

2 Peter Chapter 2

False Teachers

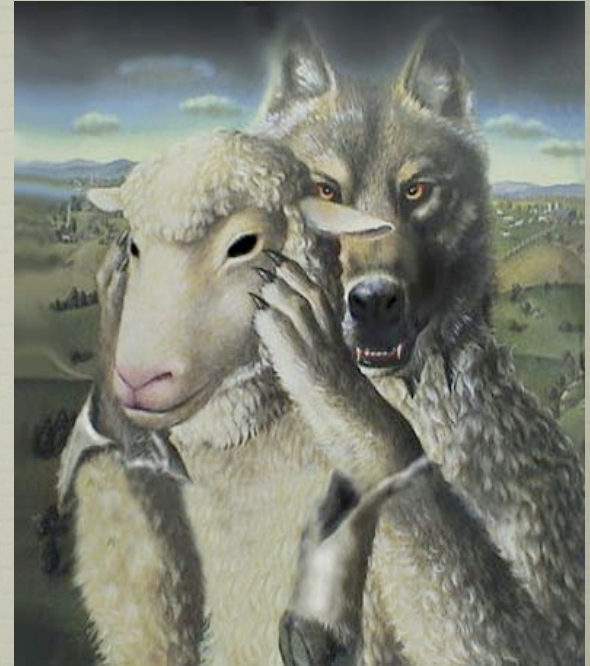
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Remember:

Chapter 1 is about building up true believers.

Chapter 2 is about the false teachers who have infiltrated into the Church.

Chapter 3 is about the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world.



2 Peter is Peter's last will and testament to the Church. As he awaits execution in Rome, he looks to the end, not only of his own life, but to the end of the Church Age. From this perspective, Peter tells believers they need to do three things:

1. They need to do add virtue to their faith (chapter 1)
2. Be keenly aware of false teachers (chapter 2)
3. Be focused on the coming of Christ (chapter 3)

Chapter 2 can be outlined as follows:

- A. The Impact of False Teachers – 2:1-3
- B. The Judgment of False Teachers – 2:4-9
- C. The Characteristics of False Teachers – 2:10-22

A. The Impact of False Teachers – 2:1-3

2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

Peter begins what we call Chapter 2 with a reminder that *false prophets arose among the people* of Israel. For example, Jeremiah 5:31 reads:

*The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it?*

What gives the false prophets, false priests, and false teachers authority? What makes their work possible? God said the reason they exist, and are able to spread their false teaching, is because *My people love it so!* If the people were discerning, false prophets would be immediately squelched. That's why Peter is writing this, so believers will be warned, and, therefore, sensitive to discern false teaching.

Next Peter predicts that just as there were ψευδοπροφήται (false prophets) in Israel – *there will also be ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι (false teachers) among you.*

These false teachers:

παρεισάξουσιν *will bring in [their teaching] secretly*. The false teaching is not announced as an upfront debate against true teaching but will literally be *brought in along side of* or *infiltrate* the truth. They will bring in two things:

- 1 αἱρέσεις, *heresies (sects or factions)*. This word in Classical Greek means *philosophy*, but the New Testament uses it for *sets* (Acts 5:17; 15:5).
- 2 ἀπωλείας, *destruction (or ruin)*. The warning is, false teachers are no small problem, they will destroy every part of the Church where they are tolerated.

Finally, Peter says they will *bringing swift destruction upon themselves*. This is the subject of verses 4-9, so we will consider it there.

The most theologically significant phrase in verse one is *denying the Master who bought them*. This statement confirms the doctrine known as **universal atonement**, which says: the atoning death of Christ paid for the sins of the whole world, not just the sins of the elect (those predestined to be saved). The logic is:

1. The false teachers Peter is speaking of were clearly unbelievers.
2. Jesus is described as *the Master who bought them*. The word for *bought* here is ἀγοράζω, a common word used for the redemptive work of Christ on the cross (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23).
3. Therefore, Jesus redeemed these unbelieving false teachers.
4. Therefore, the atoning work of Christ on the cross redeemed (paid for) the sins of unbelievers.

Therefore, the atonement was *universal* not *limited*.

