

SECOND PETER

Lesson 7

Caricature of False Prophets

2 Peter 2:10b-16

When I began the study of Second Peter, I had no idea how strongly the Apostle Peter felt about false teachers. First Peter is a book of comfort, but Second Peter is a book that disturbs the soul. First Peter is to comfort the afflicted, but Second Peter is to afflict the comfortable. The section we deal with in this message is vigorous and vindictive. It may contain the most vicious language in the New Testament, and it is difficult to preach. Nevertheless, it is in the Word of God, and I must relate it to the twentieth century if I am to be faithful to the Word of God.

Peter is writing against false teachers who had crept into the churches of Asia Minor and who were leading many young and weak Christians astray. They were like guerrilla-fighters picking off stragglers from a combat unit or wolves who wait for animals to stray from the flock. In chapter two Peter has already pointed out that these false teachers were setting forth a type of Christian-Gnosticism, a mingling of a little Christian truth with a lot of philosophical error. They claimed to have been bought by Christ but denied Him and were teaching heresies of destruction that were taking both them and their-followers down the road of eternal separation from God.

Peter makes it very clear that false teachers shall be judged in the fires of hell, not only because they hold to false doctrine but also because they do not hold the true gospel of Christ. No one can be saved until he has the right message about Christ—that He is the God-Man who died for sinners and who was resurrected from the dead to declare men righteous before a holy and sovereign God. All who change their minds about their sinful lifestyles, receive Christ by faith and follow Him shall be saved.

Charles Spurgeon was asked to put the gospel in the simplest of terms. He said, “Jesus Christ died for sinners who trust in Him for salvation.” If a person does not receive Christ as Lord and Savior, then he has followed some kind of false teaching. To follow a wrong gospel of any kind results in eternal judgment, for God will judge all false teachers and their followers. His judgment is certain, for He is a holy and righteous God. He must bring judgment as He did when the angels sinned, when the antediluvian world became so wicked, and when Sodom and Gomorrah accepted homosexuality as a lifestyle. These three illustrations are proof positive that God will judge false teachers and their followers.

In 2 Peter 2:10b-16 Peter launches into a vigorous description of false teachers, making two big points: First, they were described as libertines who were characterized by blasphemy, debauchery and covetousness. Their false teaching led them to the conclusion that they were free to live as they pleased apart from the lordship of Christ. Second, there is a definite link between belief and behavior. Those who are orthodox in doctrine must be orthodox in practice.

True Christian doctrine must produce a moral life. If a person who professes Christ does not see a changed moral life, at least to some degree, it may well be that he does not have sound doctrine and may be following a false gospel. Christian doctrine should always lead to holy living. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).*

THEIR CHARACTER (2:10b-11)

“Daring,...”

In the first part of verse ten Peter said that false teachers, “*indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires*” and he will speak to this issue a little later. He also said that they “*despise authority*” and now picks up on this aspect of their sinister character. He says they are “daring”; that is, they are bold, presumptuous, and audacious, with reckless daring that defies God and man.

False teachers have no use for divinely appointed authority and “despise” (literally “look down their noses at”) any type of authority, whether in the state, in society, or especially in the church.

“self-willed”

False teachers are headstrong, arrogant, self-pleasing and contemptuous of other people. A self-willed person is a man who is an obstinate fellow, determined to please himself. He wants his own way no matter who it may hurt.

It is interesting to note that one of the qualifications for an elder in the local church is that he be “*not self-willed*” (Titus 1:7).

“they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties”

In the Greek this literally says, “They do not tremble when they blaspheme glories” (dignitaries). This is probably not a reference to angels, but rather is about speaking disrespectfully of church leaders. The striking thing about these false teachers is that they fear neither God nor God’s leaders in the church. They would not be subordinate to the God-ordained leadership in the local church and they despised the authority of the Apostles. They did not regard rank, station or office in the church as important.

These false teachers were religious people. They claimed to be followers of Christ even though their system and their lives were filled with theological and moral corruptions.

There is no rebellion against God more heinous than the rebellion of religious people who believe what they are doing is right and do it in the name of God even though it be anti-scriptural and wrong. Such people despise or only tolerate simple Christians, and they are the most implacable foes of true Christianity.

While no Christian believes that division in the church is of itself good, when we study the history of the church we see that division was often the result of a struggle between the established church, which had gone apostate, and the simple believers who wanted to follow Christ and the Bible. The religious establishment often carried on awful forms of persecution against the minority of Christians who wanted to be orthodox, biblical and to maintain a simple faith in Christ. Under such circumstances division may be the right thing, but separation should come only when there is doctrinal and/or moral error.

