

False Teachers and Our Response
2 Peter 1:10b-22

“Tell us how you really feel, Peter!” These aren’t verses you find stitched on a blanket or put in a coffee cup!

In these verses, Peter further explains the nature of these false teachers. I called them **theological creepers** last week.

- False teachers don’t walk around and say, **“Hug me, I’m a false apostle.”**
- They creep in like wolves.

It’s a lot of doom and gloom, but **remember Peter’s purpose... 1:5-9**

- In chapter 1, he stated it positively: grow in godliness/knowledge of Christ/fruitful.
- Chapter 2 is making the same point but from the negative side. Cf, Col 1:28-29
- Chapter 1 is what to pursue, chapter 2, what to avoid, to the end that we may grow in godliness.

- I want us to consider the motives and teaching of false teachers, and then consider what our response should be to them.
- As we consider our response, I want to look at the whole book of 2 Peter, and look at the book of Jude (so be ready to flip to Jude).
- As we’ve mentioned, these two books are very similar.
- Most commentaries include these two books in the same volume.

In fact, my preaching professor and mentor, Jim Shaddix, has written an excellent commentary that I’ve consulted along the way, in our CCE series.

- Some of you may know that Jim’s son, Shane, is one of our pastors (and will be preaching in three weeks). As I was preparing for 2 Peter 2, I read an interesting story.
- **Jim explained how he had applied for expedited customs privileges for his international trips, but in the interview process he was flagged because back in 2002 he tried to bring switchblade knives home from the Philippines.**
- **He said he was unaware then that he couldn’t do such a thing, and that he was trying to bring them home for his son’s knife collection.**
- **I don’t know what was more amusing to me: the idea that Dr. Shaddix thought you could just bring a much of switchblades home, or that Shane Shaddix collects knives?**
- **I mean I thought he meant his son, Clint, who is a Navy Seal.**
- **I could see him collecting knives... but Shane is not a Navy Seal.... but he has a knife collection, so I better tread lightly!**

These false teachers were trying to **smuggle in destructive heresies.**

They were **ripping up the gospel, denying Jesus, and denying his return and final judgment, and appealing to others with the lure of wild sexual gratification.**

Peter is warning the church about their destructive influence so that they can avoid their empty teaching, and instead grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

He doesn't tell us what this heresy is, but it's likely some version of **Epicureanism**, which was one of the major schools of thought in the 1st century world (Acts 17).

- They pursued pleasure, sought to avoid pain and distress, calling vices *virtues*.
- They denied God's providence - God's involvement in events of the world (see 2 Pet 3)
- They didn't believe in the afterlife or final judgment.
- It was a popular philosophy and movement. They may have tried to merge aspects of Christianity with Epicurean thought.
 - False teachers today aren't just weirdos on religious television.
 - They may be **pop icons**, or members of a trendy movement promoting something that is not the gospel.

#1: Their Motives (2:10b-16)

It's a blistering description here; it's like hear these words and do the opposite!

A. They're driven by arrogance (10b-13a)

10b "bold and willful" (arrogant)

- Boldness in preaching the gospel is a good thing, but they are preaching a false gospel and doing it with a great sense of presumption and arrogance.
- They follow their own stubborn desires rather than God's will.
- This is the opposite of what pastors/leaders are to be: "must not be arrogant" (Ti 1:7)

"do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones"

- "Glories" - in the sense of supernatural ... we need Jude 8-10 here...
- That is, they were making light of evil spiritual beings, probably mocking the idea that their sins might put them under the mercy of such evil beings.
- They don't take sin seriously and they don't take the evil one and his host seriously.
- There's an absence of humility. No reliance on the Lord.
- They think they can do anything!

11: In contrast to arrogant false teachers, angels – greater in might and power – do not pronounce judgment upon them... meaning, they leave it to the Lord. (Jude 9)

12: Peter again reiterates the reality of their coming judgment on these arrogant teachers.

- **Irrational animals**: they act in subhuman ways." Instead of being like angels, you're like animals!"
- **Creatures of instinct**: Instead of living by the Holy Spirit in pursuit of godliness, they are controlled by their impulses, like animals.
- **Born to be caught and destroyed**: They give an appearance of being free, but are in fact like animals caught in a trap by a hunter and will be eaten.
- **Blaspheming in ignorance**: They present themselves as experts, but it's rooted in ignorance.

13a: They are **suffering for their wrongdoing**.

