

False Teachers and the Church, pt. 2 (2 Pet 2.10b-22)

I. REVIEW: DELIGHTING IN GOD'S WORD

¹⁶In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. ¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (Ps 119.14-16)

- A. One of the most essential needs in the body of Christ in our contemporary moment is to become a people who **delight in God's truth**. To delight in the truth of God (his word, his law, his precepts) does not only mean that we enjoy his word in our personal lives or in the place of study — but that we learn to love what he loves and grow in our ability to stand in agreement with his will.
- B. To stand with God in truth (to delight in his word) is **costly** and **unpopular**. In our day there is an increasing stigma for holding to the precepts and the truths of God's word unapologetically. Standing with Jesus on the truth of his word will cause us to experience great reproach, mocking, alienation, and potentially persecution.

⁹Zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me (Ps 69.9)

- C. Like in Peter's Day, we live in a moment where false teaching is increasing *within* the church. There is a spirit of confusion and of uncertainty that marks many believers today because of the presence of false teaching.
- D. Paul highlighted that a season of deception would come among the church because people failed to receive the love of the truth and instead would prop up for themselves teachers who "tickled their ears" by telling them what they already wanted to hear.

¹⁰with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false (2 Thes 2.10-11)

³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim 4.3-4)

- E. The primary strategy that Peter uses to combat false teaching is the intentional and faithful **strengthening of the church**.
- F. 2 Peter 2 is one of the most terrifying chapters in the whole of Scripture. In it Peter illustrates that one of the greatest dangers facing the church of Jesus Christ is not the darkness of the world outside, but rather false teaching as it creeps its way through the church from within.

G. Outline of 2 Peter 2

2:1-3	The presence of false teachers
2:4-10a	The certainty of judgment and deliverance
2:10b-19	The characteristics of false teachers and their teaching
2:20-22	The sobering judgment of those who follow deception

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS AND THEIR TEACHING (2 PET 2.10b-19)

- A. After establishing the certainty that false teachers will be present among the church (2.1-3) and the certainty of the coming judgment of the false teachers (2.4-10a), Peter moves to highlight several characteristics of the false teachers and their teaching.
- B. It is important to understand that Peter does not spend time telling the church the **content** of the false teaching. Rather, he is concerned to outline **characteristics** of both the false teachers themselves and of their teaching.

- C. The reason that Peter does not simply tell them what the false teaching is (and accordingly give them the truth to combat it) is remarkably wise in how the Spirit chose to inspire the Holy Scripture. This demonstrates for us the reality that the content of false teaching will continually change throughout the history of the church. Each season of the church will face different elements of false teaching as it comes against it.
- D. However, we can also see that this demonstrates that false teaching will always possess *similar characteristics* throughout the life of the church.
- E. When seeking to understand false teaching, we do not primarily give our attention to studying the particular counterfeits. Rather, we spend time seeking to understand the reality of God's truth and the elements that characterize the spirit of false teaching.
- F. This helps us to see and understand that although the content of false teaching in our day will be drastically different than in Peter's day (a form of Gnosticism), or even than the early church (heresies about Jesus' divinity), that false teaching always has a similar set of defining characteristics.
- G. *Slandering/blasphemous judgment* (vv. 10b-11): Peter begins this section by outlining how these false teachers walk with a spirit of blasphemous and slanderous judgmentalism, speaking confidently and boldly about things that they are in fact ignorant of.

¹⁰bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, ¹¹whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord... ¹²blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant (2 Pet 2.10-11, 12)

1. There is significant debate about the interpretation of these verses. The interpretive question comes down to identifying two groups in the text.
2. *Glorious ones*: Some believe that these are angels (either wicked angels or holy angels) while others believe that these are church leaders or other human dignitaries. It is most likely from the context that Peter has wicked angels in view here (as he separates the "glorious ones" from the "angels" in verse 11).
3. *Them*: in verse 11 Peter says that the angels do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against "them" and there is debate as to whom he is referring. He could be referring to the glorious ones (i.e., the angels do not pronounce judgments against the glorious ones) or the false teachers (i.e., angels do not pronounce judgment against the false teachers in the presence of God). Although either interpretation could be supported, within the context it is more likely that this pronoun is referring to the "glorious ones" of verse 10.
4. A similar passage in Jude helps shine light on the shape of Peter's argument.

⁸these people [false teachers] blaspheme the glorious ones. ⁹But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." (Jude 8-9)

5. In light of this, the meaning Peter's warning demonstrates that the false teachers despise the order of God's creation and do not have "fear" or reverence in pronouncing blasphemous judgment about things they are ignorant or unaware. However, even the angels in heaven (who we can imply have better sight and understanding than we do) do not pronounce judgment — but entrust the judgment to the Lord alone.
6. In our day, we have to seek to apply this principle/characteristic in seeking to discern and understand false teaching.

