to the false teachers? Well in the light of the context, the general context and also in the light of the usage of the words, it seems very plain that the “they” is to refer to the false teachers. So they are individuals that are referred to in the three verses. Let’s read what he says,

“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 it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”

Now notice the privileges that they have, first of all they have a full knowledge of the way of truth. They have the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and incidentally, in the Greek text, that is the word, not *gnosis* which means knowledge, but *epignosis* which means full knowledge. So they have a full knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In verse 21 we read, “They know the way of righteousness.” They have a full knowledge of the way of righteousness. Furthermore, we also read that in verse 20, “if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world” so they have been in measure delivered from the moral corruption of the world. So here are individuals who have a full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, who have a knowledge of the way of righteousness and who also have experienced such a transformation of life that it can be said of them that they have escaped the corruption that is in the world. Now those are the privileges that they have had. They

have also been exposed to the holy commandment, for he will speak about that at the end of verse 21, “to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” They have in other words, had the moral law of God expounded to them.

Now that’s what they had, but now notice their sin, in verse 20 it says, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions, they are again entangled in it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” They have become entangled again in the corruption that they escaped. They had a form of transformation that affected their outward life, but now they have gone back to it. Furthermore, he says in verse 21 that they have turned from the holy commandment delivered unto them. So they’ve turned away from the moral law of God, holy in its essence. So they’ve turned from the holy commandment, they have become entangled again in corruption, and furthermore, that brings us to their punishment, Peter says, “If after they have escaped this, they are again entangled with them, the latter end is worse with them than in the beginning,” In other words, they are worse off than they were before they received anything. Now that’s an amazing statement. He goes on to say it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

Now let’s suppose for the sake of supposition, that they are true believers. Well if they are true believers, and their state now is worse than it was at the beginning, it’s evident that a true believer can fall from salvation, it’s evident that a true believer can lose his salvation, for the latter things, the latter end is worse with them than at the beginning before God began to work. That’s the way take this text, they take this to mean that individuals have a full knowledge of the way of righteousness, they are truly saved, but they turn away and the latter end is worse than it was at the beginning. That cannot be any Christian judgment, it has to be worse than the condemnation that they had before they even turned to the Lord, in the sense here. So we would have to modify all of our belief in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, the saints do not persevere if these are true believers. There is no such doctrine as eternal security then. When the Lord Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish,” that is not to be taken then to mean that when a

person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ he has eternal life and he will never lose that relationship that he has. Fortunately that’s not the only way to take this text, although it’s the way that a number of people do take it.

Now it is possible to take it in a different way. Are these individuals regenerate or unregenerate? Well I would like to say, in my opinion, in my judgment, these individuals are not regenerate at all, they are unregenerate. Now then, how do we explain these statements that they have the full knowledge of the way of righteousness, they have known the way of righteousness, they have full knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? What then is Peter saying? Well he’s saying first of all that they have had reformation, but not salvation. They have been delivered from paganism, but they have only come into an appreciation and understanding of Christendom, not Christianity. We read in verse 20, “for if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it and are constantly being overcome,” why that of course is a statement that can never refer to a Christian.

What kind of knowledge is it then that they do have? For they have that knowledge. Well remember, saving faith, this is why incidentally we need a little theology to understand the word of God. Remember saving faith is made up of knowledge, conviction of the truth of that knowledge and trust in the person about whom that knowledge is, or concerns. Now it’s possible then for a man to have a full and complete knowledge of the facts of the gospel. As a matter of fact, it’s possible for even to be convinced of the truthfulness of that gospel, but never himself have come to the place where he relies upon the Lord Jesus who is the person concerning whom the gospel is given. So the knowledge that these men have is on the apperceptive side, they know, but they have not relied upon our Lord Jesus.

I’m persuaded there are lots of people in our churches, evangelical churches, just like this, usually second generation Christians, usually the children of you people sitting in the audience. That’s why it’s so important for you to pray earnestly and be guided by the Holy Spirit to lead your children to a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. It’s so easy for young people brought up

under evangelical preaching to know the facts of the gospel but stop there, to have full knowledge of it, to be able to repeat it as well as the preacher. Incidentally, if you'll watch a lot of kids when the adults are not around in a church just like this, if their in this auditorium, there'll be a few of them that'll get up on the platform here and get behind the pulpit and start preaching the gospel. And they'll be giving out statements like, “Christ died for your sins” and so on. I've seen that often happen in churches, they actually comprehend a great deal about what's being said.

Well now I want you to notice the way this ends. He says, “But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” There's the clue to the character of these false teachers. They are dogs and they are sows. Now the Lord Jesus said, “Do not” I shall read the text, because both of these figures are found in it. Its Matthew chapter 7 and verse 6, and Matthew chapter 7 and verse 6, we read, we must hurry, because I have only three minutes, in Matthew chapter 7 and verse 6, the Lord Jesus said, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, and neither cast your pearls before swine.” Now the individuals of whom Peter is speaking are dogs, they are dogs who have returned to their own vomit and they are sows who have returned to their wallowing in the mire. What are Jesus Christ's own? They are sheep. They are sheep, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them.”

By the way if you'll read the Old Testament and study it, instead of contenting yourself with the simplicity of the gospel, if you'll read the Book of Leviticus, you'll discover that the dog and the sow or the swine, the male, these are unclean animals, unclean animals. So you see it's possible for a person to know a whole lot of truth but not be a true believer in the Lord Jesus. If they turn away, that's apostasy. Never having received the truth and turning away from their profession, they apostatize from the faith. And of them, it can truly be said, “the latter end is worse than the beginning.” It would be better for them, as with Judas, if they had never been born. That's a beautiful figure, the dog. It's particularly fitting on account of the habits of dogs. Dogs do not vomit very easily, we all have seen them, but occasionally even he incorporates something into his

system which his indiscriminating stomach will not tolerate, and so he vomits it up. And then he stands around and looks at it and finally he comes back and he eats it again.

Now you know what you are doing? You are expressing in the physical sphere exactly what Peter is trying to get over in the spiritual or moral sphere, when a person reforms and then goes back to the old life. And then the sow, incidentally, Peter uses the feminine here it's the sow, it's not the swine, and there is a real reason for it. Because the male swine can be sleek and trim, not at all an unsightly creature, but the sow is usually fat and repugnant. [Laughter] And evidently, the female is capable of rising to greater heights than the male, but also of sinking to lower depths. It's been said by someone that anything a man can do well a woman can do better. I don't know whether that's true or not, but it has been said, and it has also been added that anything that a man can do badly, she can do worse. Peter says these are sows and they are dogs, they are false teachers, but they have apostatized from the faith. Well that's the conclusion of his description of the false teachers and it's a terrible thing, it's a terrible description. And incidentally, the very fact that it can appear so crude to us is an evidence of the fact that we are not too much in harmony with the thought of God concerning false teachers. Now next time we shall take a look at the third chapter and the scoffers and we shall try to answer the question, is it really true that God is not willing that any should be lost? We close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee Lord, for the teaching of Holy Scripture, and we pray that we may have the same attitude concerning the false teachers ...

[RECORDING ENDS UBRUPTLY]