



DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES 2 PETER 2

Introduction

Peter exhorted his readers to heed the word of God's prophets. He described the prophets as holy men who spoke forth the word of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Their prophetic word had been confirmed before Peter's eyes and ears by God's voice on the Mount of Transfiguration, affirming His pleasure in His Son (2 Peter 1:17-21). Now Peter reveals that these holy prophets had faced opposition from false prophets, as will the recipients of this letter. False teachers are nothing new. They were a danger in the days of the Old Testament prophets and have been throughout the history of the church. Peter wants his readers to beware of false teachers and their destructive heresies. As a believer, you need to know how to distinguish true from false teaching in order to avoid error and stand firm in your faith. Peter's warning against the false teachers and their destructive heresies is scathing. He recognized the danger as being very real and serious. His description of the depravity, deception and definite doom of the false teachers should quicken your discernment and stimulate you to stand firm in your faith!

OUTLINE OF 2 PETER 2

I. Wickedness of False Teachers - 2 Peter 2:1-9

II. Ways of False Teachers - 2 Peter 2:10-16

III. Wiles of False Teachers - 2 Peter 2:17-22

I. Wickedness of False Teachers - 2 Peter 2:1-9

Peter begins his warning against following false teachers by showing that they are wicked and that they will be judged and destroyed.

A. Their ways are destructive - 2 Peter 2:1-3a

The false teachers will secretly bring in destructive heresies. The Greek, "hairesis" referred to schools of philosophy, but the New Testament writers used the word to describe religious sects or factions based upon false doctrine and the specific teachings of those groups. Peter says the heresies would be brought in secretly. The literal meaning of secretly is "to bring in alongside," which is exactly what the false teachers did. They brought the heresies in alongside the truth.

1. They deny Christ - 2:1

This verse deals with the responsibility of false teachers. They claim to be redeemed by Christ, but their

destructive words and ways bring dishonor upon Him and upon His sacrifice for sin. Thus they deny Him and at the same time bring destruction upon themselves.

2. They are licentious - 2:2

The New King James uses the words "destructive ways," but the Greek is literally translated "licentiousness" or "lasciviousness," referring to shameful ways of conduct. Perhaps Peter had in mind some of the same shameful conduct he had written about in 1 Peter 4:3, *licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.*

a. They blaspheme the way of truth - 2:2

Their behavior defiles and desecrates all that Christianity stands for.

b. They attract many followers - 2:2

It really is not surprising that many would follow the destructive ways of the false teachers. Matthew Henry in The Matthew Henry Commentary, rightly notes that "men drink in iniquity like water and are pleased to live in error."

3. They exploit their victims - 2:3a

False teachers operate in a realm of covetousness, with the purpose of exploiting people. The word "exploit" means literally "to make merchandise, to buy, sell or trade," denoting the greediness with which false teachers manipulate people for their own purposes. The means of the exploitation is deceptive words, the Greek "plastois," meaning "to mold." False teachers mold their words at will to suit their own devious teachings. They flatter, confuse, tickle the ear and entertain in order to captivate and control their audience.

B. They will be destroyed - 2 Peter 2:3b-9

False teachers may think they are getting away with their wickedness, but Peter reminds us that they are already judged and condemned.

1. Their punishment is sure - 2:3 and 9b

God is just and His judgment has always been at work in the world, delivering the godly and punishing the wicked. False teachers will not escape. "Judgment is eager to be accomplished in their case and God knows exactly the punishment and the final judgment they

will accrue. God's judgment does not sleep and is never late" (Kenneth O. Gangle, The Bible Knowledge Commentary).

2. Examples of judgment - 2:4-6

God is the judge of all, and history shows that God will judge all those who sin against His truth (including false teachers). In this passage we are given three examples of God's righteous judgment.

a. The angels who sinned - 2:4

These angels may refer either to those who fell with satan, as recorded in Ezekiel 28:13-19, or to angels who intermarried with mortals, which is one interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4. Either way, the point is that if God judges and punishes evil angels, He will certainly not hesitate to judge and punish ungodly people as well.