7. Few in our day would pronounce judgment (many functionally do not even believe in) demonic powers. Rather, what we see in that day is that the teachers did not tremble when pronouncing God's judgment upon those they deemed to have sinned (the fallen angels), when angels who served in God's presence would not even do such.
8. In a similar manner, in our day there are many teachers who expend a great deal of energy seeking to expose and outline judgment against those they deem worthy of such judgment. However, the pattern of Scripture is clear in how we are to deal with "judgment" in the body of Christ.

¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (Matt 18.15)

¹When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare to go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ...⁷To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸But you yourselves wrong and defraud — even your own brothers! (1 Cor 6.1, 7-8)

9. There is a great deal of teaching in the body of Christ today that is tolerant and permissive of slanderous behavior. This form of teaching should be disregarded as we seek to walk in obedience to God's word in the process of relational reconciliation and restoration.

H. **Indulgent/sensual behavior** (vv.12-16): The second characteristic of false teaching and the teachers has to do with their desire to promote indulgence and sensual behavior (both to permit it for themselves and to promote it among their followers).

¹³They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. ¹⁴They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls... ¹⁵Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶but was rebuked for his own transgression... (2 Pet 2.13-16)

1. Peter now speaks of a self-fulfilling posture among the false teachers that did not submit the passions of the flesh to Jesus in a spirit of obedience. Here, he shows that one of the marks of false teaching is a promotion of a self-indulgent view of the world that casts off the clear teaching of Scripture as oppressive, archaic, unloving, or legalistic in order to justify patterns of sin and unrighteousness.
2. The primary way that indulgent and sensual teaching finds its way into the church is in the area of **sexuality**. The Bible is unapologetic that our sexuality (including our genderedness) is a stewardship given to us for the purpose of being ordered under the rule and reign of Christ Jesus. The Bible teaches that human sexuality is to be expressed *exclusively* within the lifelong covenant of marriage between one man and one woman.
3. One of the markers that is important for our current moment is Peter's statement that the eyes of the false teachers are "full of adultery" rather than having pure eyes that refuse to look upon worthless things (cf. Job 31.1; Ps 101.2-3). In a moment where pornography is prolific, we must have an unapologetic stance to call forth men and women to live with purity of eye as we seek to live in accordance with God's truth.
4. Another profound contemporary expression of indulgent and sensual teaching is the **false gospel of self-actualization/fulfillment**.
5. There is a movement in the church that believes the lie that the problem with humanity is one that intrinsically exists outside of myself. This teaching believes that the truest form of myself ("self") exists latent within me (and this is usually defined or discovered on the basis of *feeling*), and anything that seeks to restrain my true self from emerging or being expressed must be removed.

- I. **False appearances** (vv.17-19): the final characteristic outlined by Peter demonstrates that these false teachers present one reality, but upon a closer look, they possess the opposite of what they promise.

¹⁷These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm... ¹⁸For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. (2 Pet 2.17-19)

1. The two images that Peter uses are intended to communicate the same reality: these false teachers make certain promises but are completely inept and unable to provide the things they promise.
2. This concludes with the specific way that Peter highlights that they offer “freedom” to those who will listen to their teaching (likely sensual freedom with a view of living free from judgement). However, what the false teachers do not understand is that they themselves are enslaved to their passions.
3. Peter understands that humans are designed to live with our allegiance ordered to something outside of us — and if we give ourselves over to that thing we become slaves to it — whether the Lord Jesus in righteousness or to sin and wickedness.

¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom 6.16)

4. Jesus declares that a teaching ministry will be known by its fruit. This is not simply speaking of numbers or apparent success (Peter has earlier said that *many will follow* the false teachers, v. 2), but of the internal realities that are being cultivated both in the teachers and promoted through their teaching.

¹⁵Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. (Matt 7.15-16)

5. Over time, a teacher’s life will be evaluated by the presence (and the promotion) of the **beatitudes** (Matt 5.3-12) and the **fruits of the Spirit** in their life and in the lives of those who follow them.

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these... ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control (Gal 5.19-22)

6. In our day, many people offer a way of “healing” that abandons the ways that Jesus has outlined as leading to the way of life. These promise “wholeness” and “restoration”, but those who offer these teachings are bound in bitterness and anger, and are offering a poison to their hearers that will not bring healing — but will only lead to greater bitterness, strife, and anxiety.

III. A TRAGIC WARNING (2 PET 2.20-22)

- A. Peter concludes this chapter with a severe and sober warning about the false teachers and those who follow in their ways. He declares that for those who escape the defilements of the world through the knowledge of Christ and then returns to their sins — that it would be ¹⁶worse for them than at the first — so much so that it would have been better for them to have not known.
- B. Peter is not here seeking to argue whether a believer can or cannot “lose” their salvation. Rather, he is providing a stern, and real warning for those who are called of Jesus to not harden their hearts through unbelief and sin, outlining that those who know the will of God and walk away from it are in a worse position than those who have never known (cf. Luke 12.47-48; Matt 12.43-35).
- C. The desired outcome of this warning is that believers would **make every effort** to continue in the glorious truth of the gospel (2 Pet 1.1-4) by pursuing a life of holiness in the grace of God (2 Pet 1.5-11).