

Flagrant Misconduct

2 Peter 2:10-16

It is interesting how different sports handle flagrant misconduct. One of the reasons that I have always preferred the game of baseball is because baseball has no penalty for misconduct, only expulsion. That is, if you make a mistake in baseball, like dropping a fly ball, they call it an error. But if you do something mean or unsportsmanlike, or if you actually break the rules, you are thrown out of the game. There is no intermediate step, not even the yellow card like what is given in soccer matches, as a warning that the next offense will bring a red card, meaning that you are expelled from the game.

In other sports, you might get a minor penalty for flagrant misconduct. In hockey, they even call it that. A minor penalty. You have to go to the penalty box for two minutes. And often, a player commits an offense intentionally, in order to benefit his team, and sitting out for the two minute minor penalty is well worth taking the penalty.

In football, you just have to move the ball back 5 yards or sometimes 15 when you commit a foul, often an acceptable risk to take. Sometimes it's even done intentionally.

Or think about basketball. If you want to stop a player from scoring, you foul him. You physically prevent him from shooting the ball into the basket. In the NBA, you can do that six times before you have to leave the game. And then the other players has to make two foul shots in order to get the score. Often, he misses one or both of the foul shots, and the foul pays off.

Think about that. Committing a foul actually pays off.

Using this illustration, many people approach life as a hockey game or basketball game, and not a baseball game. That is, they see the penalty of their flagrant misconduct to be a minor punishment. Perhaps a two minute penalty. Temporary. Maybe even worth paying the price.

But in God's rulebook, flagrant misconduct, called sin, earns the punishment given in baseball. You are kicked out of the game. In theological terminology, that's called condemnation. As we studied last time in 2 Peter, God sent the angels to hell when they sinned, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment. He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. He holds the unrighteous for the day of judgment while continuing their punishment.

With that in mind, today we'll study the actual description of those given to wickedness and sinfulness. One commentator calls this indictment "the most violent and colorfully expressed tirade in the New Testament."

And so our focus this morning will be the sinfulness of the wicked, sinfulness that earns for themselves God's eternal judgment and condemnation. And it is not a pretty picture. We'll begin with,

I. THE ATTITUDE OF THE WICKED.

We'll begin with a description of their hearts. And the first characteristic comes from verse 10.

A. They despise authority.

Jude describes the same attitude.

Jude 8 "Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries."

So it is at the heart of wickedness to hate authority. It is at the very essence of sin to chafe when someone else has the right to exercise authority over you. We rebel when confronted with the reality of someone rightfully telling us what to do or not to do.

This was the first sin of Adam and Eve. It is a sin that continues to this day. It is a primary characteristic of the wicked. They despise authority.

And each one of us needs to be on guard as well, for I suspect that in some form or another, this sin lurks in each one of our hearts. We don't like living under authority. We don't like submitting to proper authorities. And we find excuses to resist. And sometimes, those excuses are just that. Empty, invalid excuses that mask the true nature of the heart.

Submission to authority is an attitude, and not merely outward obedience. It is actually possible to obey with an un-submissive heart. It is actually possible to think that you are being submissive, when in fact you are being hesitant, reluctant, manipulative, dominating, rebellious or stubborn. The question must be, where is your heart? Where is your spirit? True, genuine submission requires a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

The wicked despise authority. And,

B. They are presumptuous and self-willed.
Presumptuous and self-willed, from verse 10.

The word for presumptuous means daring, brazen, reckless, one who is shameless and headstrong. It relates to the familiar saying, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

You know people like that, don't you? And we tend to excuse such behavior. "He's just impulsive." "He has a compulsive personality, he is diagnosed with OCD." As if that makes it OK to do foolish things.

These men show themselves to be bold and conceited in their pursuits of self-gratification and physical pleasures. The real idea is that of shameless recklessness. It is related to the idea of being arrogant. Again, the word is "self-willed." Or self-pleasing. It is the attitude of, "I will do what is best for me." It is a word that implies an obstinate self-interest at the cost of harming or neglecting others.

Arrogance is a horrible thing. The wicked are recklessly bold and selfishly arrogant.