The fate of the angels was condemnation to hell. The word translated hell is "tartarus," the mythological Greek abyss where the wicked dead were imprisoned and tormented. Peter uses the image of tartarus, which would have been well known to his original readers, to convey the idea of a special place of confinement until the final judgment. There would be no trial. Their doom was sealed!

b. The ancient world - 2:5 and Genesis 6-8

God judged evil even when it involved the entire human race except for eight persons, Noah and his family. The ancient world was, *corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence...all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth* (Genesis 6:11-12). Only Noah walked with God. Only Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. *By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith* (Hebrews 11:7). Only eight people were spared. Do not think you will find safety in numbers. But if by faith you walk with God, even though you may walk alone, you can be sure that God will not destroy the good along with the bad.

c. Sodom and Gomorrah - 2:6 and Genesis 19:1-26

The destruction of these two cities is an example to the ungodly. Two thriving cities were reduced to ashes for their sins. Their sin brought condemnation and calamity upon them.

3. The righteous are delivered - 2:7-9 and Genesis 19

The example given is Lot. God's dealing with Lot shows that He knows how to rescue the righteous and punish the unrighteous.

A reading of Genesis 19 certainly does not make Lot appear to be a very righteous man, but three times in his letter Peter calls Lot righteous, the Greek "dikaion," literally meaning "just." Peter writes that Lot was, *oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked..... tormented.....seeing and hearing their lawless deeds* (2 Peter 2:7-8). The state of Lot's soul is not mentioned in Genesis, but Peter makes it clear that the vileness which surrounded him was detestable to him, and this attests to his righteousness.

Both Noah and Lot give comfort to believers because God delivered them out of temptations. Christians today also live in a dark and sinful world. Rest assured that God's judgment is not asleep and God's rescuing hand is not too short to reach out and rescue you.

II. Ways of False Teachers - 2 Peter 2:10-16

These verses give a description of those who invite the judgment of God upon themselves. In them we find an apt description of the true nature of false teachers.

A. They walk according to the flesh - 2 Peter 2:10

Being self-centered they live to indulge their own lust and impure ways.

B. They are presumptuous and self-willed - 2 Peter 2:10-11

Their daring audacity leads them to do what even great and powerful angels would not do. They despise authority (the Greek word may refer to either angelic or human authority), and they *speak evil of dignitaries*. "Dignitaries" is a term referring to angelic powers and may designate either evil angels or good angels.

If Peter's reference is to evil angels, the meaning would be that the false teachers had a flippant attitude toward the devil and demons. Jude 9 gives the example of the archangel Michael who contended with the devil but did not dare to bring against him a reviling accusation. Even an archangel did not dare to reproach the devil, but false teachers may have been presumptuously mocking spiritual forces of evil which they did not even understand (2 Peter 2:12).

It is very dangerous to have a flippant attitude toward the devil or any evil power. Christians should never be arrogant or brash in dealing with evil but should humbly rely upon the Lord Jesus (James 4:7 and Jude 9).

But "dignitaries" may be a reference to good angels, those who had a part in mediating the law at Mt. Sinai. (See Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 2:2.) Since the false teachers despise authority, it is likely they would also despise the law and those who mediated it, giving good reason for them to speak evil against good angels.

C. They are like brute beasts - 2 Peter 2:12-13a

Like animals, they are unreasoning and irrational. They act upon instinct and out of fleshly desire rather than rational thinking. Psalm 49:20 (NASB) states that *man in his pomp, yet without understanding, is like the beasts that perish*. Peter says that false teachers will perish in their own corruption. In the Greek, this is a play on words, "they shall in their destroying be destroyed." In this they will be repaid for the wrong they have done, wrong for wrong.

D. They are spots and blemishes - 2 Peter 2:13b

They carouse in the daytime. They don't even try to hide their wicked deeds under the cover of darkness. They even continue to join in with Christians, flagrantly flaunting their lies. The feasts referred to were public banquets where the early Christians gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper (Jude 12). 1 Corinthians 11:20-23 speaks of the abuses at these feasts.

E. They are habitual sinners - 2 Peter 2:14a

Having eyes full of adultery means that their lust is insatiable. They never stop sinning. Sin has become such a habit that they cannot stop. Their deceit is directed at beguiling or "baiting" unstable souls — those who are unsuspecting, not having a solid foundation of faith, perhaps new believers or those not solidly grounded in the word of God. These are the ones most likely to follow false teachers.

