

What's the Danger of False Teachers?

[2 Peter 2:17-22](#)

2 Peter, Day 10

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

- 2 Peter 2:17-22, ESV

We had an old beagle for a short period of time before he died. He was the sweetest dog, but having him in our home gave us opportunity to witness first-hand the proverb quoted in verse 22: "*The dog returns to its own vomit.*" It's a very vivid proverb, and Peter here is applying it to false teachers who teach believers to live sinful, sensual, foolish lives.

What exactly does Peter mean by using this proverb to refer to these false teachers? Peter has been strongly condemning these false teachers throughout this chapter. Earlier, in verse 10, he had told us that they "*indulge in the lust of defiling passion.*" Our modern American culture is not the first to be obsessed with sexual immorality. The ancient Roman Empire was awash in sexual debauchery, much of it associated with the worship of goddesses, whose temples were really houses of prostitution.

God had redeemed His people out of this lifestyle of sexual immorality and idolatry. Now, false teachers coming into the church were threatening to enslave God's people once again, as Peter said: "*They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption.*"

For a Christian to be freed from bondage to sin and death and then to willfully return to that bondage is like a dog returning to its vomit or the sow, after washing, returning to wallow in the muck and the mire. It is like a slave being set free from the chains of his bondage then choosing to willingly strap the shackles on his feet again.

Peter was addressing one form of false teaching, those who "*entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.*" But other false teachers follow a similar pattern of returning God's people to the conditions they were in before God rescued them:

Before we were saved by Christ, we were held in the bondage of materialism, foolishly believing that our lives consisted in the abundance of our possessions. "He who dies with the most toys, wins." Christ redeemed us from that and set us free to live for His kingdom and glory instead. Yet Prosperity Gospel preachers would put God's people back into the chains of materialism, this time with a spiritual twist: The abundance of your possessions not only is the measure of your life, but it is also the measure of the strength of your faith.

Christ also redeemed us from the curse of the law, setting us free from a legalistic system of morality that would have us believe that we needed to earn God's favor by keeping His Law, or that we could justify ourselves by our own obedience. Most non-Christians and many nominal Christians believe they will get to heaven because they are "good people," people who generally do the right thing. Christ frees us from the trap of this kind of foolish thinking. Yet legalistic false teachers would have people believe they must measure up and be good enough for God, teaching that God will bless us only as we obey Him and curse us whenever we disobey.

Of course, we should obey God. Wanton sinfulness and open rebellion against God's moral law has no place in the life of a believer. But we obey because we've been saved by grace and richly blessed by God. God's grace empowers us to be able to obey; it is not a reward we receive for our obedience.

False teachers who seek to return God's people to the bondage of sexual immorality or materialism or legalism have plagued the church from the very beginning. Yet they should beware. Peter says, "*For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.*" These are serious words of warning from the apostle, and we would all do well to heed them.