C. They are also ignorant.
v.12

They speak regarding things of which they have no knowledge. And they are described as brute beasts, a description which more literally means unreasoning animals. They are without reason. Without rational logic. They have physical, but not intellectual life. They are, therefore, no better than the brute beasts, those who are born and live only to be caught and destroyed.

To go deeper into their motivation, we can see that,

D. They are motivated by greed.
v.14

"They are experts in greed." A heart trained in covetous. We've seen that before.

v.2-3

Covetousness, or greed, is, of course, inherently selfish. And idolatrous, for when we act in greed we worship another god, a false god. We read from the Apostle Paul,

Col. 3:5 “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Peter says that the wicked have “a heart well-trained in greed.” They are “experts.” The word for training is the root of our word gymnasium. To use the language of today, the wicked work out in the development of their greed, like a man lifting weights at the local gym.

And,

E. They delight themselves in their sin.

Verse 13 speaks of pleasure. “Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight.” “Reveling in their pleasures.” “Carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you.”

They take great pleasure in it, great physical and sensual gratification in their wickedness! They revel in it. They enjoy it to the full.

They take pleasure in that which should bring them shame! Paul writes of similar folks,

Phil. 3:18 “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.”

That’s the heart of the wicked. The attitude. The motivation.

And how does that reveal itself? We see in these verses,

II. THE DEGENERACY OF THE WICKED.

Degeneracy refers to someone who has become lower in quality or character, one who has sunk or declined into a condition of deterioration. Usually the reference is to the moral quality of life. Look how Peter describes that degeneracy of the wicked. Let’s go back to the idea that,

A. They are like brute beasts.

Look again at verse 12, and notice how the brute beasts are defined.

v.12

A brute beast is an animal controlled by instinct. A brute beast doesn’t consider the moral implications of his choices. He lacks the moral reasoning to determine whether an action is right or wrong. He simply relies on created instinct for meeting the necessities of daily existence. And in that existence, animals do very much run the risk of being caught and destroyed by man or beast.

The ability and responsibility to make moral decisions is what separates us as humans from the brute beasts. It is the primary aspect of what it means to be created in the image of God. We are not brute beasts. We are created with a will, and the ability to make choices. Moral choices for which we are held responsible.

But the wicked act as if they are merely animals. In the description of,

v.10a

The wicked simply live according to the corrupt desire of their sinful nature. They live according to their own physical desires,

and therefore lower themselves to the level of an animal.

In the words of,

Jude 10 “But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.”

It’s useless to teach brute beasts to have self-control. It’s useless to teach them that they ought to abstain from the physical desires of their flesh. It’s useless. They are animals. They will do what animals do. If you put a male dog and a female dog together, they will procreate. They are brute beasts.

Sadly, the acceptance and approval which we give to sexual promiscuity of our day actually reduces us to the level of those dogs! The assumption that self-control and abstinence outside of marriage is not possible means that we are dogs in heat, living according to natural instinct.

The wicked who live for their own physical pleasures will live just like those dogs, or any other brute beast. And we often excuse such behavior, don’t we? Our culture belittles the whole idea of abstinence for young people, claiming it doesn’t work. The underlying assumption is that you just can’t tell a person, especially a young person, things that he ought not to do.

But we must disagree!! There is a huge difference between a child created in the image of God and a dog you purchase as a family pet. Sadly, the wicked diminish that distinction. And they call it freedom! Freedom to become enslaved to their own instincts, unable to exercise even the most basic form of self-control.

We’ll see more of that next week in,

2 Peter 2:19 “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”

Can you imagine such foolishness?

The degeneracy of the wicked is shown by the loss of that self-control. And as a contrast, the demonstration of godliness is the exercise of self-control.

What else do we read about the degeneracy of the wicked?

B. They enjoy public carousing with no restraints.

v.13 “[They] count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime.”

“Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight.” Can you imagine such impudence? Such disregard for common decency?

Even the wicked normally have their code of conduct, their own sense of morality, what is right and what is wrong. In the Roman society, public carousing was to be done at night! Under the cover of darkness. Even for those engaging in that sinful and immoral revelry, there was a sense of shame in carrying on in broad daylight. But not the wicked that Peter describes. “[They] count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime.”

