

# False Teachers

2 Peter 2:1-11

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This morning, we're going to take a look at the first half of 2 Peter Chapter 2. Last week, Ben pointed out that one of the purposes for Peter's second epistle is to encourage us to grow spiritually. Chapter 2 gives us a good reason why our spiritual growth is so important with a warning about false prophets and teachers.

We usually associate prophets with foretelling the future. They do that when God reveals the future but more basically, prophets forthtell the Word of God to the people. In that sense we still have prophets today even though the canon of Scripture is closed... today's prophets share what God has already revealed and documented in the Bible.

Something to be aware of, those who call themselves a prophet today are probably not. Saying you have a special word from God for an individual is more like what an astrologer does than a prophet of the Bible.

Teachers are differentiated from prophets in that they expound on God's Word to help people better understand it and see the application in their lives.

- So, for all practical purposes today, there is little distinction between prophets and teachers.

Before Peter warned us about false prophets and teachers in his epistle, Jesus also warned us:

Matthew 7:15 – *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*

False prophets and teachers represent themselves as one of us, but they are actually out to destroy us. As Jesus went on to say, "*you will know them by their fruits;*" their actions betray who they really are.

## **2 Peter 2:1 – The presence & work of false teachers.**

*But 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.*

Even as there were *holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:21), so also there were false prophets and false teachers both then and now.

- Peter stated this as a fact and not as a possibility; and he said they were among us, not just on the outside of the church.

These false teachers *secretly bring in destructive heresies*: It isn't that their teaching is secret, but the deceptive nature of their teaching is hidden. No false teacher ever announces himself as a false teacher.

A heresy is any teaching that is contrary to the Bible. A destructive heresy concerns an essential doctrine, one that has to do with who Jesus is or how a person is saved.

- What makes a heresy destructive is that those who hold to it instead of the gospel of Christ will not be saved from the consuming fires of hell.

People can disagree over non-essential doctrines which Paul called "*disputable matters*" in Romans 14. That is why there are so many different Christian denominations.

- Christians have different convictions about disputable matters but since they're non-essentials, they are not destructive heresies.

However, true born-again Christians will agree on the fundamentals, the essentials of the faith.

We should not think heresies that don't rise to the level of being destructive are not important. Any teaching that is not supported by Scripture is a symptom of not recognizing the Bible as the Word of God. That kind of treatment of God's Word will eventually lead to *destructive heresies*.

The biblical interpretations of false teachers are just made up; they take Bible passages out of context and apply an allegorical meaning to what should be taken literally.

- They engage in an interpretive method called "eisegesis." This means they read into the text what they want it to say.
- And that is contrasted with the more proper method of interpretation called, "exegesis" which lets the meaning come from the text itself.

## Alright, what are some examples of destructive heresies that you have heard?

- Salvation by works
- Universalism – the idea that everyone goes to heaven, and thus there is no hell
- Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead

I had coffee with a guy who was a Jehovah Witness just to see if there was any possibility that he would consider abandoning the destructive heresies taught by his church. But he solidly believed several of them:

- Jesus was a created being
- The doctrine of the Trinity is polytheism... God is one, but the oneness of God is a compound unity and the Bible is clear that the Godhead is revealed in three persons; Father, Son, & Holy Spirit
- The Jehovah witnesses believe a person can accept Jesus as their Savior in the afterlife (which is essentially universalism).

My Jehovah Witness friend was also sensitive to the fact that born again Christians considered his church to be a cult. It is their destructive heresies that makes them a cult.

Someone gave me a simple way to recognize a cult, it's basic math:

- They always add to the Word of God
- They subtract from the person of Christ
- They multiply the value of works
- And they seek to divide the body of Christ

False teachers deny the Lord, despite the fact that Jesus *bought them*. The Jehovah Witnesses acknowledge that you must trust in Jesus to be saved, but their concept of Him is very different from what is revealed in Scripture. And that is a problem because Jesus said...

John 8:23-24 – *You are of this world; I am not of this world [meaning He is not of the creation]. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*

False teachers may have an intellectual knowledge of Jesus paying the penalty for their sin but they haven't personally trusted in Jesus as their Savior. They have no relationship with Him; as Jesus said...

Matthew 7:23 – *I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*

When I consider those I've known who only have an intellectual knowledge of the Lord, a conversation I had with coworkers over lunch comes to mind.

- There were four of us at the table: me, a fellow Christian, a garden-variety pagan, and a Sikh named Irvand.

- Sikh men are often confused with Muslims because they always wear a turban. But they are of a religion started in India that can best be described as a combination of Hinduism, Islam, and apostate Christianity.
- Somehow, our conversation got around to how a person may have eternal life... While my Sikh friend did not have a saving knowledge of Jesus, he knew the Christian gospel and nailed it when he said:  
"Christianity is a very American religion; you don't have to do anything to be saved."