2 Peter 2:2-3 *Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.*

At the end of this sentence, Peter introduces the next paragraph where he hammers home the prediction that the false teachers will face certain judgment. But first he tells us five things about these false teachers:

1. *Many will follow* them. They are successful numerically.
2. The sin they use to entice people is *ἀσελγείαις* *sensuality (licentiousness or wantonness)*. They will draw people back into the world by appealing to our desire for earthly pleasure.
3. *Because of them the way of the truth will be maligned*. Because of them, the truth of the Word of God will be *βλασφημηθήσεται*, a future passive of *βλασφημεῶ* (*blasphemeo*) to *blaspheme* or *slander*. They will slander the truth – especially of the Gospel.
4. Their motive will be *their πλεονεξία* *greed* or *lust*, apparently lust for power. Although some false teachers are motivated by money, it's rare. Most desire power over people.
5. The way they work is to *exploit you with false words*. Their actions may seem good (clean living, helping the poor, protection of their own), but they must be evaluated by their message, their teaching, their theology, and the way they treat the Bible and the Gospel.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

Verse one makes a strong case for the doctrine known as **Universal Atonement** – Christ died for the whole world not just the elect. **Limited atonement** is part of the theological position known as Five-Point Calvinism. Here are the five points of Calvinism (remembered because the first letters spell TULIP):

Total Depravity – man is incapable, by himself, of doing any good.

Unconditional Election – there is no way we can know who will be God's elect.

Limited Atonement – Christ died only for those (elect) predetermined to be saved.

Irresistible Grace – all the elect will be saved (no elect person can resist the grace of God).

Perseverance of the Saints – the elect cannot lose their salvation (once saved always saved).

The idea of limited atonement is a logical one. If all those who will be saved were chosen from eternity past, then it would be a wasted effort for Christ to die for them. But Limited Atonement is denied by this passage. The New Testament generally seems to confirm the universal nature of the atonement (John 3:16; 5:24; 10:28-29; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2). This is not to say that everybody is saved, only that everybody is savable. The atonement is universal, but individual salvation requires individual faith.

This brings up the more basic question of how we should make theological determinations. Are they to be made by logic or by scriptural statements? Thomas Aquinas helped us by saying all revelation comes from God, but all of God's revelation must be understood with reason. So we bring logical reasoning to the concepts taught in the Bible. The problem is: theology is a study of who God is and what He does. God has told us a lot about that and commanded us to know Him (Deuteronomy 29:29). But He is also infinite, eternal, and hence ultimately unknowable. So the formula is this:

1. Learn about God from Scripture, understanding all concepts logically *line on line* (Isaiah 28:13).
2. Put the logical understanding of one passage together with another to make conclusions.
3. When our conclusions, no matter how logical they may seem, violate the clear statements of some other passage of Scripture, then we must modify those conclusions.

The reason for # 3 is not that Scripture or the nature of God is unreasonable or unable to be understood logically. The reason for # 3 is that we have a shortage of information. There is only so much we can know, and only so much we are told about God, hence our conclusions about the trinity vs. the unity of God, predestination vs. free will, the humanity and deity of Christ, eternal security and the warnings about disobedience, etc. So our logic is a good tool for understanding, but it can only take us to where we are told something else about God.

B. The Judgment of False Teachers – 2:4-9

In this paragraph, Peter uses 3 illustrations of God's judgment:

1. The fallen angels (verse 4)
2. The antediluvian people, contrasted with Noah (verse 5)
3. Sodom and Gomorrah, contrasted with Lot (verses 6-9)



Medieval 1180 AD painting of Hell from www.faust.com

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment

The phrase *angels when they sinned*, does not refer to Genesis 6:1-4 as many commentators suggest. The reason is simple. Genesis 6 is not about angels. There is nothing in the context of Genesis 6 or anywhere else that would say this is about angels. Those teaching this refer to Jude 6, which says:

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

But, as you can see, there is also nothing in Jude which connects the sin of Genesis 6 to angels. The context of Genesis 6 is the Cain line mating with the Seth line. There are simply no angels mentioned anywhere in Genesis 6. Jude and Peter are referring to the same judgment upon angels. Both Jude and Peter are telling us about the judgment for angels *when they sinned*. Angels are the good messengers of God. When they sinned they became fallen angels, sometimes called evil spirits or demons, who followed Satan (Revelation 12:4). Verse 4 is talking about the time when angels originally sinned, not some specific sin they committed.

Peter says God *cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness*. The word *pit* is used repeatedly in the Bible to refer to Hell, or Sheol, a place of eternal suffering (Job 33:28; Isaiah 14:15). Since we know some evil spirits still roam the earth, there must have been some demons so bad that they were *committed to pits of darkness*. It seems that during the upcoming Tribulation period these, or some of these, will be released to torture the people of the earth (Revelation 9:1-11).

