

The central message of 2 Peter is a contrast between true teaching and false teaching – the apostles and prophets on the one hand, and false prophets and teachers on the other.

2 Peter is all about how sound doctrine relates to godly living.

In chapter 1, Peter grounded his exhortation in a reminder of the gospel – the good news of Jesus – that our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, came in the flesh so that by his divine power he might grant us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of desire.”

God became all that we are by nature, so that we might become all that he is by grace.

And then Peter encouraged us to furnish our faith with all the things that faith needs to flourish! Virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, piety, brotherly affection, love – these are not optional add-ons that you opt out of if you don’t feel like it! These are the *way into* the everlasting kingdom of Jesus.

Because it is only if we pursue these things that there will be furnished to us “an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Now in the central part of Peter’s letter, he is contrasting the true apostles and prophets with false teachers – pointing out that false doctrine results in false practice as well.

1. Listen to the Apostles and Prophets (1:16-21) **a. The Transfiguration vs. Myths (v16-18)**

Last time we saw how Peter contrasts the apostles preaching with the “cleverly devised myths” of the false teachers.

Unlike all the cleverly devised myths of his day (and ours), the gospel message was written down by eyewitnesses about events that could be verified by testimony.

The gospel message is a message about what God has done *in history*. It is not simply a message about ethics – on how to live – it is a message about the story of how God has come in the flesh – in order to make us partakers of the divine nature.

How the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ –
which we saw with our eyes –
has granted salvation by faith to the Gentiles.

And Peter emphasizes the Transfiguration

because the Transfiguration reveals the glory of Jesus as the one who will come again
to judge the living and the dead.

The Christian message is a message about what Jesus *has done* –
and what Jesus *will do* –

the *already* of our salvation

(which Christ has wrought through his death and resurrection),

and the not yet of our salvation

(what Christ will do when he comes in judgment at the final day).

You see this regularly throughout the book of Acts.

Christian preaching must always include *both* the message of the cross
and the message that Jesus is coming again.

Without eschatology, the Christian message sounds like this:

Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead

so that you could learn some interesting information,

do some good things,

and then die.

b. The Prophetic Word vs. Human Interpretation (v19-21)

And so Peter contrasts the prophetic word with human interpretation in verses 19-21.

The difference between scripture and all other documents

is that scripture has both a human author and a divine author.

We don't interpret scripture the same way we interpret all other texts.

We recognize that with scripture –

God is speaking here in a way that he does not speak elsewhere.

The question is not “what did the human author think” –

but “what did the Holy Spirit say here?”

So now in chapter two, Peter warns us against false teachers.

2. Don't Listen to False Teachers (2:1-22)

a. Denying the Master Who Bought Them (v1-3)

2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

The basic point is this:

False teachers will use heresies to get what they want.

False teachers follow their own desires – their sensuality –
and as a result the way of truth gets blasphemed (slandered).
And because they do not know the truth – or love the truth –
they will teach false words – they will follow whatever teaching will draw crowds,
and give them money and power and influence.

b. Three Examples from OT History (v4-10a)

Peter then gives three examples from OT history.

Verses 4-10a is all one sentence –
and the ESV keeps it all in one sentence,
so that you can see the flow!

It's an "if-then" construction –
with several ifs leading up to a single *then* – (in verse 9)
“then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials,
and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.”

But if these three things are true –
if the stories of the angels, of the Flood, and of Lot are true –
then you can have confidence that the Lord Jesus knows how to do two things:
First, he knows how to rescue the godly from trials.
He did it for Noah.
He did it for Lot.
And he still does it today.

And second, he knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment
until the day of judgment.
The illustration of the angels in Tartarus
may suggest that Peter is thinking of what happens to the wicked
between their death and the resurrection.
And maybe the language of “rescue the godly from trials”
could be taken in a similar way to refer to being with Christ
in between our death and our resurrection.
And the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment
until the day of judgment – both in life and in death!

And especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.
This final phrase is powerful:
Douglas Moo renders it well:
“going after flesh in a passionate longing for defilement.”

We saw in chapter 1, verse 4, that Peter says that we have
“escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of desire.”
(it's the same word *epithumia* translated as “passion” here).