They're experiencing God's condemnation for their sin.

B. They're driven by sensuality (13b-14b)

13b: They engage in a self-indulgent lifestyle – in broad daylight.

- **“blots and blemishes”** – They are blots on the purity of Christ's church.
- **“Reveling in their deceptions”** – they find joy in their lies.
- **“while they feast with you”** – The early church gathered for a meal and celebrated the Lord's Supper; the false teachers use this time for an occasion for immorality, deception and debauchery.

14a-b: They have **“eyes full of adultery”** – They're constantly looking to sexually seduce or take advantage of someone.

- **“insatiable for sin”** – They cannot satisfy their lusts.
- **“They entice unsteady souls”** – Their like good fishermen, using certain baits to lure people into sin
 - **3:17, Jude: build yourselves up in your most holy faith**

C. They're driven by greed (14c-16)

14c: **“trained in greed”** – Like an athlete training for a game, they pursue greed with passion, ignoring Jesus' words that you cannot serve two masters.

- **Accursed children** – Not obedient children of the Father, but those who stand under divine judgment.

15: They have **forsaken the right way** – obviously!

- They have followed **the way of Balaam** –
- In Numbers 22-24 we read of how Balak, king of Moab, attempted to hire Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel.
- He refused at first, but then took the money and agreed to curse Israel, but instead of cursing them he gave four oracles blessing Israel and foretelling the Messiah.
- In his greed, he suggested another way, that is, have the Moabite women seduce Israel and God brought judgment.
- Balaam is an example of one who brought great destruction upon the people (appears in Rev 2-3 also)
- On his way to meet with Balak, he was **“rebuked for his own transgression”** by a **“speechless donkey” who restrained the prophet's madness**
- The angel of the Lord stood in front of the Balaam's donkey causing it to swerve off the path (Num 22:22-35). In anger, Balaam struck his donkey and in response – the donkey spoke!
- Then his eyes were opened to the angel of the Lord who told Balaam to only speak what the Lord gives.
 - **Good advice I heard: “God chose to speak through a donkey in the OT, and if he speaks through you, don't think too highly of yourself”**

Arrogance, sensuality, greed. Not the marks of one growing in godliness. Let us be marked by humility, holiness, and generosity.

#2: Their Teaching (2:17-22)

Peter is like a forest ranger alerting the church to the dangers...

A. It's Lifeless (2:17)

- Their teaching is empty. It's lifeless.
- Rather than proclaiming the life-giving gospel, they are **waterless springs**.
 - They are dry, as opposed to God who gives thirsty people what they really need.
- Rather than proclaiming the life-giving gospel, they were **like mists driven by a storm**; they were blown around by every wind of false doctrine.
- And their doom is sure **"the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved"**

B. It's Appealing (2:18)

They're persuasive ("enticing" people) in their speaking for two reasons.

- **"loud boasts of folly"** – they have showy speech, but it's folly that they speak!
- **"sensuality"** They appeal to the sexual appetites of others to garner followers.
 - They advocated a loose pagan lifestyle, which dominated the 1st century.
- Some **"barley escape"** their web of lies.

- Real question, since the garden, who will you listen to?
- This is Proverbs the voice of wisdom or the voice of folly?
- Listen to Christ. There is no life outside of him; he is the fount of wisdom.

C. It's Enslaving (2:19-22)

- Instead of proclaiming the real freedom found in the gospel, their teaching **enslaves** others.
- They promise freedom, but don't deliver.
 - They twisted Paul's writings ((3:15-16) on freedom most likely.
 - They offered a freedom from coming judgment.
- Corruption overcomes them and their followers.
- Slavery to sin takes many forms; and only the gospel can deliver a person from bondage!
- We live in a world of empty promises! But Gods word never fails. 1:4

20: This verse further explains the enslavement with an if/then statement.

- **"... through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"** – Peter uses the same language that he used in 1:2-11, inducing that they had professed faith in Christ had some point, but have since proved their profession to be false.
 - They only had the appearance of belonging to Jesus.
- Consequently, they are **"again entangled"** in the defilements of the world.
 - They're caught right back in the same sins that had previously marked their life.
- As a result, **"the last state has become worse for them than the first"** –
 - The greater the knowledge the greater the privilege and the accountability.

21: He reinforces the point here.

- **"the way of righteousness"** – the gospel, and the life of obedience that it involves.

