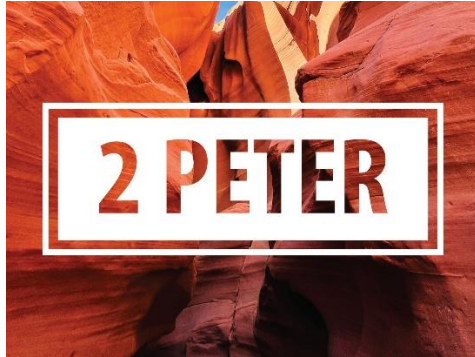




Part 4 – True Words for False Teachers

2 Peter 2:1-10

Peter's approach to the false teachers contrasts sharply with Paul's treatment of the pagan philosophers in Athens to whom he spoke respectfully, seeking to persuade them. Writing to Timothy, Paul wrote that "the Lord's servant" should go about "correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Timothy 2:22-26). So what are we to do with Peter's unabashedly aggressive approach? The key is found in his opening salvo: "There will be false teachers *among you*..." Peter was not addressing pagan

philosophers in Athens. He was dealing with those within the church; teachers who claimed to be Christians – in some cases apostles! – who taught such twisted doctrine and led such ungodly lives that they were leading undiscerning Christians into their own falsehood and debauchery.

It was the proximity and influence of these false teachers within the church that explains the difference we see between Paul in Athens and Peter writing to the churches. Remember Paul's words concerning those who teach a false gospel to the church? He said that they are damned (Galatians 1:6-9). That's not exactly subtle. Nor should there be much subtlety or nuance when the shepherds of God's flock encounter wolves who would lead the church down the path of destruction.

1. The proximity of false teachers

Vs. 1a-b – Just as false prophets (*pseudoprophetai*) arose from within Israel, so will false teachers (*pseudodidaskaloi*) arise from within the church, "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). It is this proximity that explains Peter's heated rhetoric. Traitors from within are more morally repugnant than opponents from without. Jesus warned of this very thing (Matthew 24:4-5, 10-11, 23-24). One scholar identifies three characteristics of Old Testament false prophets¹:

- They lack divine authority.
- They promise peace when God has promised judgment.
- They will be judged by God.

Each of these fit quite well with the false teachers in the church to whom Peter is referring.

2. The problem with false teachers

Vs. 1c – "...who will secretly bring in destructive heresies..." – The term translated "heresies" is modified by "destructive." Peter is not addressing matters over which Christians may disagree without breaking fellowship (Paul identified the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols as one of those issues in which there is liberty among Christians). The false teachers Peter is identifying are spreading "heresies," which have the effect of leading people away from Christ, hence their "destructive" nature.

Vs. 1d – "...even denying the Master who bought them..." – An important question that arises here is that since Peter states that these false teachers are currently under the judgment of God and will face destruction in the final judgment, how can he also state that they have been "bought" by "the Master" (an obvious reference to Jesus)? Is Peter suggesting that those who have been purchased by Christ through his atoning death may possibly lose the very salvation that Jesus "bought" for them specifically? The answer is found in the fact that Peter is using *phenomenological* language, or language of observation. That is, these false teachers claimed to belong to Christ. But just like false converts elsewhere (Judas, for instance) their connection to Jesus went no deeper than the outward trappings of Christianity. Schreiner rightly observes that "Peter said that they were bought by Jesus Christ, in the sense that they gave every indication initially of genuine faith."² As time passed, and their sensual appetites grew, it became obvious that these men were actually wolves (Acts 20:29-30).

¹ Baukham quoted in Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, TNAC (Nashville: B&H, 2003) p. 326

² Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, TNAC (Nashville, B&H, 2003) p. 331

Vs. 2 – “And many will follow their sensuality...” – Given the context and the later reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, it is clear that Peter is referring specifically here to sexual sin. The attraction of these false teachers is that they offer a version of Christianity that makes room for sexual license as one of its benefits. They would have dismissed as legalism all calls to chastity and faithfulness within marriage, as well as any prohibitions against homosexuality.

“...because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.” – The negative impact of the false teachers is not limited to the church. As the lives of those influenced by false teachers become compromised by sexual sin, the gospel will inevitably be maligned by the world who sees the hypocrisy of Christians and responds by mocking Christ. The impact of false teachers goes beyond the church by providing a ready excuse for those outside the church to blaspheme the Lord of the church.

Vs. 3 – “And in their greed they will exploit you with false words...” Peter names their ultimate motive as greed. Above all these men desired the comforts of this life and the pleasures associated with wealth. They saw the sincerity of Christians as something they could “exploit” to their material advantage. The term translated “exploit” was often used as a morally neutral term referring to engaging in business. However, Peter links the word with “greed” and thus exposes the motive behind their “business.” Their “business” was to sell a product that would poison those who purchased it.

“Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” – The destiny of the false teachers is destruction, which is an obvious reference to God’s judgment as Peter is about to explain further beginning in verses 4-10. The terms translated “idle” and “not asleep,” indicate that, contra the false teachers, God’s judgment is not a myth. Indeed, even now the false teachers are under the active (“not idle”) condemnation of God.

3. The punishment upon false teachers

Beginning in verse 4 Peter offers three examples of God’s judgment upon the wicked. He leverages these examples against the false teachers who were denying that Jesus was going to return in judgment.

Vv. 4-6 – Fallen angels, the world of Noah’s day, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are the three examples Peter offers as evidence of God’s judgment. The word Peter uses for hell (*tartarus*) in verse 4 is unusual. It was used in ancient literature to refer to a place of outer darkness, the netherworld.³ Long ago God consigned the rebellious angels to chains, as it were, to await the final judgment. The same judgment awaits the unrighteous in the days of Noah and Lot. The connection is clear enough. Just as God judged the unrighteous in the past, so too will he judge those who corrupt the church with heresies, leading others into their own immorality.

Vv. 7-8 – It may strike some as odd that Lot is described as righteous. Certainly Lot failed in ways that were significant. But he was among the elect of God. And even though his time as a citizen of Sodom eroded some of his good sense, he was still possessed of a conscience that was scandalized by the rampant sexual immorality of the city.

Vs. 9 – The Lord is unfailingly just. He knows how to rescue his own people. He proved this by delivering Noah and his family and, later Lot. And just as surely as he will save and keep his own people, the Lord will also “keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.”

Vs. 10a – Here, Peter adds a point of special emphasis that we must not miss. God will surely judge the unrighteous, “especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.” The term translated “defiling passions” refers to sexually immoral conduct.⁴ Such acts defile the body which makes them especially grievous (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). Notice the connection Peter makes between sexual sin and despising authority. Sexual transgressions are essentially acts of treason against God who alone fixes the purpose of the human body and the design for marriage and intimacy.

Thankfully, within these three examples of rebellion against God and the righteous judgment that follows, there are clearly marked signposts pointing toward grace. Peter reminds us that God is in the rescue and reclamation business. The same Jesus who will return to judge the proud and impenitent will also come to rescue his own. Until then, God’s people must curb their appetite for sin and live in glad submission to the Master who bought them. There is a better feast waiting than anything the world can manufacture.

³ Gene Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) p. 251

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 267