

What Are The Wages Of The False Teachers?

Series: Living Godly In A Corrupt World!

by Ron R. Ritchie

A few days ago I picked up the most recent issue of the magazine Science of the Mind, which featured an interview entitled "A Woman's Experience of the Spiritual Life." The woman, Swami Sivananda Radha, said she was born a Christian in Germany in 1911 as Sylvia Hellman. She lived there until after World War II, after which she immigrated to Canada. Both of her parents, she said, were Protestant, although her father later became a student of Buddhism. One of her grandmothers was Lutheran, the other Catholic; two of her uncles were Jewish. "So early in life I learned to respect all spiritual traditions," she was quoted as saying. "A visionary experience" led her to her guru, in Rishikesh, India, in 1955. There she "received very intense training in the philosophy and practices of yoga and the spiritual life." In 1956 "she was initiated into the sacred order of sannyas and given her present name." As her guru's request she returned to Canada to bring yogic teachings to the West. At present she is building a "temple of all religions" in Canada, "to honor the sacred traditions of the world."

Here was the closing question put to her in the interview: "You've been [teaching yoga] for thirty years now. Can you sum up your teaching for our readers?" She replied: "Keep both feet on the ground and be as ruthlessly honest with yourself as you can. Be as sincere as you can. Ask a lot of forgiveness for what you've done wrong. Be ever ready to forgive others. Stay in contact with the Divine every day. You can't be 100% sure you're always doing the right thing, but be sure you do your best. God will take care of the rest."

As I read that interview I felt nothing but compassion for this woman, for her wasted life and bankrupt teachings. I was reminded of what we are studying in the section to which we have come from the apostle Peter's second letter, a passage dealing with false teachers and their teachings. Today we will be looking at what the apostle identifies for his spiritual flock in Asia Minor as the wages of the false teachers who were seeking to undermine their faith. Even a cursory reading of the interview I just quoted from reveals that total emptiness was the wages of this woman who had spent 30 years teaching her guru's philosophy in Canada. When she went to cash her paycheck she discovered that it was drawn on the bank of the human potential movement, a philosophy that says, "try harder, do your best, hang tough, don't get discouraged." She was filled with the hope that she would be granted great spiritual insight, knowledge that would enable her to cope with present and eternal realities, but her paycheck bounced; she was deceived, and thrown back on her own devices.

In the opening verse of chapter 2 of this letter Peter writes, ". . . false teachers among you . . . will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them . . ." In verse 3, however, referring to these false teachers, the apostle assured his readers that God was in control ". . . their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." As for the believers themselves, God was in control. He would protect them in the midst of a violent and corrupt world. In 2:1-16, Peter then went on to list some 15 characteristics which would help them spot these false teachers.

In the section we will look at today, 2:17-22, the apostle lists three further characteristics of the false teachers. Just like Balaam, the false prophet of ancient Israel, they will receive in full the wages of their unrighteousness--spiritual and physical death. The wages of the false prophets is that

1. They Become Slaves of Corruption

2 Peter 2:17-19:

These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black

darkness has been reserved. For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption, for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

"Springs without water" is the first thing Peter says about the false teachers who had infiltrated the groups of believers in Asia Minor. They were posing as pastors offering streams of living water to the spiritually dry, but when the sheep came to drink they found only barren stream beds, strewn with rocks and sand. The "springs without water," the false teachers, were exposed for what they truly were.

A couple of years ago I spoke at the funeral of the father of a couple of high school students I had worked with years ago. The family had moved to another city and the father committed suicide. As I watched the family enter the church where the service was being held I saw the grief etched on their faces, and I prayed to the Lord to give me some words of encouragement to share with the children when it was my turn to speak. When the pastor of the church stood up to say something, all he did was read a poem which I thought wasn't very helpful to the grieving family. I waited for him to read something from the Bible, to share something with the family, but when he had read the poem he sat down. It was my turn to speak.

I left where I was sitting and walked up to the family and read to them, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." Now that's water. That is what gives hope to spiritually thirsty people.

The false teachers had nothing to offer to these people in Asia Minor. In contrast, here is what Jesus said to the thirsty, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. This I spoke of the Holy Spirit whom those who believed in Him were to receive . . ."

The second thing Peter says about the false teachers is that they are "mists driven by the storm." They were like the fog, without substance. I live in Half Moon Bay so I'm very familiar with fog. I'm always amazed that one moment the weather can be beautiful and sunny and the next foggy and cold—the fog just descends and envelops everything. But it is without substance—if you try to touch it it just slips through your fingers. Jude uses somewhat similar terms in his letter: ". . . clouds without water, carried along by winds," he calls them, "autumn trees without fruit, . . . wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars . . ."

