

2 Peter 2:10b–13a

Introduction

At the beginning of 2 Peter chapter two (vv. 1-3), Peter tells us that even as false prophets arose among the Old Testament people of Israel, so there will also be false teachers in the church. These false teachers will reject authority (“even denying the *Master* who bought them”), they will promote sensuality (“many will follow their sensuality”), and they will be motivated by greed (“in their greed they will exploit you with false words). But in doing all these things the false teachers are only bringing down upon themselves swift destruction; as Peter says: “Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” The destruction of the false teachers and their followers is all of one piece with the judgment of the angels that sinned in the days of Noah (v. 4), the judgment of the ungodly world by the flood (v. 5), and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire (vv. 6-8). In fact, God Himself has appointed these judgments as foreshadowings “already” of the final judgment still to come. Even as God preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, and rescued righteous Lot, so still today He “knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under the sentence of punishment until the day of judgment, **and especially those who go after the flesh in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority**” (9-10). Does this sound familiar? Notice how Peter ends this section with two of the same themes that he started with: The false teachers are those who promote sensuality (in verse two, “many will follow their *sensuality*”; in verse ten, they go after the flesh in the lust of defiling passion), and the false teachers are those who reject *authority* (in verse one, they deny the Master who bought them; in verse ten, they despise authority).

Well, now in the next section we could truly say that Peter really “goes off.” If we thought he was in attack mode before, that was nothing compared with what we have in the rest of this chapter. If the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment – **especially** those who go after the flesh in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority – then these false teachers and their followers are doomed, because that’s the *perfect* description of them. These false teachers are the very *embodiment* of exactly the kind of people that God is even now keeping under the sentence of punishment until the day of judgment. And so they’re the perfect model to us of what we *don’t* want to be – of what we want to at all costs stay as far away from as possible. This morning Peter focuses first on how the false teachers are those who despise authority. He says in the second half of verse ten:

I. 2 Peter 2:10b — Presumptuous and self-willed, they do not tremble as they **blaspheme** the glorious ones...

There are a *lot* of questions that we have here, and people disagree on the answers. But the main point and the main lesson for us is not lost no matter what answer we give. The first thing we need to understand is the meaning of the word “blaspheme” (Greek: *blasphemeo/blasphemos*). We often think of blasphemy as something that can only be perpetrated against God (like cursing God or claiming to *be* God). There’s a sense in which that’s true; but in the Bible, human beings can also be blasphemed. To blaspheme can mean to mock or deride someone.

- Matthew 27:39–41, 44 (cf. Lk. 23:39) — And those who passed by **derided** him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, *mocked* him... And the robbers who were crucified with him also *reviled* him...
- Acts 13:45 (cf. 18:6) — But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, **reviling** him.

To blaspheme can also have the idea of falsely accusing or slandering someone.

- Matthew 15:19–20 — Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, **slander**.”
- Romans 3:8 — Why not do evil that good may come?—as some people **slanderosly** charge us with saying.

To blaspheme can also have the idea of unjustly judging and condemning someone.

- 1 Corinthians 10:30 — If I partake with thankfulness, why am I **denounced** because of that for which I give thanks?

Blasphemy really just stands for *any kind* of belittling treatment **that’s out of place because it’s crossed a certain boundary**. And what’s the boundary that’s been crossed? Well, usually the treatment is undeserved, but that might not always be the case as we’re about to see this morning. The real boundary that’s crossed every time in every sin of blasphemy is claiming for myself an *authority* that I don’t actually possess. So we read in Mark chapter two:

- Mark 2:5–7 — [Jesus] said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

In the scribes’ opinion, Jesus was belittling God and His authority to forgive by wrongfully claiming that authority for Himself – and *that* would have been blasphemy. We could say that in blaspheming I’m *pretending* to have a certain *authority* which I then use to belittle, or denounce, or slander those around me. Or we could say that in belittling or denouncing or slandering others I’m claiming for myself a *kind* of authority that belongs ultimately and by rights to God alone. So now we can see why even the blaspheming of men is ultimately blasphemy against God. All blasphemy involves arrogantly crossing a boundary by which I arrogate to myself an authority I don’t actually have – an authority that *belongs only* to God. That’s going to be really important to remember as we look at our passage this morning. So now we come back again to these words in verse ten:

