

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – May 24th 2009
2 Peter 2:1-10

Ian began by describing how an intellectual behaves and then gave us tips on being a 'pseudo-intellectual', which you can find on the internet! In this passage Peter is talking about 'pseudo-prophets' who would come among the people of God. They were not interested in the hard work of making disciples, but rather insisted that as the Lord was not going to return, and all this talk about judgement was for 'fuddy-duddies', people could be encouraged to relax and enjoy themselves. After all didn't Paul teach a Gospel of freedom, and Jesus himself ate, drank and partied. It would seem that Christian love-feasts were events where they cast off restraint as being the old-fashioned legalism.

This kind of teaching, which still occurs in the 21st century, is heresy, and a distortion of the Gospel of grace. These false prophets like to take the money but do not deliver the Gospel. Because although it is true that God is gracious, and indeed true that he is not a killjoy, and that dourness is not a sacred virtue, it is also true that the God who saved us is also the God who bought us. With the Gospel comes an accompanying moral vision – a way of life. He who saved us also calls us to obedience. He must not only be Saviour but also Lord – of my money, of my sexuality and of my work. So those who suggest that one can follow Jesus and still sleep around, or live a life of greed or drunkenness also bring the Gospel into disrepute, because strangely enough the world expects the Church to be different.

Peter does not preach a message of 'peace, peace', but the less popular but timeless truth that there are consequences for our lives. We can't keep trivialising our world where we judge activities not whether they are right or wrong but whether they are fun or boring; where employers look at someone's personality rather than their character; where we talk about values rather than virtues; where the fear of the Lord is replaced by the CCTV camera. God cannot be mocked; you reap what you sow. Peter gives four examples from the Old Testament of this and emphasised that justice delayed is not justice denied. Even though the Lord has not returned even now after 2000 years this does not mean he has gone to sleep but that he is patient with us. People like Dan Brown and Richard Dawkins who peddle myths will be condemned for leading people astray. We watch and we groan more in prayer.

According to Dante's *Divine Comedy* people in the inferno are so consumed by their sins they have become their sin. Dante was not trying to describe hell, but in presenting us with these scary images Peter is saying that as we are people made in the image of God, the actions we take have eternal significance. Jesus came to save us from that hell, and those who call themselves Christians must live sober, godly lives in this increasingly godless society.

Noah and seven others were saved by God – that's 8, and this number represented the new creation, Sunday being the 8th day. When Lot was rescued from the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men. Not that he was holier-than-thou. He was in fact quite a compromised character, with a foot in both camps. But he knew enough of the character of God to be distressed by the lawlessness.

This distress about what is going on is a sign that you are living for the Kingdom. Have we become so absorbed that we cease to be distressed in our soul? This distress is not a sign of priggishness or prudery, but that we are a part of the new world. We live in a culture that has forgotten how to blush, how to feel shame. Shame we are told is the worst thing, but actually it might be a sign that you are still alive, and can recover moral boundaries.