

Christian Living in a Sinful World

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[0 : 00] Let's turn once again this evening to 2 Peter, 2 letter of Peter, chapter 2, and we'll read from verse 4.

2 Peter, chapter 2, and verse 4. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell, and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment, if he did not spare the ancient world but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making an example of what was going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard.

Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

Well, if we were going to take every verse of this chapter, it would be exceedingly difficult, indeed in some ways tortuous for us to go through it, and to be sure that there is not that there is anything wrong with doing that, and it is certainly a chapter that in itself, because of how full and detailed it is about what it says, especially about the ungodly, it is certainly a chapter that shows us how serious false teaching is, and how serious departure from the truth is, and how serious it is to rebel against God, and to rebel especially against the light that God has given us in his word.

It's that kind of chapter, that's why it's there. We have to give it its due place in the teaching of the Bible, in the teaching of the Gospel, and it's not that we want to actually ignore or pass over quickly such solemn and detailed chapters as you find here in chapter 2 of 2 Peter.

[2 : 25] But as we do that, and as we note that that's the case, it's also important that we see it as a chapter that sets before us where the Christian must live.

What kind of conditions the Christian faces in their Christian life? Into what kind of setting has God placed us? As we read the things that are mentioned in this chapter, we can say that many, if not all of them, have been repeated throughout history, and in fact are found in our own generation.

The same kind of sinful, boastful arrogance, the same kind of lascivious behavior, the same kind of sexual deviancy, the same kind of things that you find mentioned there.

They're all there in our society. And that's where God has placed us. That's where the Christian must live. And that seems to be why you find here in the chapter a passage like this, which mentions these two men, Noah and Lot.

There's the chapter full of all of these things that describe the condition and the lifestyle of the ungodly. And there are these two men mentioned here in the middle of the chapter as men that lived contrary to what they saw around them.

[3 : 47] Men that lived an opposing way of life. Maybe it's a bit difficult for us to understand why Lot is mentioned along with Noah as a righteous man.

It's not that long ago we looked at the life of Abraham in the Old Testament, in Genesis, and we noticed that Lot was far from being always a man who was true to God or true to the principles that he ought to have followed in his life.

He chose to live near Sodom when Abraham gave him the choice. He went by what he saw naturally. He went by what was going to be of advantage to him in this world. And he ended the account that you have of him, of course, in Genesis, ends by telling us of a debauched episode in his life as he had left Sodom and moved on in his life.

And yet, here we are, we're told that he was a righteous man. And as we'll see, not only was he a righteous man, but he was vexed, he was tormented by the lawlessness, by the sinful lifestyle of

those people of Sodom among whom he lived.

And it tells us that we need to be careful that we don't just take one part of what the Bible says about anyone or make assumptions about things that we find in the Bible.

[5 : 09] If you went to the Old Testaments, we said about Lot, you probably would leave that account in the Old Testament about Lot as if he had really compromised himself all of his life.

There are many good people of God who have had episodes of failure, but nevertheless in the main have remained true to God.

It seems that there was much like that in the life of Lot. Yes, he had these terrible episodes of failure, of sinfulness. And yet, here we read that he was a righteous man who actually was deeply, deeply sorrowful over the sinful lifestyles of those among whom he lived.

So here we are, we've got two things to look at from what you find in the chapter and the setting in which these two men are described. Living in a sinful world, firstly, how it's a constant test to the Christian.

Secondly, living in a sinful world, how it must be a contrasting lifestyle for the Christian. A constant test and a contrasting lifestyle.

[6 : 23] Let's look at it in more detail. Living in a sinful world, a constant test. As you read these words, you find Noah described a herald of righteousness and Lot described as a man who was righteous.

And Noah and Lot are individuals in that massive ungodliness of their day. Lot in Sodom, Noah in that corrupt world that God had looked down on and determined to destroy with a flood because of its gross wickedness.

And you can see the way the chapter deliberately, it seems, tells us that these people were in the minority. There were only eight people in the ark. Noah and seven others.

They're the only ones who were saved. There weren't many that were delivered out of Sodom. Even Lot's wife didn't make it to safety.

And you remember Abraham praying over Sodom and praying for the inhabitants of Sodom and conscious that Lot, his relative, his nephew and his family were there.

[7 : 33] And he brought it before God in prayer. And you remember how he dealt with it before God and how he went through reducing the number of the righteous. Lord, if there be twenty or fifty, wherever he began.

And you brought it all the way down until he finally had, in his last petition, Lord, if there be ten righteous, will you destroy it? No, said the Lord, I will not destroy it if I find ten.

