

2 Peter 2 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

The theme of 2 Peter has two thrusts:

- 1) Peter *first of all* exhorts his readers to grow strong in the faith.
- 2) *Secondly*, he warns them about false teachers.

Spiritual maturity will help them identify and resist heresy, while heresy will hinder their maturing in spiritual things, so Peter both *warns* and *urges* in this letter.

In Chapter 1, Peter described what a genuine Christian life *looks* like. Now in chapter 2, he moves to speak clearly about the danger of false teachers.

And we have to say, that he certainly wasn't concerned here about offending anyone.

Our modern preoccupation with *tolerance* was a foreign idea to Peter – as we'll see.

CHAPTER 2

¹But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

This verse and chapter begin with the conjunction “but” because at the end of chapter 1, Peter had spoken about the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Look at vs. 20 & 21 –

²⁰knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

While scripture came through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, at the same time that the writers of the Word of God were writing, there were also *false* teachers and prophets who were claiming the

inspiration of God but were in fact, liars.

And Peter says that just as there *were* false prophets in the past, there *will be* false teachers in the present and future.

These false teachers would secretly bring in error that, *if believed*, would do great damage.

Peter calls this false teaching – *heresy*.

The word means a *choosing*, and came to refer to a *sect*.

That is always the aim of false teachers – to covertly sneak into a group, and through stealthy means, start pulling people away to form their *own* group.

Heresy works by bringing *division* – it forces people to make a decision about who and what they are going to follow.

False teachers know that if they're open and honest about their error up front, no one would listen to them – so they begin by infiltrating the ranks of the Church, looking like sheep, but they are in fact, wolves in sheep's clothing.

Once they've built relationships with people, they USE those relationships as the beach-head to work terrible evil.

As Peter identifies here, one of the first things the false teacher will refute and deny is the *Lordship and Salvation of Jesus Christ*.

It's one of the marks of false doctrine that its *Christology* is non-biblical.

Typically, the false teacher will deny either the *deity* or the *humanity* of Jesus Christ.

And while false teachers can bring about great trouble and ruin through their lies, they sow the seeds of their own judgment and destruction in that deceit is *always unmasked* in the end.

Dishonesty, disloyalty, and deceit can never lay the foundation for a lasting work.

They only create *instability* and it isn't long till the false teacher is exposed and his or her lies are refuted.

But that doesn't mean that they don't enjoy a season of popularity and sometimes great power, as history shows.

So Peter says . . .

2And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

Why do false teachers garner such success when they begin?

Because they're motivated by carnal desires and teach things that are appealing to the flesh!

As long as you preach a message that caters to human pride and lust, you'll find a ready audience – and such is the case for false teachers.

The problem is – when the purity of the gospel of Christ is distorted and turned into a license to sin, even the world recognizes it for what it is – and finds justification for their *rejection* of Christianity. We've seen the proof of this in our own age with the scandals of the televangelists in the 80's.

How much shame was heaped on the cause of Christ because of the errant teaching and *lifestyles* of some Christian celebrities?

3By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

One of the primary appeals of false teaching is that it stirs up *covetousness*, which is one of the root sins of the human heart.

Being physical creatures, it's easy to confuse the yearning we have for God with a longing for the things of this world.

Only God can satisfy us, but we lose sight of that so easily and think that if we just had more of this or that, *then* we would be happy and find contentment.

One of the great struggles that Christians of *every* generation have had is that we often confine our faith in Christ to a “religious corner” of our lives and to divorce our faith from our “practical” lives.

It's the idea that Christianity is good for dealing with the issues of our *spirit*, but when it comes to our daily life, we have to live and play by the world's rules.

The hook that false teachers often use is that they apply the same rules that govern the world to our relationship to God.

They define *success* in the spirit by the same definition the *world* uses for success; which is money, power, and position.

We see this in the modern heresy of the Prosperity Movement.

The evidence of *real* faith, they say, is a big, brand new car, designer label clothes, a large estate, premier furnishings, and a jet-set lifestyle.

In fact, they go so far as to say that Jesus died to bequeath to us just such a lifestyle of luxury and prosperity and that to *not* achieve these things is to show a lack of faith and to dishonor Christ!

This is nothing less than a blasphemous sanctifying of greed and covetousness.