So these false teachers live their lives as "springs without water," as "mists driven by the storm." As a consequence of choosing the wrong road, having once known the right way, because of their deception, their fleshliness and empty religious activity, "the black darkness has been reserved [for them], "according to the apostle. He has already mentioned (in 2:4) that God committed the angels who had sinned to "pits of darkness, reserved for judgment." In 2:9 he says "the Lord ; knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." And we will see next week (in 3:7) that "the present heavens by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment all a destruction of ungodly men."

It seems as though these false teachers of Peter's time redefined hell all a judgment. To demonstrate that not much has changed in the intervening 2,000 years, let us see what three modern--day groups say of judgment and hell. Christian Science holds that "hell is error, lust, remora,, hatred, revenge, sin, sickness, death . . . There is no final judgment for mortals, for the judgment day of wisdom comes hourly continually Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that "The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true . . . Satan and the ungodly will be annihilated at the end of the Millennium." Armstrong holds that "when a human being dies, he is dead . . . he simply stops being. The wicked will be resurrected at the close of the Millennium, only to be annihilated. The concept of hell is part and parcel of the folklore and mythology of the whole world." Notice how these groups redefine these doctrines. They hold that they are not

accountable, that they can do whatever they wish.

But Scripture makes frequent mention of hell. The story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16) is a good example. When the rich man died, we are told, he went to "hell," from where he called out to Lazarus, who was "resting in the bosom of Abraham." The rich man asked Lazarus for a drop of water to relieve his torment, but was denied. Then he asked Lazarus to go and warn his brothers that they should change their ways. But he was reminded that they had Moses and the prophets to warn them; even if Lazarus returned from the dead they would not listen to him.

When Jesus talked about hell he referred to it as "Gehenna," a valley outside Jerusalem where the kings Ahaz and Manassah offered children in sacrifice to the pagan god Molech. Jeremiah called this place (which later became a dump) "the valley of the slaughter." Then in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared that whoever called his brother a fool "shall be liable to the fires of hell." He said it would be better to lose an eye or a hand rather than sin and have the whole body cast into hell. The ungodly, he warned (Matt. 7:23) would be cast from the presence of Christ. Apostates, he said, shall be cast into "outer darkness" (8:12), and in that place "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hell is "a place of unquenchable fire, where the worm does not die" (Mark 9:42-43).

Using figurative language, Jesus taught that judgment would involve conscious regret for a wasted life. Hell is a place where the conscious ungodly will be aware that they have chosen to be eternally separated from Jesus and from everybody else. There, in isolation, in pits of gloom and darkness the eternally damned will be aware that they wasted their lives. Contrary to popular myth, they will not be in the company of their friends. Hell is a place of eternal isolation. "The Gates of Hell," Rodin's master work (which has now been duplicated and is on display at Stanford University) displays, according to the Stanford magazine, "a helter--skelter tangle of bodies in anguish." In the sculpture, the bodies are in close proximity to each other. But according to Scripture, hell is a place of total isolation, where no one will ever again see another living being. The false teachers in Asia Minor were seeking to woo young believers away from Jesus but Peter says that "the black darkness has been reserved [for them]."

C.S. Lewis in his book *The Great Divorce* paints a vivid picture of hell as the abode of the self-centered and heaven as the above of those whose life has found its center in the glory of God. Hell is depicted as a gloomy and empty town, inhabited by people who don't want to live close to anyone else so they keep moving millions of miles away from each other. Hell is a place of unquenchable agony, of torment (not torture, as the Jehovah's Witnesses say), but remorse and regret over the life in Christ that has been rejected.

In his book *Modern Heresies*, John Krumm says, ". . . a man has as his eternal destiny whatever he sets his heart on. If he sets his heart on himself, he can live for himself for all eternity. The doctrine of heaven and hell pays this ultimate tribute to man's freedom. God will respect human integrity throughout eternity and if man insists on rejecting God's offers of mercy and of love, then he must live outside their influence . . ."

Peter reminds his readers that the "black darkness" has been reserved for the false teachers, the fallen angels, the ungodly of Noah's day and all the ungodly who have existed since that time. When Jesus Christ returns in power and glory, then comes the judgment, spoken of in Revelation:

Rev. 20:1 1-15:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

God is serious about how we live here on earth. When we discover who Jesus really is we should fall on our

knees and worship him as Savior and God. We were created by him; we are not his equals. We should echo the words of Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips," and the words of Job when God appeared to him in a whirlwind, "O God, I have heard of you but now that I've seen you I wish I had never opened my lips."