There weren't ten in Sodom that were righteous. They were a minority. They were a very small minority compared to those that were around them.

And that's why it's a constant test for the Christian living in a sinful world because it's a test by our being a minority. By our being small in number compared to those who are around, compared to the lifestyle that you see around you.

That itself makes it a difficulty. Because the fewer you find of the faithful, people who are faithful to God, the greater the difficulty.

[8 : 43] The smaller the number of those who are faithful, the bigger the difficulty, the bigger the challenge, the bigger the test is. Because the more you're standing on your own, or almost on your own, the more the pressure gets to you.

The more of a burden you carry. The more difficult it is, rather than be accompanied by a great number of people. And that's true for the Christian in all the different settings in which you find them. It's true in some homes. It's difficult to be a Christian, even in your own home, if everybody else in the home is against you, or contrary to you, or doesn't actually accept your lifestyle.

It's the same when you come to school. For our young folks here, when they come to school, they're not going to be in the majority. They're not going to actually have the greater numbers as Christians with them, compared to the others that are there.

They're going to be in the minority. It's difficult to be a Christian on your own, if there are no other Christians in your class, or in your room, or sometimes even in your whole school.

[9 : 52] They're in the minority. It's a huge test. It's a test when you go to university. You'll meet many, many, many people there of different beliefs, and of a whole lot of hostile beliefs, hostile to the Christian faith.

It's very difficult in a minority. Even if you have others that do believe with you, still it's a great test, because you're in the minority. And there are some people who are in a minority, even in congregations, because not every congregation has a majority of converted, believing people. And there are some Christians struggling, and finding it really hard going, because what they believe is not shared with those who come to church with them.

That's where God has set us, living in a sinful world. We are in a constant test. And we're in a constant test because we are a minority of people who believe.

Now, of course, we have to say that that is more than compensated for by the fact that we know God is on our side. But even when you know that, it doesn't actually make the test any less real, or any less difficult.

[11:11] You still take comfort from the fact that God is on your side, and that as you are true to God, so He will be true to His promise. You carry that with you into school, and into university, and into your workplace, and wherever else it is, you're a minority for Christ.

But it still means that you face that, that you find yourself in a minority, that the difficulty and the test is not going to go away just because God is on your side.

But it's a constant test not just by being a minority, but it's a constant test to, secondly, because of what you believe. Because of what you believe.

Because the majority in Noah's day and in Lot's day did not believe what God was saying. Here we find Noah described as a preacher or a herald of righteousness.

The world around Noah didn't want to know about righteousness. They were living in a corrupt lifestyle that really had no time whatsoever for what Noah was preaching.

[12:15] This tells us that Noah was preaching. And he was preaching not just by his words, we believe. We don't just think of Noah as somebody who went about preaching by just speaking out for God.

He did that, I'm sure, many, many, many times. But Noah had another task to do by which he was also a herald of righteousness. And that task was building a massive ark.

A thing that looked so incredibly odd to the world around him. They just could not figure out what this man was up to.

And many of them probably thought he was a bit of a fruitcake. Building a huge vessel like this miles from the sea on the supposition that there was going to be a great flood that would actually come and bury the earth under it so that those, only those in this ark would be saved.

You can just imagine the comments, the ridicule, the newspaper headlines, the kind of things that you and I would associate with modern technology if Noah had had that in his day.

[13:27] If you bring it forward into our day, just imagine the public debates. Just imagine the way that his view of life and his view of the future and his idea or his opinion of what was going to happen just because someone called God put this into his mind.

They would have thought, yeah, well, just leave him the way he is. He believes that it's God that's speaking to him. But don't bother listening to him.

It's just not going to happen. It's a constant test because of what you believe. You believe the word of God.

You believe what God has said. You believe that God's word as it affects your lifestyle and how we should live this side of death.

You believe that this Bible tells you about that, that God has specified it, that it's in keeping with his own will, with his own mind, with his own standard. But those people around in the world don't believe that.

[14:32] They're constantly putting you to the test because of what you believe. Because it's so contrary to what they believe. Because it's so different, so radically different to what they believe.

And, of course, it's that way that we're made to feel somewhat odd. Just remember, you have to take the fact that you're in a minority with you.

And a pupil in a class, if they're the only Christian there, it's not just that they're in a minority, but what they believe against what the majority believe is used in a way that makes them feel awkward and feel odd and feel out of it.

The pressure is always there. Even if they come back to a very good home, still they've got a number of hours to spend in that environment.