Sometimes we must separate from false teachers or immoral apostates in order to be true to God and His Word, but we should never divide over personalities, policy or secondary theological issues. Unfortunately, this is where most division takes place, and it

is a sad commentary on the Christian church. However, it is never wrong to divide over false teaching or immoral apostates to preserve true Christian doctrine and ethics.

“whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.”

These false teachers are so rebellious and so self-willed that they will step in where others fear to tread and bring railing accusations against church leaders when even angels would not do that but would rather turn over the judgment to the Lord.

“Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you.’ But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed” (Jude 8-10).

Angels understand submission much better than do false teachers who are self-willed and arrogant.

THEIR CONDUCT (2:12-14)

“But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed”

These false teachers are like animals that have no spiritual reasoning whatsoever, and this causes Peter to glow with moral indignation and to make a direct assault on them. They have animal instincts that dictate their passions. They have left their rationality to follow their fleshly lusts. They live like beasts that first get captured in their lusts and then are destroyed by their passions. Like dumb animals, they are led to the slaughterhouse.

The implication in this verse is that these false teachers are destined for destruction. There is pleasure in sin for the moment and for a little while it satisfies, but in the end it ruins one’s health, wrecks the constitution, and destroys the mind and character. Trapped in his own sin, a person begins to experience a little bit of hell here on earth.

“reviling when they have no knowledge”

These false teachers pour abuse on things they do not understand and curse in matters they do not comprehend. They speak dogmatically out of ignorance. They mock any kind of moral restraint for themselves and others. They speak in ignorance about the true meaning of Christian ethics. They do not understand that true Christianity is inescapably ethical. It is impossible to have a relationship with a good God without becoming a better man.

“will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.”

The eternal fate of these false teachers and their followers is destruction. The wages for doing wrong (going against the will and law of God) is suffering for wrong in eternal judgment. It is true for all men that *“whatever a man sows, this he will also reap”* (Gal. 6:7).

“They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime.”

These false teachers did not confine their drunkenness and sexual immorality to nighttime but also reveled in the broad daylight in the name of God. This kind of debauchery was frowned upon even in degenerate Roman society, and these false teachers were making a mockery of true Christianity.

“They are stains and blemishes, reveling (luxurious, voluptuous living) in their deceptions (love-feasts) as they carouse with you.”

Apparently some of their debauchery was taking place at the Lord’s Table. Some of the ancient manuscripts have the word “love-feasts” rather than “deceptions.” In First Corinthians 11 we are told that drunkenness, and we assume immorality also, took place at the Lord’s Table.

“Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you” (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

In the early church a “love feast” was observed before the partaking of the Lord’s Table, and it was during this love feast that so much drinking, leading to immorality, took place. Hippolytus, a church father, tells us that the love feast was conducted in the daylight in order to avoid slanderous rumors. These false teachers were engrossed in this kind of immorality at the Lord’s Table; therefore they are called “stains” and “blemishes.” What a contrast are these false teachers to Jesus Christ who is said to be the *“lamb unblemished and spotless”* (1 Peter 1:19).

This reminds me of what was said about a libertine clergyman (a man who insisted upon the use of all his Christian liberties). He was transferred to another church, and after being there a few months a woman in the congregation came to him and said, “You are so wonderful; I never knew what sin was until you came here!”

“having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin”

The Greek says, “Having eyes full of an adulteress.” Apparently, these false teachers lusted after every woman they saw, viewing every female as a potential adulteress. False teachers will encourage licentiousness and sexual misconduct. They openly urge people to indulge their lusts freely and shamelessly.

Adultery is so common among Christians today. Even seminary students and ministers are guilty of this gross sin. Let's face it, the world is in our hearts and in our churches. Adultery is sin and dishonors God, making man just a step above an animal.

Any man in the ministry today knows how rampant premarital and extramarital sex is in our society and even in the so-called church. It is a common situation to counsel and hear this kind of story: A man comes to his wife and says, "I'm leaving you." She tells him that it is wrong and he answers, "I know, but I'm doing it anyway." Then he runs off with another woman with whom he has been committing adultery for some time. This situation could just as easily be the woman telling her husband that she is leaving him.

Adultery ought not to be in the Christian church, but it is, and with this sin comes a heavy price to pay. However, adultery, like any other sin, is not unforgivable. In Christ Jesus God can and does forgive; that is a basic message of Christianity.

“enticing unstable souls”

The word “entice” means to “catch by bait.” These libertines lure and hook innocent new Christians or weak Christians by their sweet talk and promises of a life of moral liberty.