2 Peter 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly

Peter refers to the Flood of Noah three times in his two epistles (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:6). *Noah ... with seven others* refers to Noah, his wife, his three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), and their wives (Genesis 6:10, 18). Although we do not know how many angels followed Satan (it seems to be one-third of them – Revelation 12:4), the judgment at the time of Noah was so severe that only Noah's family was saved. The whole antediluvian κόσμος (*kosmos*) world was destroyed.



Noah preaching picture from www.searchingthescriptures.net

Noah is called δικαιοσύνης κήρυκα, a righteousness preacher (or proclaimer). There is nothing in Genesis which would tell us Noah did any preaching, but we must take Peter's word for it. Possibly that is what Peter was referring to in his first letter, when he said, *Christ went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark* (1 Peter 3:19-20). Possibly this means Noah was preaching Christ or Christ was preaching through Noah. Anyway, it seems that Peter is telling us Noah did some proclaiming, not just building. We do know that Noah was surrounded by evil people, and he alone (with his family) found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:5-8).

2 Peter 2:6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter

Both Peter and Jude (Jude 7) refer next to the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 10:15-29). The participle *τεφρώσας*, *burning them to ashes*, or *reducing them to ashes* or *covering them with ashes*, is used only here in the New Testament.



South of the Dead Sea which may be Sodom,
from www.christiananswers.net

Peter concluded this illustration by saying that God *made them* *ὑπόδειγμα*, *an example (model or pattern)* of what is going to happen to this kind of ungodliness, which is sexual immorality, especially homosexuality (Genesis 19:4-5; cf. Genesis 13:13; Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10).

2 Peter 2:7-9 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment

Here we learn two things about Lot we could not know from the Old Testament:

1. He was a *righteous man*
2. He *felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds*

Also, notice that homosexuality is described as *the sensual conduct of unprincipled men*.

A Brief History of Lot

Lot's life was one of much turmoil. After Lot's father died (Genesis 11), he traveled with his uncle Abraham from Ur to Haran and down into Canaan (Genesis 12).





Separation of Lot from Abraham
from lavistachurchofchrist.org

When their herds became prosperous, there was strife between their herdsmen, so Lot separated from Abraham and moved to the southern part of the Jordan valley and lived in Sodom. Even at that time, we are told: *Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD* (Genesis 13:13).

The city then fell to a coalition of northern kings, and Lot was taken captive with the others. Abraham gathered together an army of young men and rescued Lot, who returned to Sodom (Genesis 14).

When God sent angels to destroy the city, Lot took them into his house. When the homosexuals wanted to have relations with the angels (who they thought to be visiting men), Lot tried to talk them out of it and offered his daughters to the homosexuals (Genesis 19:8). Those daughters were apparently already betrothed to husbands who did not believe Lot, when he told them God was going to destroy the city. The angels told Lot to get his whole family, including the sons-in-law, out of the city. So the plan was similar to the Flood of Noah, where Lot's family would be delivered as Noah's was. But Lot's sons-in-law did not come, and his wife turned to a pillar of salt because she looked back at the city.



Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah from russellwebner.wordpress.com

The last we hear of Lot, his daughters got him drunk and had sexual relations with him to become pregnant with Ammon and Moab (Genesis 19).

There is very little in Genesis that would lead us to conclude Lot was *a righteous man who felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds.*

There are a few things we can discern from the Genesis account about Lot:

1. He believed in the God of Abraham.
2. He understood the men of Sodom were wicked sinners. He never condoned their actions.
3. He believed the word of God which came through the angels.
4. He believed in the judgment of God upon Sodom because of its wickedness.

On the other hand:

1. He chose to live in Sodom.
2. He seemed to be afraid to leave Sodom.
3. He offered his betrothed daughters to the homosexuals.

If we were to make a moral judgment about such a man today, would we say he was *a righteous man who felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds*? I suspect not. And that's why we have to leave judgment of character and motives up to God.

But we could do one of the things that the angels did. We could judge his actions. We could tell him, encourage him, and even pressure him, to get away from people like the homosexuals of Sodom. Lot was like many Christians today. He was basically a righteous man. He believed in God, and he believed the Word of God. But he was unable to get himself to separate from the sin around him until the judgment of God forced him out.

