

WHERE SHALL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?

TEXT: I PETER 4:17-19

INTRODUCTION:

1. My message this morning is entitled, “Where Shall the Ungodly and the Sinner Appear?” (I Peter 4:17).
2. It is an important question, and it is not answered.
3. Actually, though it is not answered here in I Peter, it is answered elsewhere in the Bible. Psalm 9:17 says, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” So, the answer is – hell.
4. Here in our text, there are two similar questions:
5. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (4:17).
6. “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (4:18).
7. We can see from our text that God’s judgment begins with the saved (“the house of God”) and it will end with the lost (“them that obey not the Gospel of God”).
8. The theme of this epistle is “suffering” (4:12-16), and the conjunction "for" in verse 17 indicates a close connection between suffering and judgment.
9. One obvious reason for suffering is that it purges and cleanses the church (4:17-19).
10. There is a judgment for God’s people. It is a judgment that is going on now, and it is a judgment all Christians will face when they leave this world.
11. The apostle Paul said, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:10, 12; cf. I Cor. 3:11-15; II Cor. 5:10, 11).
12. W.A. Criswell said, “In that great and final day, when God’s people stand at the judgment seat of Christ, what an immense mountain of rubbish will be burned up! All of the worldliness, and all of the selfishness, and all of the vanity and ambition, and all of the pride wherein we have served God will be burned up.”
13. There is an old saying, “He escaped by the skin of his teeth.” Like many old sayings, it comes from the Bible.
14. Job said, “I am escaped with the skin of my teeth” (Job 19:20).
15. Many Christians are going to get into heaven by the skin of their teeth!

16. First Corinthians 3:15 says, “If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” In other words, saved by the skin of his teeth, scarcely saved, barely saved, etc.

I. A SERIOUS WARNING (I PETER 4:17).

II. AN INTERESTING QUESTION (4:18).

III. A FAITHFUL COMMITMENT (4:19).

I. A SERIOUS WARNING (4:17).

1. “Scarcely saved” (4:17) means, “saved with great difficulty.” The same Greek word translated “scarcely” is translated “hardly” in Acts 27:8, where it refers to Paul’s ship sailing “over against Salmone; And hardly passing it.” This means they passed it with great difficulty.
2. Or salvation is full and free, and our salvation is perfect and eternal.
3. Furthermore, our salvation has three aspects – past, present, and future.
4. Past – we have been saved from the penalty of sin. The “ungodly and the sinners” (I Peter 4:18) will suffer eternity in hell, but those who trust Christ have everlasting life (John 3:16).
5. Present – we are being saved from the power of sin.
6. Future – we will be saved from the very presence of sin.
7. First Peter 4:18 says, “And if the righteous scarcely (“with difficulty”) be saved...” John Wesley used to say that he was “a brand plucked out of the fire.”
8. But few Christians see things that way. They are like Little Jack Horner, sitting in a corner, saying, “What a good boy am I!”
9. According to the Bible, judgment must begin with God’s people. The “house of God” refers to the local church. First Timothy 3:15 says, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”
10. In I Peter 2:5, the church is called “a spiritual house.”
11. This principle is taught throughout the Bible. God judged Israel first, and then He judged the other nations. Ezekiel 9:6 says, “Begin (the judgment) at my sanctuary.”
12. We see this principle established in the early days of the church in Jerusalem. God quickly judged Ananias and his wife Sapphira, and we are told that right after they were dead and buried, “great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11).

13. The fear of God came upon the apostolic church. Acts 9:31 says, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”
14. But there is little fear of God in churches today. Many church members are as worldly as their unsaved friends and neighbors.
15. First Peter 4:17 says, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God...” The old-time evangelists used to start off their revival meetings by preaching every night to the church members, then the second week they’d preach to the unsaved.
16. A certain church committee called Evangelist Sam Jones to come to their town to preach to sinners. They were offended when he came because he preached at them instead. Upon complaining to him they were told by Jones, “Never mind, I will get to the sinners. I never scald hogs until the water is hot.”
17. Sam Jones was an old-fashioned Methodist preacher. He died in 1906. Unfortunately, there aren’t too many like him today.
18. On another occasion, someone asked Sam Jones why he didn't preach more against the Roman Catholic Church. He replied, “When I get through with the Methodists, it's bedtime.”
19. Oftentimes, the carnality and hypocrisy of church members has been a big stumbling block to the unsaved. I heard of a certain pastor who invited a respectable businessman to his church. He said, “Come worship with the saints this Sunday.”
20. The businessman replied, “Saints? That’s the problem. I do business with some of your so-called saints. They may be saints in church on Sunday, but they certainly are not saints the rest of the week! In fact, some of them act like devils.”
21. This is why “judgment must begin at the house of God” (4:17). Hebrews 10:30 and 31 says, “The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”
22. The “judgment” referred to here has a lot to do with the sufferings referred to throughout Peter’s first epistle. When persecution comes to the church, God often allows it because it has the useful and beneficial effect of purging the church.
23. Sometimes, God judges the church directly. The apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 11:29 that when Christians take the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner (e.g., unconfessed sin) they eateth and drinketh damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause,

many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (I Cor. 11:30, 31).