It's a constant test because of what we believe. But then it's added to, you see, by those that Peter was writing to here. They were conscious of these false teachers, what the false teachers had done, the damage that they were causing, what they themselves actually were as human beings, having once actually shared with these Christians the things that they shared in the church.
[15 : 54] You can see verse 13, what it says there about these people. Verse 13, where you've got the final part of it there, these are blots and blemishes reveling in their deceptions while they feast with you.

And verse 20, you find the same sort of idea there, if they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first, for it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

What is Peter saying there? What is this saying to us about us being a minority in a hostile environment in a sinful world? It's saying pretty much this to us, that not all who say they are Christians are so.

Not everyone who says they are Christians believes the Bible to be the word of God. Not everyone who says they are a Christian believes that a homosexual lifestyle is wrong.

Not everyone who believes who says they are a Christian believes that the first three chapters of Genesis are literal history. That's the kind of thing that compounds the difficulty, that makes it more difficult, that makes it a more severe test.

[17 : 20] Because you come across people like that, that as Peter says here, had come to profess at one time that they were Christians but did not actually live in accordance with what the Bible contains, with what the word of God insisted upon.

They were living a contradiction. That's making it more of a test for those who want to be true to God. Living as a minority and because of what we believe.

You find all of that in this brief reference to Noah and to Lot. There they were, a minority in these hostile conditions.

There they were, believing in God's word against all the opinions around them that just threw out any such ideas.

They had to remain faithful to God where God had placed them. That's where we're at. That's one of the benefits of this kind of passage.

[18 : 29] You don't just go through the chapter and pull out all of these solemn things that it's saying about the ungodly and their judgment and their eternal doom. All of that is hugely important.

But it says to us, you're living among such people. That's where God has put you as a witness to Him. And the fact that you're a minority and that you believe so differently to the world means that you're constantly being tested.

But secondly, living in a sinful world means a contrasting lifestyle. Firstly, we have to be different to the sinful world.

Many people tell us that if the Bible were just the Sermon and the Mount, that's true Christianity, many people will say to you.

And if it didn't have all that Old Testament stuff and the way that Paul just developed the teaching of Jesus in his own way and added so much to it that's not acceptable in a modern context.

[19 : 34] If it was just the Sermon on the Mount, then we could live as Christians. That's what a Christian life is about. Yes, that's what a Christian life is about. But what is the Sermon on the Mount?

It's Christ's great treatise or sermon in regard to His people living a contrasting lifestyle to the world around them. That's what the Sermon on the Mount is.

How often you count these verses that Jesus says to the disciples, it shall not be so with you. This is what these people do, but it shall not be so with you.

You have different standards. You have my standards, He's saying to them. You have God's standards. And we must be different, He says, in that Sermon on the Mount to the world.

We have to counteract the world's opinions and the world's lifestyles and the world's priorities with those of God, with the things that God has given us.

[20 : 35] You see, that's why we, as we looked at this letter at the beginning, chapter 1 there, verse 3, His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the

knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence.

That sets you apart. That gives you an opening into the purpose for which God has come into our lives and taken hold of our lives and done something in our lives by which we have become partakers, He says there, of the divine nature.

That, in other words, He's making us like Himself. And you will not be like Himself except as you are unlike the world out of which He's taken you and into which He's put you as a contrasting lifestyle. Now that doesn't mean, of course, that we just withdraw from the world. That doesn't mean that we just have no business or no contact with the world at all for fear of contaminating ourselves or fear of just getting sucked into it.

There are all of these fears and there are all of these dangers and we mustn't withdraw from the world. You have to be involved in the world. It's the lifestyle of somebody who's involved in people's lives and working conditions and politics.

[21 : 55] Whatever it is, Christians have to show their face and live their life. That's where we have to be, in the world but not of it. As Jonathan said in prayer to the Lord to help us to be in the world but not of it.

But it does mean, well, it doesn't mean standing back from the world and not having any contact with it. It does mean standing out in the world. Standing out as different to it.

Because that's what you read here about these two men actually. You can see how they themselves were so different, so opposed and so opposite to that world.

Noah, a herald of righteousness. Lot, a righteous man, lived among these people day and day, day and day out.

He was tormenting his righteous soul. You see, righteousness and righteous three times mentioned about these two individuals. And that is a word that really packs in everything that is opposite to the world in which they lived.

[23 : 04] An unrighteous world, a sinful world, a world filled with debauchery, with sinful things, with pride, with arrogance, with violence, with all the things that God himself looks upon with displeasure.