- After knowing the way of righteousness they turn back from **the holy commandment delivered to them** (instruction on how to live out the Christian life)
- It's a wonderful gift to have apostolic instruction passed down to us; and for us some 2,000 years later to be studying it and living in light of it.
- Two ways theology: Psalm 1, narrow gate...
- self centered or Christ centered
- **Tupac, All Eyes on Me, or Peter, All eyes on Jesus**

22: He concludes with a proverb illustrating how they're like irrational animals.

- The **"dog returning to his own vomit"** is a reference to Proverbs 26:11, as a fool returns to his folly.
 - Dogs were rarely pets in the NT (**not like today when they reign over the family! If I could just get Kimberly to look at me the way she looks at our dog!**)
 - They were nasty scavengers, so being compared to a dog is never a good thing.
 - **"those who leave the way of righteousness, never to return, simply show that their inner nature had never been changed in the first place."**
- The second one is no better: **"the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire"** – Now the teachers are compared to pigs!
 - They were also known as filthy animals, known for wallowing in mud after being washed.
 - It's a sad and vivid picture of a person who made a false profession of faith and later returns to the same corrupt lifestyle.

So their teaching: It's lifeless. It's appealing. It's enslaving. It leaves people's nature unchanged.

#3: Our Response

Let's start with the immediate context, & then widen the lens to 2 Peter and then to Jude.

1. Don't be surprised by the presence of false teachers.

- We should expect them, as people who live in the last days. (2:1; Matt 24:9-12)

2. Don't be dismayed by the presence of false teachers

- The Lord knows how to rescue and how to judge! (2:4-10)
- God is aware; he is sovereign.

3. Don't be deceived by the teaching of false teachers.

- They're persuasive but destructive. (2:11ff)
- Titus 1:9 – one of the jobs of a pastor is to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it... Peter is doing that here.
- He doesn't want his people deceived and ensnared.

4. Make your calling and election sure.

- Apparently, some of these teachers once made a profession of faith, but that was apparently not a genuine conversion for they fell back into doctrinal error and moral depravity.
- Peter urged his readers to make their calling and election sure in chapter 1, and chapter two shows the importance of doing that.
- Have you truly placed your faith in Jesus and Jesus alone?
- Are you growing in the knowledge of Christ?

5. Pursue the way of righteousness by growing in the knowledge of Christ.

- This book is about growing in our knowledge of Christ; about growing in godliness.
- (2:20-21; 3:16-18).
- The best way to detect false teaching and avoid it is by knowing the gospel and growing in that understanding.

6. Be a minister of mercy and truth to everyone, including those enslaved by false teaching.

Jude 17-23

¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” ¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

- Verses 17-19 speak of the problems caused by false teachers, very similar to Peter.
- Verses 20-21 highlight some of the same ideas in Peter, with different language and some different emphases: growing in knowledge of Christ (“**build yourself up in your most holy faith**”); confirming your calling (“**keep yourselves in the love of God**”) waiting on the second coming, growing in godliness (“**most holy faith**” praying in the **Holy Spirit**”).
- But then in 22-23, Jude adds this part about how to engage with those who **doubt** and are close to the **fire**...

Be a minister of mercy and truth to everyone, including those enslaved by false teaching.

- God uses his people to rescue others.
- He uses us to rescue all kind of people.
- The text has a **progression** from those least affected (v. 22) to most affected by false teaching (v. 23)

Group 1: Reach out gently. Have mercy on those who doubt (those who are wavering on the faith), because they can be reclaimed (v. 22).

- It is tempting to lose patience with those who doubt, but we must not.
- It’s tempting to be harsh, but we must speak with gentleness and truth. **2 Tim 2:25**

Group 2: Reach out quickly. Don't give up on those who are close to being taken by false teaching (v. 23)

- Go save those who have already given in to sensuality and aspects of this false teaching.
- Before the flames of final judgment take them, proclaim the gospel to them.

Group 3: Reach out carefully. Show mercy with fear (v. 23).

- Judge speaks of those who had already been defiled by the false teachers, and maybe the false teachers themselves, saying that mercy should also be shown to them – but to be careful in doing it (v. 23).
- He doesn't tell them to despise false teachers, but to be merciful.
- Many of us know people who are caught up in cults and false religions, or popular worldview devoid of redemption, and this should grieve us.
- We should pray for them, show mercy to them, and desire to see them saved.

Let us never forget that God has saved us; that He has had mercy on us, and let us minister with love and mercy to this broken world that needs to hear the best news in the world and be set free!