But as Peter makes clear here, it's also nothing new; it's the MO that false teachers have been using since the beginning of time – in fact, it's the temptation the devil used in the Garden of Eden.

But Peter reminds us that while false teachers can do a lot of damage, ultimately they're doomed to failure for God Himself will deal with them.

Now, notice how long the next sentence is -

4For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; ⁶and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; ⁷and delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)—⁹*then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, ¹¹whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

Okay, this is a mouthful and we need to dig into it because Peter has laid some really heavy stuff on us here . . .

Peter refers to 3 examples of God's judgment;

- 1) A Judgment of Angels
- 2) The Judgment of the Flood
- 3) The Judgment of Sodom & Gomorrah

In v. 4, he refers to something that seems highly obscure to us - a judgment of angels –

4For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;

The phrase, “angels who sinned” is troubling because the thought of angels sinning is tough to get our minds around.

What makes it even worse is what Peter says happened to them – they were cast into hell and bound in chains of darkness where they await judgment.

There are two possibilities in figuring out what Peter is speaking about here –

- 1) He may simply be referring to the angels who followed Lucifer in his aborted attempt to rebel against God.

These angels left their proper position as messengers and their roles as servants of God and ended up becoming the demons.

As a result of their departure from their assigned place, they've lost their freedom and fallen into *bondage* to spiritual darkness, where they will remain confined until the final judgment when they will be hurled into the Lake of Fire.

- 2) The other possibility is that Peter has in mind here a *specific group* of angels from a well known story of that time that's been obscured by the passage of the years and the fact that we are unfamiliar with Jewish legend.

In Peter's day, one of the more popular extra-biblical books was called *Enoch*.

One of the stories in Enoch elaborated on what we read in Genesis 6, about how the “sons of God” took the “daughters of men” and produced a race of giants by them.

These giants then were the focal point of the violence and

corruption that led to the Flood.

According to Jewish legend, the sons of God mentioned in Genesis 6 were actually fallen angels who were attracted to human women.

They violated the boundaries God had set for them in terms of interference in the physical world and so, because they had proven themselves to be so willful and rebellious, God had judged and confined them to a special prison – here called “hell.”

Actually, this is not the word we might expect – *Hades*; it’s the Greek word *Tartarus*; which in Greek mythology referred to a *special section* of Hades, the lowest and most despicable region of the netherworld that was where the worst offenders were confined in total and utter darkness.

While most of the demons are free to roam the earth, these particular demons were so hideous and evil in violating the rules that God had set, they received *immediate* judgment and had to be shackled in a place they could work no further harm to the human race.

Peter’s point is that if God would take *such severe action with angels* – false teachers ought not think they are going to get away with anything.

In the next two examples of judgment, Peter points out that while judgment comes on the evil, God will rescue His own.

⁵and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;

Peter’s point here is that God’s judgment isn’t just temporary and sporadic.

When the time is ripe, it’s global in scope and will sweep away all the evidences of evil.

⁶and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;

⁷and delivered righteous Lot, *who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked* ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)—

While the judgment of the flood points out the *extent* to which God's judgment can go, Sodom and Gomorrah reveal that it can also be focused and prescriptive as well.

If there is just one group, one city, one region, one nation that needs judgment, God will do what needs to be done.

And yet, just as He did with Noah, when judgment falls, coming as it does on evil, God will rescue those who look to Him.

⁹*then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,*

Now Peter applies these three examples of judgment to *his* subject – false teachers and prophets.

¹⁰and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority.

False teachers are usually marked by two traits –

- 1) They order their lifestyle by fleshly lusts, usually greed or sexual immorality
- 2) They despise authority, meaning they resist those God has ordained to be in charge.

Mark this about false teachers and prophets; they refuse to recognize the God ordained leadership of the Church.

They set themselves up as the final authority and look down their noses at everyone else.

This is why one of the marks of a cult is that it follows some solitary leader or small group that claims to be God's sole agent of revelation.

They are presumptuous, self-willed.

False teachers tend also to be presumptuous and self-willed, meaning they sanctify their own desires and turn them into the voice and will of God.

They come to think so highly of *themselves* that the slightest desire or whim is elevated to the “leading of the Spirit.”

They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,

This goes with their lack of respect for authority.