No restraints upon shameful behavior, and just to speak those words is to make you aware of how they apply to our own day as well. There are no restraints on shameful behavior today. Immoral behavior is carried on in broad daylight, for all to see!

Paul appeals to us to avoid such degeneracy.

Romans 13:13 “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

And,

1Ths. 5:4 “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

The wicked have no such self-control, enjoying public carousing without restraint, and in the words of verse 14,

C. They never stop sinning.

Their eyes are full of adultery. Never enough. Never satisfied. Always another experience to pursue. They never stop sinning. They never cease. Never take a break.

It amazes me that we have extended the sense of addiction and addicts to any and all issues of compulsive behavior. The idea of addiction began with reference to alcohol and drugs, where at least there are some medical and physical addiction caused by sinful abuse. Though, at heart, even that is a moral issue of choice and responsibility. But we now call anyone an addict who is given to uncontrolled behavior as if they were a drunkard addicted to alcohol or a drug addict enslaved to narcotics. Addiction may be a useful description of the effects of sin, but it is not an excuse that removes human responsibility.

The Bible describes the wicked this way. They “walk

according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed...”[They are] natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption...[They] cannot cease from sin.”

And we see something very common here. Wickedness doesn't like to be alone. The wicked don't like to be alone in their wickedness. So,

D. They seduce others.

Particularly, they seduce the vulnerable. The unstable.
v.14

They trap. They set bait. They ensnare. Whatever it takes. And they go after the unstable, those without a firm foundation in the faith and in their own discipline. They wicked go after those who are most vulnerable and most liable to go along with the scandalous living.

And that just makes them all the more guilty! And what will happen to them? What will come of them?

v.14

They are accursed children. They will be condemned. Judged. By God Almighty. And as an encouragement to us, as a warning to stay away from the wicked, we read about,

III. THE JUDGMENT UPON THE WICKED.

A. Those who forsake God will face his judgment.

And as an example of the judgment, we read about the example of Balaam.

v.15-16

In Numbers 22 through 24, we read of Balaam wanting to curse the Israelites but through the Spirit of the Lord, he was forced to bless them. Balaam was driven by greed, a love for material rewards, not by a love for God and his people. He loved the wages of wickedness. He was ready to accept a bribe to curse Israel. He was rebuke by his own donkey, a beast of burden, a beast without speech.

Num. 22:21 "So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road."

Num. 22:24 Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. 25 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. 26 Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. 27 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff. 28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

Num. 22:29 And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!" 30 So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your

donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No."

Num. 22:31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. 32 And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. 33 "The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

Balaam illustrates God's rebuke. And God's judgment. For Balaam's folly brought about his own death at the hands of Moses' soldiers, recorded in Numbers 31.

Those who forsake God will face his judgment. And in that judgment,

B. Those who forsake God will bring about their own destruction.

They will destroy themselves.

Actually, such self-destruction is a form of God's judgment, one of the means God uses to inflict his judgment. Simply put, wickedness will destroy your life!

Peter certainly believes that.

v.12

Brute beasts really have nothing to look forward to in life, except death. Animals who live merely according to instinct shall

eventually perish, for some other animal will come along whose instinct is to kill. Such are the expectations of the wicked. “Like beasts they too will perish.”

Indeed, the ways of the wicked ensure that they,
v.13 “...will receive the wages of unrighteousness.”

There is no future in wickedness. There is no hope for those given to unceasing sin. And that will become our subject for next Sunday, beginning with,

2Pet. 2:17 “These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”

So how does all of that apply to us today? Simply put, we are to put away all such wickedness in our own lives. The wicked are described in the words of verse 13 as “spots and blemishes,” a description that is the direct opposite of Peter’s description of the believers, found in,

2Pet. 3:14 “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”

That’s the application. “Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless.”

And in that sense, to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, who is described in 1 Peter 1:19 as “a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Life is not a hockey game, where a minor penalty puts you in the penalty box for only two minutes. Life is not a basketball game, where you can foul with impunity up to six times a game.

Life is much more serious than that. Sin is much more serious than that.

Therefore, in Peter’s own words found in,

2Pet. 3:11 “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”).