And it's in that that they lived a righteous life. The one thing we must never do is let the world set the agenda for our lives.

For what we must be, for what we must be, for how we must think, for what we must be doing. If we let the world dictate and set the agenda of our lives, then we're going to lose our distinctness.

We're not going to have the impact that God himself has designed us for by making us a new creation. And that's what John says, isn't it, in his first epistle where he said something very similar to this one, John 2, verses 15 to 17, do not love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and pride and possessions is not from the Father but from the world.

[24 : 23] The A.B. has it stronger than that and the word lust is really a good word that's used to describe the word that's used here in Greek. For all that is in the world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

That's what the world's essence is. That's what the world is in its nature. It's all about lust and it's all about pride and selfishness. And God has placed us in that world to be opposite to it.

To live not unrighteously but righteously. To live not proudly but humbly. To live in a way that's not lustful but desires the good things, the better things, the beautiful things, the things that are Christ-like.

We have to be different to the world. Living in a sinful world, a contrasting lifestyle means being different to the world at the very essence of it. And secondly, it means we must be distressed. about that sinful world. Very interesting here how Lot is described. As we said earlier, it wouldn't be easy just from what you read in the Old Testament to come to this conclusion about him, but this is every bit as much the word of God as the Old Testament is.

[25 : 39] And what's it telling us? It says that he was greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked. For that righteous man lived among them day after day.

He was tormenting tormenting his righteous soul over their lawful deeds that he saw and heard. You could translate that. It literally means he was just being worn out and he was tormented inside himself by the sinful lifestyle of Sodom.

Now you might say, well, he should have known better when he went there. Yes, he should. You might say he didn't make a very good choice when he chose Sodom. No, he didn't. And you might say that there were many other things in his life where compromise was true of him. Yes, there was. But this tells us something very precious.

That when he heard the language of Sodom and was living with that every day, when he saw the lifestyle of Sodom and saw that every day, when he had to walk and live amongst these people as he did every day, he was grieved in his heart.

[26 : 53] And it's very interesting, isn't it, that God is spoken of in that chapter we read in Genesis as he looked down on the world of Noah's day, on the man that he had made, on the human beings that he had made.

He said that, it's difficult to translate it, it was sorry that he made them, it repented him. The old test, the old AV says that I have made them on the earth.

But it says, it grieved him at his heart. And it's very interesting that it's Lot who said to be grieved with the lifestyle of the wicked.

Really an image or a pattern of God. As God looked down on the wickedness of the world of Noah's day, so Lot, as he looked out on the wickedness of Sodom, was like God grieved in his heart over it. It wasn't that he was grieved that he had made such a choice, I'm sure that came into it. It wasn't that he was hurt, that he was really tormented over the fact that he had brought such things on himself.

[27 : 54] What he was tormented over, what he was tormenting his soul with, what he was deeply distressed inside himself was, was for the lifestyle these people were living. He was deeply, deeply moved by what he saw.

He couldn't look out on Sodom without crying. Are you and I like that? Or are we just so used to it? The psalmist was like that.

We read and sang his words in Psalm 119. Tears streaming down his face, he said. Waters running from my eyes.

When I see her, men do not keep your laws. When was the last time I did that?

When was the last time I saw sin in the practice of the ungodly and wept because it was so ugly, so ungodlike, so destructive of human beings made in the image of God.

[29 : 10] Well here you see is Lot tormenting his righteous soul over these lawless deeds that he saw and heard. we have to pray that God will give us back something of this inner soul of Lot, something of the psalmist's emotional state when he looked at the sinful lifestyles of his day, that God will give something back to ourselves or an increase to ourselves of that spirit, of that reaction, of that response.

Because you see, one thing it will do is it will add zeal to our prayers. It will help us to pray with more earnestness for conversions, for the lifestyles that we see in the world to be changed by the grace of God.

It grieved this righteous man and that leaves us with the question tonight, how much am I grieved over the sinful lifestyle of our society?

how often do I cry when I see on my television people and even in surrounding people in our land when I see things and hear things that are so ungodly that God himself finds offensive.

So that's the second thing. A contrasting lifestyle must be different to the sinful world, but a contrasting lifestyle must also be distressed about that sinful world.

[30 : 50] Thirdly, a contrasting lifestyle must deliver the truth to that sinful world. That's what Noah has described as, isn't it, a herald of righteousness.

And although it doesn't say exactly the same of Lot, we take it from the words there and from what is described as, that he also would himself have spoken to those that were around him of the standards of God, the judgment of God.