F. They practice covetousness - 2 Peter 2:14b-16

They specialize in greed. Their hearts are trained in it. Here Peter gives an athletic metaphor, using a word which refers to gymnastic training. The false teachers train themselves in covetousness. They work out in covetousness and practice their greed just as a dedicated athlete works out and trains for his sport. But the false teachers never have enough of it. They are addicted to covetousness and greed. They are accursed children, a Hebrew term denoting certain destruction from the hand of God.

1. They have forsaken the right way - 2:15

They have left the straight and narrow path and gone astray.

2. They follow the way of Balaam - 2:15-16 and Numbers 22-24

Balaam was proverbial for his greed and false teachers imitate him in that. They are also like Balaam in that they claim to be men of God. They profess to be doing what is right. They go against what they know to be the will of God because of their covetousness and they induce others to sin (See Numbers 31:16).

Balaam so *loved the wages of unrighteousness* (2 Peter 2:15) that he was short-sighted and blind (2 Peter 1:9). His donkey saw what he did not see and rebuked him (Numbers 22:22-33) to turn him away from his mad mission to curse the people of Israel. But still Balaam persisted.

III. Wiles of False Teachers - 2 Peter 2:17-22

Peter has made it clear that the false teachers will be judged, but their wiles are still a destructive element in the church. Their deceptive ways and misleading words are detrimental to true believers, giving them false hopes and leading them astray. Beyond that, their entanglement in the world will lead to their doom.

A. Deception - 2 Peter 2:17-19

The false teachers seem to offer spiritual refreshment, but produce nothing. Their words seem good, but they are empty.

1. They offer empty expectations - 2:17

A well is a promise of water, and a cloud is a promise of rain. Just as a well or clouds without water are deceptive, disappointing, and useless, so are false teachers. They look good and make a good show on the outside, but they are empty on the inside. False teachers are spiritually barren. They do not possess what they pretend to have and they will be judged accordingly. They are men (or women) who choose to walk in darkness, so God has reserved a place of gloomy darkness for them for eternity.

2. They speak empty words - 2:18

False teachers speak words that sound good, but have no substance to them. They are futile, worthless, and without results because there is no truth in them. With their words they attempt to entice baby Christians (those who are new believers or are not grounded in the truth) to be like them in their licentious way of living.

3. They make empty promises - 2:19

False teachers promise freedom but deliver only bondage because they are in spiritual bondage themselves. Jesus said that whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore *if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed* (John 8:34b-36). Freedom does not come from empty words and immoral living. Freedom is found only in God's Son, Jesus Christ. Have you found true freedom in Christ, or are you still living in slavery to sin?

B. Doom - 2 Peter 2:20-22

In the last verses of this chapter, Peter depicts the terrible danger of apostasy. It is difficult to determine whether he is referring to false teachers or their victims but what he says would apply to both. This is a serious warning to anyone who has been exposed to the life-giving truth of the gospel.

Peter is speaking about people who had a definite knowledge of Jesus Christ, had come to associate with other believers, and had probably joined in a church. But they rejected that knowledge to return to the entanglements of the world. The end result is an even deeper corruption than they had at first. These people deserve a harsher punishment than those who have never heard the gospel. In fact, they would have been better off never to have known the gospel at all! Apostasy is worse than ignorance. This is illustrated

by Jesus' words in Luke 12:47-48. *That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with a few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*

Those who have the opportunity to escape the pollutions of the world through knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and yet turn back to the world are like dogs returning to their own vomit and freshly washed pigs returning to wallow in the mire.

Application

1. How discerning are you of the truth? Are you blown to and fro by the windy doctrine of every television preacher, enticed by an entertaining sermon, and swayed by the spurious use of language? Will you become more discriminating through serious study of God's true word? Will you keep a sharp eye and ear for warning signs of heresy as Peter has described?
2. How firmly are you entrenched in your faith? How are you putting into action the truths you are learning in God's word so you may have confidence in your own steadfastness?
3. Are you walking the narrow path of God's perfect will? Who can you encourage to walk that path with you?