II. 2 Peter 2:10b — Presumptuous and self-willed, they do not tremble **as they blaspheme the glorious ones**...

Right away, the question we have is who are these “glorious ones” (literally, “glories”) that the false teachers blaspheme? Perhaps the majority of commentators (very good commentators) think they’re evil angels, or demons (cf. Schreiner; Moo; Bauckham; Kistemaker; NIV’s “celestial beings”). So, in some way, the false teachers would have been “belittling” the powers of darkness and acting for all practical purposes as though they were really the ones greater in power and authority. How were the false teachers doing this specifically? Here’s one educated guess:

“Influencing our sinful behavior is the personal power of... Satan and his host. Sins for which we ask and receive God’s forgiveness cannot bring us into spiritual danger, for on the cross, Christ ‘disarmed the powers and authorities’ (Col. 2:15). But when we do not seek God’s forgiveness for our sins or pretend that our sin is not really sin, we run the danger of putting ourselves at the mercy of [demonic powers]. This may have been just the error of the false teachers. Bent on their own pleasure, rejecting God’s standards of righteousness, they were, in effect, treating with contempt the evil spiritual beings that stood behind these practices.” (Moo)

This view may be the correct one, but I personally believe that the “glorious ones” that these false teachers are blaspheming are actually the “good” angels (cf. Davids; Green; Bauckham on Jude 8-9). How were they doing this specifically? Once again, we don’t know for sure, but we can make a very educated guess.

The Hebrew word for “angel” means “messenger” and so the angels are God’s messengers who carry out and enforce His will and His purposes on the earth and then report back to Him. Remember Jacob’s dream when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau:

□ Genesis 28:12–13 — [Jacob] dreamed, and behold, there was a staircase set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.”

This is a really vivid picture of God’s sovereignty over the whole world and how He’s exercising His rule through the “mediation” of angels that are constantly going out from Him to do His will and then returning to Him to report and then receive further instructions. We see another example of this in one of Zechariah’s visions:

□ Zechariah 1:8–11 (cf. 6:5-7) — I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, “What are these, my lord?” The angel who talked with me said to me, “I will show you what they are.” So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, “These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.” And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, “We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest [undisturbed in its wickedness].”

We know that God knows all things. He doesn't need the angels to inform Him of what's happening on the earth. But we are meant to understand that God somehow mediates His sovereign and universal rule through his angelic messengers and servants. So the Psalmist writes in Psalm 103:

- Psalm 103:20–21 — Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do [accomplish] his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will [who execute His purposes in heaven and on earth]!

In the New Testament, Jesus says that He Himself is the fulfillment of the staircase in Jacob's dream, and so He Himself is the true mediator between God and man. And yet He still says this to Nathanael:

- John 1:51 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

In light of all this, it shouldn't surprise us that among the Jews in Peter's day, the angels were thought of as the “guardians of the created order” (Bauckham); they were the upholders of the moral government of God's universe. This is what helps us to understand a verse like this, when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 11:10 — That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

The concern of the angels is God's created order which includes the marriage relationship and the complementary roles of husband and wife exercised in authority and submission. That's part of God's created order. So we can imagine angels, sent out from God (descending, as it were, on the Son of Man), observing the Lord's Day meetings of the Christians; and therefore we can also imagine the importance of not “offending” these angels who report to God (ascending on the Son of Man) and who we know are zealous for the upholding of God's moral order in the world and *especially* in the church.

As guardians of God's created order and upholders of the moral government of the world, the angels are also associated in the Bible with God's giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (cf. LXX Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17). Stephen accused the Jews:

- Acts 7:53 — ...you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.

How exactly the angels were involved in the delivering of the law, we don't know, but again, it fits perfectly with who the angels are and the role they were created to fulfill. Stephen mentions the role of the angels in delivering the Law as a way of emphasizing the great glory and the divine authority of the Law, but the writer of Hebrews sees this as only one side of the coin.

- Hebrews 2:2-3 — If the message **declared by angels** proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? *It was **declared** at first **by the Lord**...*

The point this time is that if the Old Covenant declared by angels was authoritative and full of glory, then how much more must the New Covenant be authoritative and full of an even greater glory because it was not declared by angels but directly and immediately by the Lord. As the writer of Hebrews says in another place:

- Hebrews 1:3b-4 — [The Son (Jesus)] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

And then Paul writes:

- Galatians 3:19 — [The Law] was put in place through angels by an intermediary [Moses].

Paul's point is that the Law *as a covenant* (the Old Covenant) *must* have been only temporary and provisional because there's a real sense in which it came *through* angels *by* an intermediary (Moses) rather than directly and immediately from God Himself. So now let's think again of these false teachers. Could they have been belittling the angels by claiming that their role as upholders of God's moral government in the world was now irrelevant because the New Covenant had come, and the Old Covenant—the one delivered by the angels—was now obsolete? Were they suggesting that even the angels themselves were now irrelevant because they were no longer accountable to the Law—which was delivered by angels—and therefore they were free to live their ungodly lives of sensuality (cf. Bauckham)?