And that's what you and I have to do as well. Noah preached by his words, but he also preached by his actions. You imagine this man building this gigantic vessel, this wooden ark as God had commanded him and God had given him the plans and the specifications.

We mentioned already the very likely ridicule and opinions that would be thrown at him for what he was doing. But every single hammer blow with which Noah was building his ark, every single blow of the hammer was a reminder that there was a coming judgment.

What he was doing in the world was actually saying something clearly to these people. They didn't believe it. They didn't accept it. That's not the point. Noah still went on doing it.

[32 : 17] He still went on hammering in the nails of the ark. He went on finishing it. He covered it with pitch. He made a roof for it. It was all according to God's specifications.

conditions. And then the time came when God said, go into it. Shut the door. Because in seven days I'm going to make it rain.

For forty days and forty nights. And then you read in Genesis of the upheaval that took place. Not just the rain, but the fountains of the great deep were opened, whatever that means.

Massive amount of water came gushing out of the seas. And everything was destroyed except the contents of the ark. Those that didn't believe what he said came to believe when it was too late.

But Noah's conscience was clear. He had done his duty. And you and I must bring that truth to this sinful world. We must live ourselves in such a way that makes it clear we believe in a coming judgment.

[33 : 32] We must live in such a way that really says to these people around us, this is real for me and I want it to be real for you. That God is real.

That God's righteousness is real. That God's judgment is real. And that just as it was coming in the days of Noah, so it is coming as far as our day is concerned.

You see, that's what the third chapter here is saying, isn't it? The second letter that I'm writing to you, in both I'm stirring up your sincere mind, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment, knowing this first of all that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

They will say, where is the promise of his coming? That's what they were saying in the days of Noah. Where is the promise of his coming? Flood? What flood? What are you talking about?

Science has discovered floods are not possible in this part of the world we're living in, and anyway, we're so high up, even if a flood comes, it won't catch us.

All sorts of arguments against what Noah was actually saying to them, of the truth of God, just as you're facing, all kinds of arguments. When you present the truth of God, but you must go on presenting it, you must go on in a way that lives it out, you must never deflect from it, be deflected from it, you must never deviate from it, you must go on believing what God has given you to believe, living what God has given you to live, so that you are preaching righteousness by words and by lifestyle to a world that doesn't want it, but it's your privilege and mine to live in a sinful world in a contrasting lifestyle, but as you emphasize the reality of judgment, of course, against that, and in a sense even above that, you emphasize mercy, the compassion of God, the forgiveness that is with God, the love behind the sending of his Son Jesus

[35 : 42] Christ into the world, the hope that is in Christ for a sinful world, to turn from its sin to this Jesus, yes, we have to emphasize that, we have to live not just in a way that shows that judgment is real, that we believe it, that we are preparing against it, but also that we have the answer, that we have the remedy, that we have God's provision, that we love this Christ, that we love what God has done for us in salvation, and that it shows in our life that we love this, and that he is by far the most important person and thing in our lives.

I don't know where it was, I can't remember, but somewhere in a university classroom or lecture theatre, somebody had written on the board out of the front, Jesus is the answer.

Somebody else had come in and written underneath that, but what is the question? You see, it's no use of saying, Jesus is the answer. We've also got to take people to the real question, to which he's the answer.

What's the question? Well, you could say there are many ways in which you could answer that, what's the question? But one of them is surely this. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

The answer to that is Jesus. And that's the Jesus who saved us. And that's the Jesus that we must live out as we live in a contrasting, hostile, sinful world.

[37 : 43] Let's pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the direction that your word of truth gives us.

Give thanks for the way in which your Holy Spirit has been placed in the hearts of your people. And Lord, we give thanks for the way in which you guide your people into the ways of your truth.

Forgive us, we pray too when we are unfaithful and untrue to you. When we fall from the standard that you set us. When we know in our own lives privately that we have failed in the things that we

ought to have done, that we have left undone, and also failed in the things we have done that we should never have done at all.

Lord, we pray that as you bestow forgiveness, so we ask for your pardon. And we pray that you would help us to live in a way that is faithful to you.

And help us to realize for all the testing that we have in this world, and for all the way in which we are required to live a contrasting lifestyle. Lord, we ask that you would help us count it a privilege to be your people, to be your witnesses, to be lights in this world, to light up the darkness by what you have given us, by the grace you have planted in our hearts.

[39 : 05] For before us now we pray, hear our prayers, and forgive our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.