Our passions – our desires – keep ensnaring us
leading to corruption – leading to defilement.

But don't be afraid –
don't be discouraged when you see the chaos and disaster in our world!

The chaos and disaster is itself a part of God's judgment,
keeping the ungodly under punishment until the day of judgment!
The wicked invariably hamstring themselves!
They fall into the pit that they devised for others!

In the first part of verse 10 Peter identifies two key characteristics of the false teachers:
they indulge in the lust of defiling passion,
and they despise authority.

Their sensuality – their indulgence in the passions –
and their arrogance – their despising of authority –
are the two vices described in verses 10-13:

c. The Sins of False Teachers (v10b-16)

i. Slandering the Glorious Ones (v10b-13)

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, ¹¹ whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. ¹² But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, ¹³ suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, ^[a] while they feast with you.

First, they are “bold and willful” – they are arrogant –
as they do not tremble when they blaspheme the glorious ones.

In the book of Jude, there is a similar way of saying this.

In Jude verse 8, the false teachers
“defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones” –
which Jude contrasts with the way in which the archangel Michael
dealt with Satan in a dispute over the body of Moses
(a reference to an old Jewish story).

The idea here is that the false teachers are slandering demons.
Whereas angels (verse 11) though greater in might and power
do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.

Why are demons called “glorious ones”?

In part because of their origin –
they were once glorious.

But also think about what we saw from the Psalms recently about the gods of the nations.

The gods of the nations have a certain kind of glory.
Zeus, Baal, Odin, Marduk –
 all the nations of the earth have recognized that these “gods”
 are glorious!
They are weighty.
They are majestic – in a way.

And Peter says that even the angels – though greater in might and power –
 do *not* pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.
Even the angels do not slander them – but deal with them respectfully.

But the false teachers, “like irrational animals, creatures of instinct,
 born to be caught and destroyed,
 blaspheming (slandering) about matters of which they are ignorant,
 will also be destroyed in their destruction,
 suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing.”

We don’t know exactly the form that this took –
 but it fits very well with a lot of charismatic speculation about demons.

And especially those who used their charismatic powers
 for their own selfish pleasures.

Note the second part of verse 13:

“They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime.
 They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions,
 while they feast with you.”

They combine their arrogance with ignorance, greed, and lust.

We are called to be “spotless” and “blameless” (chapter 3, verse 14)
 as we wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus.
But false teachers are blots and blemishes!

ii. Greedy Seducers Like Balaam (v14-16)

¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery,^[p] insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! ¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray.

How many celebrity pastors have fallen into this trap?!

They use their preaching to obtain power, money, and sex.
Peter says that they have “eyes full of adultery” –
 they see every woman as a potential conquest –
 they are insatiable for sin –
 they are never satisfied.

Peter uses the example of Balaam:

They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

We hear about Balaam in Numbers 22,
where Balak, king of Moab, summons him and asks him to curse Israel.

Balaam was a famous prophet in the ancient world.

There is another reference to Balaam found in an inscription
on an Ammonite temple in the Valley of Succoth (ca. 840-760 B.C.).
In this inscription, Balaam receives a message from the gods of impending judgment
that no one will survive.

The “mighty gods” had decreed that the heavens would be sewn up,
turning all the world to darkness.

The fragmentary nature of the text makes it hard to piece together the conclusion,
but it is clear that Balaam’s incantations and sacrifices change the course of the gods.

So according to an Ammonite legend (from 800 B.C. or earlier),
Balaam was a truly powerful sorcerer.

He had access to the divine council – and so he knew *in advance* what the gods were planning –
and his words had power to manipulate the gods and change history.

So it’s no wonder that Balak wanted him to curse Israel!

But the LORD would not allow him to curse Israel –
and so Balaam prophesied *blessing* on Israel.

Balak got upset – and naturally refused to pay Balaam –
so Balaam told the kings of Moab and Midian how to curse Israel themselves!
Numbers 31 tells us that “on Balaam’s advice”
the Midianites and Moabites had sent their daughters to seduce Israel
and get the Israelites to worship other gods.