There are many professing Christians whose hearts are not established in grace who may be easily turned to sin. Men and women who have emotional problems are often easy prey for false teachers who take advantage of their bodies, minds or money (or all three). This is why Christians must become established in sound teaching, so they will not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Any person not securely anchored to God's Word is an open target for false teaching.

“having a heart trained in greed”

False teachers love the money that comes from beguiled souls. There is big money in false religion. False teachers have an unbridled desire for more and more things—things they have no right to or need for. They have programmed themselves for a life of greed, avarice and materialism, becoming masters at the art of bleeding people of money, knowing all the psychological tricks to get people to give.

We should beware of organizations that are always appealing for money, or who refuse to open their books to the public, or whose leaders live a life of pure luxury. Surely true pastors, evangelists, missionaries and Christian workers are worthy of their hire and should be paid adequate salaries by their churches or organizations, but beware of men in so-called ministries who want an inordinate amount of money to live plush lives.

“accursed children”

These false teachers and their followers are children of a curse. They are under the judgment of Almighty God. They are under His eternal curse.

THEIR COVETOUSNESS (2: 15-16)

“forsaking the right way they have gone astray”

These false teachers went after the flesh and not after Christ. The way of Christ is narrow, but it leads to eternal life; the way of false teachers is broad and it leads to destruction.

“having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness”

Peter astutely uses the example of Balaam in the Old Testament as an illustration of the kind of people these false teachers really are. Balaam was not only guilty of great greed as a false prophet, he also led the children of Israel into immorality (Num. 22:25, 31). He is a tremendous prototype of these false teachers. As a professed prophet of the Most High God, Balaam prostituted his high office for money. While in their wilderness wanderings, the children of Israel encamped in the plains of Moab, and this frightened Balak, King of Moab. So he sent for Balaam (the name means destroyer of the people”) who had projected himself to be a great prophet. The elders of Moab brought handsome divination fees for Balaam. He should have refused the money right then, but instead he said, *“Spend the night here and I will bring back to you as the Lord may speak to me”* (Num 22:8). He sent the elders away, but King Balak sent more prestigious leaders and obviously more money to entice Balaam to curse Israel.

Although the Lord had told him that he was not to curse the people for they were blessed, Balaam told the elders to stay and he would see what else the Lord had to say. He rationalized his situation because he loved money more than God. He proved the adage that every man has his price and he was willing to compromise what he knew to be the will of God.

Disgusted, God said (in our vernacular), “Okay, have it your way.” But when Balaam started out with the elders to go to King Balak, God was angry. The “wages of unrighteousness” had become Balaam’s god.

“but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.”

Balaam had an encounter with God who spoke to him through a dumb donkey. He was so preoccupied with money that he could not see the Angel of the Lord. Here is a clear incident where the prophet was more dumb than an animal. He was so crazed that he carried on a conversation with a donkey and wasn’t fazed by it.

What was the sin of Balaam? Compromise of truth and conviction for money. We also know that when Balaam was unable to curse Israel but only make good prophecies about them, he was still devious, suggesting that the way to overthrow the Israelites was through having them be sexually involved with Moabite women (Num. 25:1-5). This counsel of Balaam led the children of Israel into harlotry, and the blame was laid at Balaam’s feet (Num. 31:16).

Greed and immorality characterized Balaam’s thinking. So also greed and immorality captured the thinking of the false teachers of whom Peter is writing. We know that Balaam was judged by the Lord (Num. 31:8). So, too, the false teachers will be judged, and that without mercy.

CONCLUSION

What lessons does God have for Christians in this section? First, false teachers are to be avoided as much as possible because they can in no way build up a Christian.

“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Rom. 16:17-18).

Second, Christians are to be leery of radio and TV preachers who are constantly begging for money and not support them if they are not sound in doctrine and life. Third, Christians who are new believers or who are weak in the faith need to get grounded in solid teaching so they will not be tossed around by every wind of doctrine. Fourth, Christians must become more and more convinced that right belief affects a right practice, for it is impossible to live by truth we do not know. Fifth, the best way to keep from falling into false teaching is to know and live the true teaching as found in the holy Scriptures.

Are you a searching person? Are you wondering whether you are a Christian? If you have heard that you become a Christian by being good, going to church, being water baptized or whatever, you have been given bad information. A true Christian is one who has met the resurrected Christ by faith and has believed that Christ died for his sins and will take him to heaven. A true Christian should be water baptized, should go to church and do good works, but these things do not save a person. Christ alone saves through faith. Have you trusted in Christ? If you are a searcher, don't let religion or the organized church keep you from finding Christ. Christianity is Christ, and all who believe in Him shall be saved.