In order to assert and promote their own agenda, false teachers have to denigrate and criticize those who stand contrary to them and their errant ideas.

When you listen to a false teacher answer his or her critics, what you’ll hear is not an honest dealing with the *issue or the doctrine* that’s at stake but a *personal* attack on the one who opposes them.

That ought to be a clue as to the *heart* of the one who is speaking evil.

Peter sets this despising and reviling of God ordained authorities by false teachers against the back drop of the angels who *refused* to do this -

11 **whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.**

In the book of Jude, we read the story of how the archangel Michael contended with the devil over the body of Moses.

We aren’t told much detail about this, only that Michael refused to get into a brueha with Satan and instead of reviling accusations, Michael simply said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

Here’s the way Jude puts it

8 **Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries.**

Notice how Jude uses the exact same phrase as Peter.

9 **Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” ¹⁰But these speak evil of whatever they do not know;**

Peter and Jude’s point is that even the holy angels are ultra cautious

about speaking disrespectfully toward the devil himself.
The angels know that although Satan is the arch adversary of God,
at one time he was the *highest* of all God's creation.
Though stripped of this position and authority, they're still
cautious in their treatment of him.
Well, if the holy angels stand in this posture toward *the devil*, how
much more wrong is it when false teachers disrespect the
authority granted by God to those He ordains to places of
leadership?

12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught
and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not
understand, and will utterly perish in their own
corruption, ¹³ and will receive the wages of
unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to
carouse in the daytime. //→

Peter paints a terrifying picture of both the spiritual condition of these
false teachers and their destruction.

He says they *carouse in the daytime*.

Carousing was the occupation of those who had had too much
wine to drink and were out in the streets disturbing the
peace and getting into trouble.

Now, people normally *worked* during the day and didn't start
their drinking till the evening.

As a result, carousing was done after *dark*.

When Peter says these false teachers carouse during the
daytime, he's saying their corruption is so far gone that they
don't work normal jobs but are sponging off the people they
are leading and putting the money to an *immoral* use.

Their occupation is a religious con-game.

They're little better than animals, and like animals, their
understanding is dull because they have *knowingly* rejected the
truth.

But the corruptions they pursue will be their undoing.

Their sin will bear bitter fruit, and they will perish.

Pick it up half way through v. 13 . . .

They are spots and blemishes,

Jude calls false teachers the same name – *spots*!

The word means a stain, an imperfection – as when you're eating and spill food onto your clothing.

Over and over in the NT, we see the Church referred to as the Body and Bride of Christ. When He comes for His bride, she's arrayed in spotless white, in a wrinkle-free gown, and without blemish. But Peter sees false teachers as spots in the garment of the Church and a blemish on it's complexion.

carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,

The entire time false teachers hang out in the fellowship of the saints, they're carrying on a double life.

They smile and make it appear as though they are one of us, but they're actually plotting their next move and angling to figure out how they can lie, cheat, and steal so they can pursue their own lusts.

14 **having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. *They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.***

Peter is pulling no punches here – and don't forget, the real author behind this is the Holy Spirit – this is God's view and judgment of these guys.

He says that false teachers are *motivated by* and *addicted to* sin.

And as I mentioned before, their lusts boil down to two main things – women and money!

Literally, Peter says that their *eyes are full of an adulterous woman*.

So he doesn't mean adultery here as *idolatry*, which is *spiritual* adultery.

He means it as *sexual immorality*, that one of the main aims of false teachers is to put themselves in a position of authority so that they can take advantage of women!

Many women find men in power extremely attractive, and men with impure motives will seek out positions of influence just for that reason.

Peter says that false teachers have eyes FULL of adultery.

Meaning they look at EVERY woman as a potential

candidate for an adulterous relationship!

Disgusting buggers!

Their hearts, which ought to be trained in godliness, are bent only on greed.

15They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; **16**but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

Peter uses the example here of Balaam, a man who was *blessed* with the gift of prophecy.

The King of Moab tried to get Balaam to *curse* the nation of Israel, thinking that prophecy could somehow be used to CHANGE the future, instead of merely foretell what was to come.

Balaam of course, could only declare what God *said* and that was blessing for Israel.

But the King of Moab was frantic and promised a huge reward to Balaam if he would just find some way to curse the Jews.