I plead with you, don't choose to go to hell. There the "worm dies not," the flames never die, and torment lasts for all eternity. Jesus said that hell was created for the devil and his angels. Anyone else who goes there does so because he chose to reject God's revelation of himself in creation, his Spirit, his prophets' word, Jesus himself, his apostles and his witnesses. Billy Graham has said that hell is a place where there is no more hope. But there is hope for all who heed the words of John, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever would believe in him would not perish but would have everlasting life."

Thirdly, Peter describes the false teachers as arrogant. They were proud and boastful, flattering people so as to gain advantage over them, speaking empty words so that "they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality. Those who barely escape from the ones who live in error." The false teachers used as bait the lust of the flesh (power), the lust of the eyes (possessions), and the boastful pride of life (position) to fish in the streams of new believers, people who had recently come out of the mystery religions which appealed to the senses. "... promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption," Peter says.

These teachers were doing just what Satan did to Eve . . . God is holding back, for God knows "the day you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. They learned evil by doing evil. But they did not gain the freedom they had hoped for, rather they found themselves in bondage to sin, for rebellion against God is sin and sin is a tyrant.

For example, these false teachers had eyes filled with adultery (verse 14). "Meaningful relationships," "mystical communion," they called it. They were promising believers something they didn't have themselves. But 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." True freedom comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Scripture says, "Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty"--freedom to be transformed into the very image of Christ. Galatians 5:18 says, "You were called to freedom, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another." An individual is truly free when Jesus is his Lord and Savior. He then becomes a partaker of the divine nature ("Christ in you"), and has "escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (1:4).

What are the wages of the false teachers? They become slaves of corruption, and

2. They Return to Their Own vomit

2 Peter 2:20-22:

And after they have escaped the defilement of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first, for it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than having known it to turn away from the holy commandments delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit, a sow after washing returns to wallow in its own mud."

Be careful not to take these verses out of context. They could be construed as saying that these false teachers were Christians--"carnal" Christians, that is. But a careful study of the letter reveals that they never were Christians. Remember that Peter said early on in this letter, "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (1:10). Then, in his first reference to the false teachers (2:1) he said that they "denied the Master who bought them." In 2:4-10 he compared them with the ungodly of the ancient world. In 2:14 he called them "accused children"; and in 2:15 he compared them with the false prophet Balaam.

No, they were not "carnal" Christians. While they professed to be Christians they never had been born again. Verse 19 and 20 declare, "For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the way of

righteousness. . . ," and that would seem to indicate that they were believers. But the fact that they perceived and discerned these truths does not mean that they had received Jesus as Lord and Savior. Verse 15 says they obviously knew "the right way." At one time they probably made a profession of faith (that is how they infiltrated the Christian community at the beginning), but professing to be born again does not make you born again. Scripture says, "By their fruits you shall know them... " In time their true character became evident They drifted back to their worldly ways, becoming "slaves of corruption." Someone has said, "When you say, 'Christ died,' that's history. But when you say 'Christ died for me, that's salvation.'" 1 John 2:18-19 says it best: "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen . . . they went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they are all not of us."

What has been, and what will be, the final end of these false teachers? What will their payment be? Three things, Peter says. First, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first." Secondly, he says, they are like dogs which "return to their own vomit." They can't escape the shackles of their old life. Having gotten rid of their internal corruption, they find themselves returning to it again. Thirdly, he says, like pigs after washing, they "return to wallowing in the mire." They return again to the external corruption which they once had. What graphic terms Peter uses! Washing a pig does not change its heart; he still remains a pig. In the same way, a false prophet will always remain that, no matter how flattering his words, no matter how well he dresses.

What are the wages of the false teachers? "The wages of sin is death," Scripture says. Emptiness is the lot of the misguided woman who sought to learn of the spiritual life from a guru in India. Balaam, who "received a rebuke for his own transgression [from] a dumb donkey," found that his wages were spiritual and physical death. The false teachers of Peter's day, like dogs, returned to their own vomit; like sows, after washing, they returned to wallow in the mire.

"The wages of sin is death." Yes, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." To those who do not know Jesus I say, if you want to go to hell, no one will stop you. I plead with you to look at the scriptures, however, and see if you really want to go to the hell Scripture talks about, not the hell of your imagination. If you want eternal life, on the other hand, look into the scriptures and discover the good news that "the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." He can set you free from the emptiness, corruption and death.

To the believers among us I say, let's start looking at non-Christians with new eyes, eyes that recognize that they are going to hell if they don't turn to Jesus and repent. Don't keep the good news to yourself. Give them an opportunity to hear Jesus speak the good news through you. And don't be fearful--God knows how to protect his own in this corrupt world.

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Ron R. Ritchie
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