24. Not only does God judge His people by direct intervention, but He also does it indirectly through the devil. Paul told the church in Corinth, that if the immoral man would not repent, they were to deliver him over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh” (cf. I Cor. 5:5).
25. In the book of Job we see how God allows Satan to afflict believers (cf. Job 1:1-12; 2:1-8).
26. Let us consider what our Lord said to Peter in Luke 22:31. “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.”
27. Satan is the sifter. But he can only sift believers with God’s permission.
28. The apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 11:32, “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”
29. Those of us that have trusted Christ will not be judged with the world. We will not have to stand before the great white throne, described so vividly in Revelation 20, where it says, “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).
30. When all lost sinners will be cast off into the lake of fire those of us who are saved by God’s grace will not be there.
31. That brings us to my next point.

II. AN INTERESTING QUESTION (4:18).

1. Actually, we have here two interesting questions. “And if it first begin at us, what shall the end be...?” (4:17b). “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (4:18).
2. The questions are similar. Christians must pass through “fiery trials” (I Peter 4:12), but they are only temporary. However, the judgment of the wicked – “them that obey not God...the ungodly and the sinner” (4:17, 18) – will go on for all eternity.
3. Referring to eternal damnation, Revelation 14:11 says, “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.”
4. Jude 7 refers to “the vengeance of eternal fire.”
5. The Lord Jesus spoke often about the terrors of hell. He described hell as a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. He also described it as a place of eternal punishment (Matt. 25:41, 46).
6. In Luke 16, in the story of the rich man in hell, our Lord used the word “torment” four times to describe the rich man’s pain and agony.

7. What is really sad is that most lost sinners do not realize they are heading for eternal torment in hell. A few years ago, author and seminary professor David Wells wrote a book entitled, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World*.
8. Dr. Wells said, "We certainly do not think of it (America) as a place where we could lose our souls. If such thoughts do cross our minds, we would be inclined to suppose that souls are lost by doing large and inhumane acts of evil, not by living in the realm of shallow and empty triviality where so much of our life is moored."
9. How tragic to waste a life spent in "the realm of shallow and empty triviality" and then spend eternity in the realm of eternal damnation!

III. A FAITHFUL COMMITMENT (4:19).

1. The conjunctive "Wherefore" (4:19) connects verse 19 with the preceding verses. Does God allow suffering in the life of a Christian for a specific purpose? He certainly does.
2. David said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Psalm 119:67).
3. The answer to the question of God allowing suffering must be "yes" because I Peter 4:19 says, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God."
4. There are some words here in I Peter 4:19 that are missing from the modern Christian's vocabulary – suffer, the will of God, commit, etc.
5. First Peter 4:19 says we must commit the keeping of our souls to God, our "faithful Creator." It is significant that God is referred to as our Creator. As our Creator, God is sovereign over His creation.
6. As our Creator, God is a God of order and purpose. He has a plan for our lives, and we must be submissive to His will for our lives.
7. There is a big controversy these days over Creationism and evolution. Many people think the argument is simply over the first two chapters in Genesis.
8. I do not want to minimize the importance of the first two chapters of Genesis. Those that undermine the book of Genesis are as foolish as a man that knocks out one of the foundation walls in his house.
9. But my point here is that the doctrine of creation is not just taught in the early pages of Genesis; it is taught throughout the entire Bible (cf. I Peter 4:19).
10. Referring to the coming tribulation, the Lord Jesus Christ said in Mark 13:19, "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from

the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.”

11. Jesus was a “creationists.” In fact, our Lord is not only a creationist, He is the Creator. John 1:3, 10 says, “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made...He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.”
12. Colossians 1:16 says, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.”
13. The book of Revelation teaches that, up in heaven we will worship the Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity because He “hath created all things,” and for His “pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11; cf. 10:5, 6).

CONCLUSION:

1. The other night at least nine people were killed and 25 missing after a huge fire tore through a 100-person “rave party” in a clutter-filled Oakland warehouse. There were no sprinklers or smoke detectors in the building.
2. The fire chief said that fire crews found a “makeshift stairwell” between the first and second floor, and that most of the people who died were on the second floor of the building.
3. A survivor by the name of Bob Mule lived in the building and suffered minor burns. He told a newspaper reporter, “It was too hot, too much smoke, I had to get out of there. I literally felt my skin peeling and my lungs being suffocated by smoke. I couldn't get the fire extinguisher to work.”
4. It is a sad story, but it is only a foretaste of what is in store for “them that obey not the gospel of God” (4:17).