The Bible tell us that the angels will also play a major role in the final judgment (Mat. 13:39, 24:31; 25:31; Rev. 7:2; 8:2, 6, 13; 9:15; cf. Green).

- Matthew 16:27 — The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 — ...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
- Matthew 13:49-50 (cf. 13:41-42) — So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The angels' *future* role in the final judgment only helps us to see even more clearly their role in the *present* as guardians of the creation order and upholders of God's moral government in the world. So in light of the false teachers' denial of the final judgment (cf. 1:16; 3:3-4), are they belittling and mocking the authority of the angels and their power to cast the wicked and the ungodly into the fiery furnace? In the end, I think Peter's saying that the false teachers were

blaspheming angels by belittling them as guardians of the creation order and the upholders of God's moral government in the world and therefore essentially claiming for *themselves* an authority over and above that of the angels! As one commentator summarizes: "They will allow no voice, no authority, other than their own. Their insolence is beyond measure" (Green, on Jude 8). That's exactly Peter's point when he says:

III. 2 Peter 2:10b — **Presumptuous and self-willed, they do not tremble** as they blaspheme the glorious ones...

"Presumptuous" could be translated positively as bold or courageous or daring, but that's not Peter's meaning here. The Greek word for "self-willed" is made up of two words that could be translated together, "his pleasure." The point is that these false teachers are speaking and acting according to their own pleasure or their own will – they've set themselves up as their own authority in order to be accountable and answerable to no one but themselves. And so their "courage" is actually a *reckless* courage and their "boldness" is actually a stupid, foolhardy boldness. It's *this* arrogant *crossing of lines* and *transgressing of boundaries* that's the essence of their blasphemy. We know from numerous examples in Scripture that the natural human response to an angelic visit is to tremble with fear and even fall down as one dead (cf. Dan. 10:1-17; Mat. 28:3-5; Lk. 1:11-13, 26-30). But so presumptuous and self-willed are these false teachers that they don't even tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones!

IV. 2 Peter 2:11 — ...whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not bring a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.

Who's "them"? Who are the one's against whom the angels do not bring a blasphemous judgment? If the false teachers are blaspheming evil angels, then we would have to say that Peter is comparing the good angels with the false teachers by pointing out that even *they* do not blaspheme the demons (cf. "such beings," NIV; Jude 9). On the other hand, if we're right in understanding the "glorious ones" to be God's holy angels (cf. Bauckham, Davids, Green on Jude 8; contra Moo, Schreiner), then this is Peter's point: If we want to see just how foolish and just how out of their mind these false teachers are, then just think about the fact that the very angels they blaspheme—though they are in fact the ones far greater in might and power, and therefore the ones far greater in authority—the very angels the false teachers are blaspheming never respond in kind by bringing a *blasphemous* judgment against the false teachers *before the Lord*. And *why* don't they do this? Can you see the answer right there in the question? The answer is: Because any such judgment would be a *blasphemous* judgment! Because even though the angels might be speaking the truth, in doing this the angels would be claiming for themselves an authority that even *they* don't have. It's not for the angels to pronounce their judgments *even* on human beings; therefore if they *were* to do so, these could only be blasphemous judgements. The angels would be crossing lines and transgressing boundaries into territory that belongs only to the Lord. This is what Peter's emphasizing when he says that angels, "though greater in might and power, do not bring a blasphemous judgment against them *before the Lord*." Another possible reading is "from the Lord" (NIV; NRSV; NLT) – "[they] do not bring a blasphemous judgment against them from the Lord." But in either case, the point is that the authority or the right to speak against someone in judgment belongs only to the Lord, and therefore if the angels were to speak against these false teachers in judgment, even *they* would then be guilty of

blasphemy – *even though* they’re guardians of the created order and upholders of God’s moral government of the universe!

In this light, then, can you be utterly shocked and appalled by these words?—“Presumptuous and self-willed, [the false teachers] do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones”! Can you see how outrageously insane this is – how irrational and senseless and foolhardy? Can you completely understand, now, why Peter goes on to say what he says in verse twelve?

V. 2 Peter 2:12-13a — But these [these false teachers], like irrational creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage of their wrongdoing.

