

A Study of Second Peter
Week Two
2 Peter 2:1-22

Day One

2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

v. 1 – Why are there false prophets? For the same reason that there are false or counterfeit \$20 US notes. The reason is that there are real prophets and \$20 bills. No one's going to imitate something that doesn't exist in the first place. The existence of false prophets should not scare us away from prophecy, but cause us to work to verify those prophets who are real. Peter warned that there also be false teachers among us because there are real teachers. And the false teachers will appear real and will convincingly teach things with authority. Ultimately their teaching will deny Jesus and His role in the life of the Church. We must work to identify the real teachers and prophets.

v. 2 – I heard a Bible teacher say once, “Error is half way around the world before truth ever gets off the mark!” That is so true. False teaching seems to spread like wildfire. I have known some people who heard a bad teaching one time and made it part of their life philosophy, even teaching others the same wrong things that they learned. And this is particularly fulfilled where whole movements like the Mormons and Christian Scientists have emerged from just a few false teachers who attracted many followers.

The early church encountered many such heresies, but in some sense those false teachers forced the early church to determine what was true, and that truth has been handed down to us today. That is why it is so important that we understand what the historic position of the church has been on such issues as Jesus, His Lordship, the Holy Spirit, the Church and other important doctrines. By adhering to the historic position, we can avoid such errors as have arisen by bogus movements such as I mentioned above.

v. 3 – There is a saying, “Follow the money.” Peter stated that the motive of these false teachers is greed. False teachers usually have some ulterior motive for their teaching and its greed for money, power, prestige or any combination of the three. Their motive is never to glorify God or to lift up the name of Jesus. Anyone who detracts from Jesus' person, mission or supremacy has a judgment waiting for them, as Peter pointed out.

I pray regularly, “Lord, keep me from doctrinal weirdness. Don't let me be deluded or deceived.” **Won't you join me in that prayer?**

Day Two

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

v. 4 – We are not told what the rebelling angels did to merit banishment from heaven to hell, a place of gloomy darkness from which they can never escape. We suspect that they participated in the rebellion of Lucifer when he attempted to usurp the worship that was intended for God alone as explained in Isaiah:

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit (Isaiah 14:12-15).

These fallen angels have now taken on evil personalities and are the demons that torment the sons of men and tempt the sons of God. They have been given some freedom of movement and influence until such time as they will be judged and confined for all eternity.

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:10).

All those who don't know the Lord will join the devil and his fallen angels in that same lake of fire:

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15).

v. 5 – It would be easy to ignore or overlook God's judgment as we emphasize his mercy and compassion. But God has judged wicked beings (including men) in the past and He will do so again. Peter gave three examples of such judgment: 1) the angels who rebelled; 2) the ungodly inhabitants of Noah's day; and 3) the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah during Abraham's lifetime.

I heard R.C. Sproul, the Presbyterian Reformed theologian, say that God didn't ever have to give man a second chance. The first time any of us sin, God could judge and punish us. He relents, wishing us to repent, but eventually His patience will run out and He will

move in judgment. The first judgment was a confinement to darkness for the angels, the second was a world flood and the third was fire from heaven. By the way, the flood wasn't regional or localized flood. It was a world-wide event that had cataclysmic impact on our world as we know it. It is my opinion that The Grand Canyon and other such phenomenon were formed not through millions of years, but through the flood.

Day Three

7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

vs. 7&8 – God knows how to judge and how to rescue and preserve. While God destroyed all the inhabitants during the flood, He saved Noah, his sons and their families. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, but spared Lot and his family. God saved Rahab when Jericho was destroyed and He saved the thief on the cross the day Jesus died.

Peter gave us a testimony concerning Lot that we did not have in the Genesis account. We knew that Lot was righteous, for God spared him at Abraham's request that the righteous be spared. We did not know, however, that Lot was so distressed by the filthy lives of the lawless inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is always an interesting thought, though, that Lot chose to live in that area when he chose to separate from Abraham in Genesis 13. You might say that Lot chose unwisely.

This tells me that even righteous men can make bad decisions, for which they must suffer the consequences. But their bad decisions don't affect their salvation, just their quality of life on the earth. I have seen godly women make bad decisions where a life partner is concerned. I've also seen godly men make bad career decisions that have limited their effectiveness for the Lord and caused them much pain.