My friend Irvand was exactly right; we are saved by the grace of God; there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor for salvation. As Jesus said...

John 6:29 – *This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent*

The idea that Christianity is an American religion is very similar to a rationale that my atheist brother expressed for why he thought I became a Christian. He associated my moving to Texas with why I became a born-again Christian. He thinks I just assimilated the Bible belt culture of Texas.

I could see how such a rationale could resonate with people who have only met Christians from America.

- That is why it is a genuine blessing to meet Christians from other cultures.

Teresa and I had an opportunity to take a group of Chinese students who were visiting Sul Ross to the national park on a hiking trip. I had in my truck their teacher and three of the students. The teacher spoke excellent English and she was a Christian. We had the most delightful conversation about spiritual matters that reinforced for me that the Holy Spirit is the same in China as He is in Texas.

- As it says in Revelation 5:9, the Christians in heaven will be from *every tribe and tongue and people and nation*
- The students with us couldn't really participate in our conversation because they didn't speak English.

False teachers are deceptive because they often appear to have a godly relationship with Jesus. The worst damage is caused by good men who teach lies.

- Their lies are accepted far more easily because of their good character.

God here promises false teachers swift destruction, even though they aren't judged fast enough in the opinion of many.

## 2 Peter 2:2 – The popularity of false teachers.

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

False teachers may be very popular because they tell people what they want to hear. The Apostle Paul also warned of this:

2 Timothy 4:3-4 – *the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

Just because a teaching succeeds in attracting a crowd of followers, it doesn't mean that it is of God.

- It is always very popular to represent worldly ways as being godly.

False teachers blaspheme the way of truth which means they misrepresent the Lord Jesus Christ. Their lies about Him dishonor and disgrace God's holy name and character.

## 2 Peter 2:3 – The ways & destiny of false teachers

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

False teachers exploit people due to their own *covetousness*, and they inspire their followers to embrace their desire for worldly pursuits.

- They advocate a gospel of self-gratification.
- And their message is presented with deceptive words because false teaching never announces itself.

False teachers are in more danger than they realize because *their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber*: False teachers *will be* judged. Even though it seems like they prosper, their judgment is building up.

- God's wrath pours out on them even in allowing them to continue promoting their destructive heresies.
- This heaps up more and more condemnation on them as their heart grows harder.

## 2 Peter 2:4-6 – God judging the ungodly

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

We know the false teachers will be punished because *God did not spare the angels who sinned*: God judged these wicked angels, setting them in chains of darkness.

- The most egregious fallen angels are in bondage while the bulk of them are still unbound and active.

Angels sinned when they rebelled against God as represented by Satan, the most notorious of the fallen angels...

Isaiah 14:12-14 – *How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ...I will be like the Most High.'*

Satan's pride caused him to rebel against God.

And we know from Revelation 12:4 that a third of all the holy angels turned against God. Some of these fallen angels compounded their rebellion as described:

Jude 6 – *the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*

These angels were put in bondage in hell. They were the "sons of God" described in Genesis 6 who caused the Nephilim, or giants to be born.

- Their plan appeared to be corrupting human DNA so that the Messiah couldn't be born.
- Besides being faithful, Noah and his family were chosen to re-boot humanity because they were "perfect in their generations" per Genesis 6:9.

I've wondered why fallen angels seek to thwart God's plans for mankind. It occurred to me that besides hating their Creator and His creation, God's plan for mankind must have stirred up jealousy among them...

- Men and women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and angels are not.
  - Satan & his angels might have resented this plan to create beings that would be more closely connected to God than they were.
- The Bible tells us that though mankind is beneath the angels in dignity (Hebrews 2:6-7a, 2 Peter 2:11), angels are called to serve mankind (Hebrews 1:14, 2:7-8, Psalm 91:11-12).
  - Satan & his angels might have resented a plan that would require them to serve lesser beings.

- And, on top of that, mankind will be lifted in honor and status above angelic beings when we are resurrected (1 Corinthians 6:3; 1 John 3:2).

Satan & his angels might have rejected any plan that would glorify such lower beings to places above them.

The angels who sinned had pride in their own gifts, and their envy of God's plan for humanity gave them ambition to make their own way.

- The Bible reveals that will not work out well for them.

The fallen angels who mixed it up with humanity in Genesis 6 are now kept in chains of darkness referred to here as hell. There are plenty of fallen angels that did not engage in the Genesis 6 effort to thwart God's plan for the Messiah that are not incarcerated. These are the demonic spirits that are active in our world today and why our preparation for spiritual warfare is so important.

The word hell here is a translation of the Greek word *tartarus*, which can be thought of as the "deepest pit" or the "lowest part of Hades." Hades is a temporary place for the dead who are awaiting judgment.

- The permanent, eternal hell is called the lake of fire in Revelation 20. That is where all the fallen angels and all humans who have rejected God's provision for eternal life will end up.