Apparently Balaam recognized that the only way to curse Israel
was to get God’s people to rebel against the LORD!

The lesson is simple:

no curse can harm you –
unless you rebel against the LORD!
Because if you rebel against the LORD,
then *God’s curse* against rebellion will strike you!

But Peter focuses more on Balaam himself.

These false teachers “have followed the way of Balaam...
who loved gain from wrongdoing...”

They desire money, power, influence, and sex –
and their teaching is designed to gain what they desire.

The case of Balaam is instructive!

After all, if you go back and read Numbers 22-24,
you will find Balaam speaking the *truth*.

He proclaims the Word of the LORD faithfully in four oracles!
In other words, false prophets may be good preachers –
who often preach the truth!

You cannot evaluate a teacher based on a handful of sermons!

Think of all those celebrity preachers who have fallen!

(I'm not talking about someone who sinned *once* and then repented –
I'm talking about those who developed a *pattern* of sin and deception –
I'm talking about those who *used their position* as a preacher
to acquire wealth and power and sex).

They may be good preachers.

They may generally preach *the truth*.

So how do you know how to spot a false teacher?

Notice who they attract:

“they entice unsteady souls.”

They attract a devoted following – you might call it a cult of personality –
people who are devoted to a *teacher* –
not devoted to *Christ*.

Are the people around this teacher growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Are people becoming *steady* in their knowledge of the scriptures –
are they growing in their sanctification –
are they becoming more holy and more like Jesus?

The way that you can be sure to avoid these false teachers
is for *you* to become *steady* –

to be firmly grounded in the Word of God –
to know the Scriptures *thoroughly*.

When you know the truth – when you know the way of Christ deeply –
then you will not be seduced by a charlatan.

And the reason why this is important

is because of what Peter says of them in verse 17:

d. The Fate of False Teachers (v17-22)

i. Gloom of Utter Darkness (v17)

¹⁷ *These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm.*

“Waterless springs” – it’s a powerful image in a land where water is scarce!

Peter borrows this from the prophet Jeremiah,
who speaks of how God's people have exchanged a fountain of living water
for a broken cistern that cannot hold water.

Think about that.

A broken cistern.

The whole point of a cistern is to hold water.

In a broken cistern all the water leaks out.

That's like a waterless spring.

The whole point of a spring is that water is coming out of the ground –
so what is meant by a waterless spring?

This is actually a common phenomenon in the middle east.

Springs are often seasonal.

As the water table drops during the summer,
many springs dry up.

So a waterless spring refers to a temporary source of water
that dries up and is unreliable.

This fits very well with the image of Balaam –
who spoke the Word of the LORD faithfully for a short time,
and then “dried up” and led the people astray.

False teachers may likewise be restrained by a donkey for a while –
but then they “dry up”!

For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

They obscured the vision of others – as “mists driven by a storm” –
and so they will receive a judgment of obscured vision as well!
The gloom of utter darkness is reserved for them.

They enticed unsteady souls – they drew people away from Christ –
so they themselves will receive what they sought to do to others.

Why do these false teachers deserve hell?
We see the answer in verses 18-19:

ii. Slaves of Corruption (v18-19)

¹⁸ 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.

In our day, this describes the Antinomian movement perfectly!

Antinomianism is the view that says that how you live doesn't *really* matter.

They say that salvation equals justification –

and if you are justified, then how you live doesn't really matter *for salvation*.

But Peter has already rejected this in 2 Peter 1:10-11 –

“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure,
for if you practice these qualities (and these qualities are faith,
virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness,
godliness, brotherly affection, and love) –
if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

For in this way (in the way of virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness,
brotherly affection, and love) there will be richly provided for you
an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Yes, we are justified by faith.

But the one who is justified by faith will furnish his faith with these qualities –
and thus will be furnished to you
an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As the Reformed have always insisted –

good works are the *way* – the *path* – to eternal life.

Francis Turretin (17th c. Reformed theologian in Geneva) went so far as to say
that good works are necessary subsequent conditions for justification!

In other words, they must necessarily follow –
and if they do not follow in the life of the Christian,
that is strong evidence that there was no justification to begin with!