I am still learning not to trust my own instincts where decisions and guidance are concerned. I recently submitted my name to a search committee for a job opening. On the one hand, I gave my best efforts to get the job. On the other hand, I prayed fervently, "God, I ask that you block this job if it isn't what you want me to do." I didn't get the job and I was disappointed in one sense, but relieved and thanking God at the same time. Remember the warnings in Proverbs:

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice (Proverbs 12:15).

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death (Proverbs 14:12).

v. 9 – The lesson in what Peter wrote was this: God knows how to preserve and save those who are His, while holding those who aren't His under judgment and punishment.

Another graphic example of this is found in Exodus when God was afflicting Egypt with the ten plagues:

"But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow."(Exodus 8:22-23).

Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields — both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were (Exodus 9:25-26).

Do you believe that God holds you in the hollow of His hand? Do you believe that He can cause you to prosper while everyone else around you doesn't? Do you believe He can preserve you while others are afflicted? I hope you believe that—because it's the truth!

Day Four

10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; 11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. 12 But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

v. 10 – These verses are a bit difficult to follow, but I will do my best to comment. It seems that Peter addressed those false prophets and teachers whom he reference earlier. These false ministers were following their sinful nature, even though they were involved in spiritual things. I think these are the same to whom Paul referred:

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things (Phil 3:17-19).

These false teachers were not afraid to slander angels and even secular and church governing officials. It seems that they had such “insight” that they declared themselves superior to all in heaven and on earth. I am trying to think of a modern example, but I am unable to do so. Can you? It is clear that Peter and Paul had certain ones in mind and these false teachers must have been a severe problem. Otherwise they would not have written in such a forceful manner.

v. 11 – Angels are respectful of God's governing hierarchy, even if those in such positions do not honor God:

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals — these are the very things that destroy them (Jude 8-10).

So Peter, Paul and Jude addressed the problem of these obstinate teachers and leaders, so it must have been a serious problem. **Do you respect authority? Are you careful in what you say concerning those in positions of power and authority, even if you disagree with them politically? Are you careful not to speak too strongly against what you don't really understand? I have seen many things in the church, for instance, with which I don't agree or which don't happen according to my taste and preference. I try to be careful what I say. Then there is the matter of some countries in which I speak and work have governments that are evil and corrupt. Again, I am careful what I say, since their authority is from God and God will deal with them. Does this make sense?**

Peter referred to these false teachers and prophets as brute beasts who would be caught and punished. Whoever these men were, they certainly stirred up the ire of the apostles.

Day Five

13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. 14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

vs. 13&14 – These are not innocent, harmless men who happened to be teaching some things that weren't quite right. They did great harm, causing people to emulate and surpass their erroneous ways. This is why James wrote that not many of us should desire to be teachers:

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check (James 3:1-2).

These men were immoral as well, which is consistent with Jesus' warning that we would know the real from the false by their fruit:

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The

good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:43-45).

v. 15 – Peter returned to the motivation for false prophets and teaches, and that’s greed. They love money, power and prestige. I did a study on the connection once between money and the word of God and Paul especially had much to say about the connection. I won’t repeat the study here, but there is one verse that stood out from the study:

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God (2 Corinthians 2:17).

It is hard to imagine that someone would simply peddle the Word, like one would peddle shoes or healing potions. Peter, however, reported that men were doing it in his day and there is no reason why others won’t do it today. Throughout history men and women have devised clever schemes to make money from God and Jesus. Today for example, we have men who peddle clever books with tales of the end times for millions of dollars. The problem is that these books are fairy tales and foment fear in the hearts of readers.

I give these Bible studies away because I felt the Lord promise He would provide for me in other ways as I gave them freely. I am not precluding publishing these studies one day, but I have worked to develop these studies every day for more than four years. I send them out to 6,000 people every week and anyone can sign up to receive them at no cost. No one can accuse me of peddling the word of God in this case.

Day Six

16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey — a beast without speech — who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness. 17 These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

v. 16 – In the previous verse, Peter began to refer to the Old Testament prophet Balaam as an example of someone who peddled the word of God—who made money from his prophetic gift. Those who do the same follow in his evil footsteps. To read the account of Balaam’s story, you can go to Numbers 22-24. It isn’t clear that Balaam was on his way to Balak the king to receive a payment in return for his prophetic services. So the Holy Spirit has Peter finish the story in this letter.