The book of Revelation names the place where the fallen angels are incarcerated as the Abyss. It is mentioned 5 times in the book of Revelation.

- In Luke 8, Jesus cast the Legion of demons out of a man, "*and they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss*" (verse 31).
- The Abyss is obviously a place that the demons fear and try to avoid.

The fact that this punishment of hell was meted out to fallen angels is a warning to us humans. It is possible for the sin of people be more egregious than angels.

The devil never...

- rejected free grace and the dying love of Jesus
- struggled against the Holy Spirit in his conscience
- never refused the mercy of God.

The term *ancient world* used here is a reference to the time before Noah's Flood. God not spare this world because, as it says in Genesis 6:5, *He saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

God also judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, turning them to ashes thus making them another example of His judgment, *because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave* (per Genesis 18:20).

The message in these 3 examples of judgment reveal some important principles:

- God judged **the angels who sinned**, so *no one is too high to be judged.*
- God judged **the ancient world** before the flood, so *God doesn't grade on a curve*, only comparing man among other men.
- God judged **Sodom and Gomorrah**, so *even the prosperous can be judged.*  
By the way, the prosperity gospel popular with televangelists is another example of a destructive heresy.

The message to the ungodly is that there is no reason to think they can escape God's judgment. Their coming judgment is certain. As Jesus said in Luke 10:10-12, for those who reject the truth "*it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom.*"

## 2 Peter 2:7-9 – Good news for the righteous

*And [God] delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,*

The Lord delivered Lot because God considered him to be righteous and his uncle, the likewise righteous Abraham, asked Him to.

- God knows how to *save* as well as to *destroy*; and His *goodness* led Him to save Lot

Lot was righteous in God's eyes, though perhaps it was hard for others to see that.

- Lot and Abraham were righteous because they both trusted in God's provision for eternal life.
- They didn't know that provision would be the Messiah paying the penalty for sin in His death on the cross.
- But their faith was in God Himself, that He had a plan for them.
- God also knew the wickedness of Sodom & Gomorrah tormented Lot's righteous soul.

Despite Lot's soul being tormented, he failed to take action to separate himself and his family from the ungodliness of Sodom.

- The Lord delivered Lot because of his righteous soul; but Lot lost everything else because of his too-close association with that wicked city.

There is an important principle here for God rescuing His spiritual children... *the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations*: Even as the Lord delivered Lot, He knows how to deliver us from the temptations we face, and He also knows how to reserve the unjust for the day of judgment.

- We can trust in God's deliverance of His spiritual children because it is just as certain as His judgment of the ungodly.

We do not always know how we can be rescued, but the Lord knows how. The Lord orchestrates situations for us that brings us to a point where we have no choice but to recognize our utter dependence on Him.

- As we grow in our relationship with the Lord, we get better at trusting in Him before we have no other choice.
- The unrighteous will get what they are due in time... the Lord knows how to see to that as well.

## **2 Peter 2:10-11 – They are fleshly and proud.**

*[the Lord knows how to... reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment], and 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, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.*

Those who are especially deserving of judgment are *those who walk according to the flesh*: They live according to the way of the world, not the spirit, and are thus marked by uncleanness.

- The flesh is our natural sin nature; our tendency toward selfishness, to put ourselves ahead of all others, especially God.

Those who are especially deserving of judgment are characterized by being *presumptuous* and *self-willed*: These ungodly ones are proud and they despise authority. In their presumption they will even speak ill of spiritual powers which refers to Satan and his demons. The holy angels will not even do that...

Jude 9 – *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!"*

False teachers show this kind of pride and presumption when they advocate personally rebuking the devil as being part of spiritual warfare.

- While we recognize our authority in Jesus, we know that it is only in Jesus that we have any kind of standing at all. And so, we should leave the reviling accusations to Him alone.

Our spiritual growth is especially important today as we anticipate the return of Jesus and the end of the Church Age. Jesus warned us in His Olivet Discourse that among the characteristics of the time before He returns is that, *many false prophets will rise up and deceive many* (Matthew 24:11). We need to be well grounded spiritually to keep from being deceived.

We know that the work of false prophets & teachers will have an impact on the church as we approach the end of the Age because one of the signs of the Lord's soon return is apostasy, a falling away from the faith...

1 Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*

The destructive heresies Peter warned about are most certainly demonically inspired or as Paul said, *doctrines of demons*.

So, the message for us from this passage today is to be aware that there are false teachers among us.

- That is why we each should pursue personal spiritual growth in order to recognize these false teachers and not be deceived by them.

## **Alright, what other observations come to mind from what we looked at this morning?**

Some additional take-aways for me is:

- Examples of God's judgment include angels, the ancient world, and Sodom & Gomorrah; the judgment of modern man will be worse... don't be among those who provoke God's judgment.
- False prophets and teachers face severe judgment; don't get caught-up in their lies.
- The deliverance of God is just as certain as the judgment of God.