Those are strong words; but would any of us say that they’re at all out of place? Is Peter at all overstating or exaggerating his case? Anyone so presumptuous and self-willed as to speak against even the angels in judgment (without even any trembling!) must truly have no more sense than irrational animals or brute beasts. The point here is that animals have no “reason” – no capacity for thinking. They’re just creatures of “instinct,” born to be caught and destroyed. Peter’s thinking of animals that are hunted for food. All these “prey” animals are born into the world as a potential meal for the predator or the hunter – precisely because they’re only irrational, brute creatures of instinct. So now you can see where Peter’s going with this, can’t you? The false teachers are really *no different* from these animals in their utter stupidity and ignorance, and so they, too, will ultimately be caught and destroyed – *just like* the brute beasts of prey. Those are strong words; but would any of us say that Peter’s overstating his case? Of course, the irony here is that it’s the angels that these false teachers are speaking against in judgment who will, on the final day of judgment, be sent out to “capture” the false teachers and throw them into the fiery furnace (cf. Mat. 13:41-42).

Can you see how this entire passage is dripping with an absurd and a terrible irony? The false teachers are blaspheming the glorious ones—the guardians of the created order and the upholders of God’s moral government of the universe—thinking themselves to be above the angels and accountable in the end to no authority but their own. The angels themselves, however, know that to speak against these false teachers in judgment is a prerogative that belongs only to the Lord. The angels themselves, therefore, *do not dare* to blaspheme the false teachers. Therefore, it’s obvious that the false teachers *really are* like irrational, brute beasts of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed—ironically—*by the very angels that they blaspheme*. Peter says, “blaspheming about matters of which they are *ignorant*” – not innocently ignorant, not pitifully ignorant, but willfully and stupidly ignorant. And so Peter concludes this morning by saying that when these false teachers are finally caught and cast into the lake of fire, they’ll be suffering wrong *as the wages* for their wrongdoing. We could also translate, “being treated unrighteously as the wages of their unrighteousness.” Peter uses the same word here not to imply that God will do “wrong” to these false teachers or be unrighteous in His judgment, but only to emphasize that the punishment will perfectly fit the crime. In being cast into the lack of fire, the false teachers will only be getting exactly what they deserve.

Conclusion

What's the lesson in all of this for us? How is it that these verses teach us wisdom? In the first place they ought to teach us the fear of the Lord, and we know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When you read these verses, and all of these verses in 2 Peter chapter two, are you conscious of a *growing* "fear of the Lord" that motivates and enables you to turn away from all wickedness and ungodliness and to walk daily and willingly in true righteousness? When we read these verses, do we heed the warning? Are we diligently striving by God's grace to never, ever be guilty of the sin of blasphemy?

Blasphemy, at its heart, is the sin of arrogantly claiming for myself an authority I don't actually possess – an authority that belongs only to God. Blasphemy, at its heart, is the desire practically to be my own authority, accountable and answerable to no one but myself. So there's a sense in which the fundamental sin of the entire world is blasphemy. But in the end, all such blasphemy is completely foolhardy, and irrational, and senseless. It's the unchecked desire to be my own authority that puts me, in the end, in the same category with the brute beasts of prey, born only to be caught and destroyed. The reason for this is that there *is* a Judge, and there *is* a final day of judgment, and so we *must* learn to see that at every moment of our lives we are wholly accountable and answerable to the authority of another.

We cannot sin and live ungodly lives with impunity. Remember the angels whom God has appointed as the guardians of His created order and the upholders of His moral government of the world, and who will one day accompany Christ when He returns – to do His bidding on the final day of judgment – to gather in the wheat (the righteous by faith) and to cast the tares (the wicked) into the fiery furnace. Especially and uniquely as Christians, we're not our own masters; we're not a law unto ourselves. We're slaves and bondservants of God, subject in all things to His law and His sovereign rule, and ultimately to His righteous judgment on the last day. Has this really been brought home to us? Has this really taught us true humility and the genuine fear of the Lord?

A deep and conscious awareness of these things will also help us to really understand and live in true obedience to Scriptures like these:

- Matthew 7:1–2 — Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.
- Romans 14:13 — Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.
- James 5:9 (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5) — Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

If even the angels do not pronounce judgements against the false teachers, how much more should we be careful never to set ourselves up as judges over one another?

I must never live my life presumptuously, as though it was ever my own will and pleasure that was ultimate. Instead, what I desperately need is a deep, deep down awareness of the authority of God over my life at all times and in all places and in all things. *It's in this way* that we'll be

saved from being swept away with the false teachers in their destruction. *It's in this way* of Gospel obedience—of moral excellence, and knowledge, and self-control, and steadfastness, and piety, and brotherly affection, and love (cf. 1:3-7)—that there will be richly and graciously provided for us an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. 1:8-11).