God used the donkey that Balaam was riding toward his appointment with the king to speak to Balaam. Can you imagine a donkey speaking? What’s even more remarkable, Balaam entered into a discussion with the donkey like he would have with a human traveling companion! That is what the love of money in ministry can do to you! It

deadens your spiritual senses, causing you to miss what is an obvious encounter with God. I've worked for several men who, when I look back, were a bit attached to money. They were eager to return to churches who paid large sums of money for their ministry. They were resentful of any situation that did not allow them to maximize their economic return. Now I find myself traveling in faith, relying on my work and teaching to generate the revenue that I need to live and pay my bills. I see today how hard it is to do that, but I also see how attached to money those men were. In many ways, they turned into entertainers, using their music or speaking skills to insure that they had a good chance of being invited back to speak again.

I've seen modern prophets visit large churches, receiving large honoraria for their work. I have watched them give those who sponsor the events positive words promising blessings and riches. In fact, I don't think I have ever seen a so-called prophet give any leader a negative or correcting word. That would be bad for business!

I'm not saying that everyone who receives money in return for ministry is corrupt. I am saying, however, that those of us who do make a living from the gospel or our spiritual gifts must be very careful when we do not to cross over the line and become "hired guns," renting our skills and gifts to the highest bidder.

vs. 17&18 – Peter was a very good writer. These two verses contain a descriptive, visual picture of these word-peddlers. This is why I write as often as I can—to become a better writer. And I am working on being a concise writer. Each week I try not to allow these weekly studies to exceed eight pages. That forces me to use as few words as possible to say as much as possible.

These false teachers and prophets were and are vultures, feeding on the dead and near-dead. Peter condemned them without mercy, seeing them as the harmful creatures they truly were. Can we do any less today? I watch some of the Christian television telethons and see many who could qualify under the same label that Peter used in these verses. They are men who take advantage of weak people, promising blessings if so much money is sent in by such-and-such a time. Who are these men who have such a line to God that they can promise God will perform for a fee within a prescribed time? It is ludicrous to watch, yet their techniques must "work" or they would not be doing what they do as often as they do it.

Do you think I am being too harsh here? If so, please feel free to write me with your thoughts and corrections.

v. 19 – I have seen peddlers promise all kinds of freedom from sickness, suffering, relational problems and lack. I would agree with what Peter wrote. These men and women promise freedom but they can only enslave since they are enslaved themselves. They are enslaved to money, ministry and their image as they minister. They undergo facelifts, hair transplants and makeup makeovers so they can preserve their youthful looks, all for the sake of their image. God wants us to be free from all such nonsense and to be slaves to Him and His will:

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).

Day Seven

20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

vs. 20&21 – Someone who has seen the things of God but then twists those things to use for selfish ends is in trouble. Peter stated that it would have been better had they never gotten involved than to have found the Lord and then perverted His ways. Why? Because once they confuse the spirituality of Christ with greed, they produce a hybrid faith that blurs their vision and reduces their discernment. They begin to use their spirituality for personal gain, believing they have a right to such benefits and developing a persona and image that is almost impossible to change.

Help me, Lord, and protect me from ministry greed. Don't allow me, Lord, to profane your name or to rip off Your people. Lord, if I am ever close to bringing dishonor to Your name, I pray that You will take me to You before that happens. Amen.

v. 22 – Perhaps the problem is how we conduct “conversions” today, being more interested in making converts than disciples. We urge people to come to Jesus to have their sins forgiven and lives saved, but we don't emphasize the hard work that needs to be done in cooperation with the Spirit to put our fleshly deeds to death. We have made it too easy for those who want to “do” ministry to perform. And we have not emphasized theological training for those who show spiritual gifting, rushing them into a public role before they are ready.

I suppose there are many reasons, but the main reason is that the devil is always working to discredit the gospel. He is producing counterfeits or trying to pervert the real deal so that the cause of Christ is damaged and God's creation enslaved. I cannot change the world. All I can do is define and walk out my ministry values in humility and with God's help. I am not the church's policeman nor am I spiritual or smart enough to spot every bogus minister. I must simply develop safeguards with those around me to protect me from error, be open to correction and trust the Lord. I must also follow my heart and if something doesn't seem right to go with my gut feeling without judging or condemning.

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We are in a spiritual war and I should expect some enemy spies who will attempt to pervert my communication from headquarters. But I serve a great God who knows all things and if I keep my eyes on Him, I am certain He will protect me and mine from error and harm.