For the justified there is no other path to eternal life!

The antinomian rejects this path.

The antinomian says that how you live doesn't matter.

You can do whatever you want –
you can follow the sensual passions of the flesh!

The word translated “sensual” has been used already twice in this chapter.

First in verse 2, describing the false teachers:

“many will follow their sensuality,
and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

And then in verse 7, describing how Lot was “greatly distressed
by the sensual conduct of the wicked...”

Now Peter speaks of how the false teachers entice “by sensual passions of the flesh.”

The picture here is that false teachers lure immature Christians away from the faith
by telling them that they can continue to live the way the world does.

We see it all the time.

In some cases, pastors may be afraid that if they insist on gospel ethics
people will leave.

And that may be.
But we don't need to be afraid.
If the gospel is *true* – then gospel ethics will be *good* for people!
We can trust God that if we preach *his message*
he will take care of the rest!

And listen to how Peter contrasts the message of *gospel freedom* –
with the message of antinomian freedom:

¹⁹ *They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves^[g] of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.*

Scholars debate what kind of “freedom” Peter is referring to.
But perhaps Peter is intentionally vague!

Does it matter?

Whatever sort of freedom they promise –
they do not deliver on it!
Consider the antinomian preacher –
Antinomian freedom does not really deliver from corruption.
Antinomian freedom leaves you in bondage to sin!

iii. They Return to Defilement (v20-22)

²⁰ *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.* ²¹ *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.* ²² *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.”*

The language of verse 20 is borrowed from Jesus story of the man who was cleansed of a demon.
The demon went out and found 7 other demons more wicked than itself,
and returned to the man who had been cleansed –
and so “the last state has become worse for him than the first.”

And Jesus says,
So it will be with this wicked generation.

Now Peter takes over this language and applies it to the false teachers and their followers.

As we saw last time at the beginning of chapter 2,
Peter says that the false teachers “deny the Master who bought them.”
Here he says that they had “escaped the defilement of the world
through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”
but again become entangled in the defilements of the world.

There are those who temporarily escape from the defilements of the world.

In other words, they join the church!
They become part of the visible church –
they become part of the family of Jesus –
they are among those who are called “saints.”

If you think about it, we talk about *every Christian* as those for whom Christ died –
but the apostle John will say that “they went out from us
but they were not of us,
if they had been of us, they would have continue with us us.
But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 Jn 2:19)

Here, Peter is talking about how there is a sort of “temporary” faith –
but a temporary faith is *not* a saving faith.
Sure, they escaped the defilements of the world for a short time –
but the fact that they went back to the defilements of the world
is evidence that their knowledge of Christ
was not a saving knowledge of Christ!

Think of the way Jesus says it in Matthew 13 – the parable of the Seed and the soils.
There are some who receive the word with joy –
but they have not the root within themselves –
and so when trouble comes, they wither and die.

That’s very much the same picture that Peter is using here.
They escaped the defilements of the world
through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
but then they return to that same defilement –
they go back to their sin and misery –
“they are again entangled in them and overcome,
The last state has become worse for them than the first.”

Why is it worse for them?
Because now they are immunized to the gospel.
The one who knows the truth – and then walks away –
is very unlikely to come back to the truth.

And think about the way that God’s judgment works:
God judges justly.
He gives to each according to his works.
With the measure that you judge others, God will judge you.
There is a certain “poetic justice” in God’s judgment.
This explains why it is better to *never believe* –
than to believe for a while,
but then “turn back from the holy commandment.”

Because the apostate are simply living up (or down, as the case may be)

to their true nature:

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.”

We tend to like dogs and pigs in our culture.

But in Peter’s day, dogs were not pets – they were scavengers.

And the OT considered pigs to be unclean.

Peter says that the false teachers – and those who follow them –
are simply revealing their true nature.

This is what dogs do – this is what pigs do!

So, what Peter is saying to you tonight is

Don’t be a pig!

Do not throw away your confidence.

Do not return to your vomit!

Do not go back and wallow in the mud!

Cling to Jesus!

Hold fast to him – and do not be overcome by evil.

Do not be enslaved by corruption – by the sensual passions of the flesh.