Balaam was enticed and seduced by the offer of wealth and knew that prophecy was not the route to take.

He simply counseled the king of Moab on *how* to cause Israel to stumble into sin - then God would bring judgment on them.

Think of it, Balaam was a prophet with a genuine spiritual gift.

He even understood the heart, holiness, and ways of God.

But he made *merchandise* of this knowledge of God and bent it to his own greed.

Most false teachers start out as sincere believers and ministers.

They have a gift, often times an effective gift, at teaching or exhorting.

When they obtain a measure of success and popularity, it goes to their head, and growing enamored of their new found power, they start using their position to get more, and more and more.

They *prostitute* their gift and calling and turn it into something *unholy*.

But no false teacher innocently *stumbles* into error. No Way!

They *know* they're twisting the truth into a lie.

Just as Balaam was confronted and warned by the donkey –

they're confronted and warned by the Spirit and other believers who challenge them when they start to get off track. Still they press on – because their heart has gone bad.

17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

False teachers make a promise of something, but they cannot deliver. They are like dry wells and rainless clouds.

Their fate?

It seems God has a special place for them – their judgment is even more severe because not only have they knowingly twisted the truth, but they've sought to take others down with them.

18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

You'll notice this about false teaching – it sounds really good and is spoken eloquently and with great conviction – but if you analyze the words and hold them up to the Word of God, they're void of truth.

They are spiritual Krispy Kreme donuts – sugar on air.

Once again, Peter says that false teachers and prophets attract people by *appealing to their flesh*.

They know that Christians struggle constantly with lust, so they do this little spin number that *excuses* lust and actually *sanctifies* it.

He says they attract people through *lewdness* – meaning false teachers often times appear *avant-garde* – willing to break the mold and defy convention!

This brings an element of novelty into religion, and people who are restless are often attracted to something just because it's *new*.

Like the Gnostics of old, false teachers promise freedom, but since their message appeals to the *flesh*, it's by the flesh they'll be

brought into bondage.

20For if, after they

Meaning the people who are seduced by false teachers . . .

have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²²But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

Friends, Peter’s words here are troubling.

It seems quite clear that he means us to understand that it’s possible for a person to be saved, and then through the deceit of heresy, to fall away and be lost.

In fact, to turn away from the Lord after being saved is worse, he says than never being saved in the first place.

We can understand why this would be so.

God is perfect in His justice and will hold us to varying degrees of accountability.

To whom *much* is given, *much* is required; so conversely to whom *less* is given, *less* is required.

The Lord said that those who had erred more grievously would be punished more severely. [\[1\]](#)

So it stands to reason that those who have been brought to the truth and then rejected it in favor of the *old lusts* and the lifestyle they had once repented of, will be worthy of the greatest judgment.

But then Peter quotes Proverbs 26:11, and by doing so makes us wonder if we’re to understand him to mean a person *can’t* fall away.

A dog *reveals* it's a dog by returning to it's vomit and a pig demonstrates it's nature by once it's clean, going back to the mud.

You can dress a dog up in a suit and tie but it's still a dog.

You can take pictures and go out to dinner.

But when you get home, it's going to go out in the backyard and roll in the grass.

You can dress a pig up in a Donna Karan dress and make a movie with it and title it *Babe*, but at the end of the day, that pig is going to look for a mud hole to roll in.

Look friends, whether we're to understand Peter to be saying that a person *can* lose their salvation or that eventually their *true nature* will come out no matter how much they may *look* like a Christian – the *real point* of what Peter is saying here is this – Heresy is a very real threat to the Body of Christ!

And you can discern whether someone is a false teacher by listening closely to what they are appealing to.

Do they appeal to your flesh or to the Spirit?

Do they promise that if you will buy into what they're saying that you will achieve a place of special standing with God that is *higher* than the rest of the Church?

Do they claim a corner on the revelation of God and give the impression that those who follow them are *better* than others?

Truth will bring us *closer* to other believers, not separate us from them.

CONCLUSION

No, turn back to v. 1 -

¹But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you

We've not seen the end of false teachers.

Peter promised we'd see more of them.

The Spirit warns us that heresy will always present a challenge to the truth.

There are plenty of false teachers today, both well known and those who are still working secretly.

Are you prepared and equipped to discern error?

[\[1\]](#) Luke 12:47-48