Jesus used both the Flood of Noah and the destruction of Sodom at the time of Lot to predict what will happen at His Second Coming (Luke 17:28-31). The point is, wicked godless people will be prospering and carrying on as usual when God brings upon them a swift judgment. This is the description (wealth and prosperity in the midst of immorality) we have of the antichrist's Babylon in Revelation 18.

Peter has a double conclusion:

1. *the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and*
2. *[the Lord knows how] to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.*

This statement most likely means that the individual believer will be rescued by God from his personal temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), and the unbeliever will live in his sin (Romans 1:27) and after death be confined to Sheol/Hades (Luke 16:19-31) until the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

The point of this section is that we can know certain things about the judgment of God:

- God will indeed judge all sin—angelic and human. The biggest moral characteristic of today's liberal is that he or she does not believe in sin. Therefore, they do not believe in judgment. Criminals are thought of as being socially misguided or carrying some violent genes from our evolutionary past. So they need to be rehabilitated or, at worst, contained. For a secular liberal, it is morally okay to murder thousands of unborn babies but not to execute a known murderer.
- God's judgment of sin is not happening now. What is going on now is not judgment, rather *the unrighteous* are being kept *under punishment for a later day of judgment*. The liberal/secular world understands our present situation as progressively evolving a solution to our problems. That always means economic/technological advance in the midst of moral decadence, and the moral decadence is overcome by tolerance and more economic and technological advances. But Peter says this is a time when people are living out a punishment which is the consequence of their sin, awaiting the judgment of God. As the western world advances its technology and more materially prosperous lifestyle, they are not happier. Actually, their prosperity statistically makes them more miserable.

- God's judgment is slow. He is *slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness* (Jonah 4:2). He waits and waits and waits some more, as with the antediluvian wickedness (Genesis 6:5-8) and that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:23-33). So it is with our world today. But slowness should not be mistaken as God overlooking sin. At a certain point, God has had enough, and judgment is certain.
- The temporal earthly judgment of the Old Testament is extended to an eternal judgment in the New Testament. Actually, we see that transition in both eternal rewards and eternal judgment. Walt Henrichsen wrote:

As we seek to trace the footsteps of God through the Old Testament, we note a gradual shift from the temporal to the eternal, the nation to the individual, and action to motive. By the time we come to the New Testament, this transition is complete ("Leadership Foundation Co-laborer Letter," Vol.13, No. 32).

C. The Characteristics of False Teachers – 2:10-22

In the next 10 verses, Peter gives us 16 (by my count) characteristics of false teachers. I shall quote the text as is (in the NASV) but in a form which outlines the 16 characteristics. After I list them, I will comment on them briefly. But before we begin, we should note from verses 20-22 that Peter is talking about those false teachers who have come from within the Church, those who proclaim themselves to be Christians. Now the 16 characteristics:

1. **2 Peter 2:10** *and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires.* The most basic perversion of false teachers is that they take the Church back into the world with its fleshly desires. So they actually make a case for Christians acting like the world.
2. *and despise authority.* This would be the authority of the apostles and all *those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you* (Hebrews 13:7).

3. *Daring.* The word means *daring, bold, or reckless.* Peter is talking about those who daringly pervert the apostle's teaching. [Brian McLaren teaches that making disciples means *to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts.*]



4. *self-willed.* They are self-pleasing, meaning they use others to promote themselves.

5. *they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties*

2 Peter 2:11, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. It is not clear how they were βλασφημοῦντες, literally *blaspheming* angels. Today we see a fascination with demonic activity, but we don't know how they were reviling good angels.

6. **2 Peter 2:12** *But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed.*
2 Peter 2:13 *suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.* I put this all as one characteristic because it all seems to be saying the false teachers are acting like animals. A man is thinking like an animal when he ignores morality, the capacity for judging things as good and evil, thoughts of purpose and destiny, and creativity. Specifically, Peter says *they have no knowledge*, meaning no illumination to understand the truth of God. [Philip Yancy teaches that unrepentant homosexuals should be included in the congregations of our churches.]



7. *They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime.* ἡμέρα means *in the day*, and the Louw and Nida lexicon says the word τρυφήν is *usually associated with intemperate feasting and drinking* — ‘to revel, to carouse, to live a life of luxury.’ So apparently these false teachers are not hiding the fact that they are living in luxury. This word is also used in James 5:5 *You have lived luxuriously on the earth.*

8. *They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you.* Since this is said to be done as they *συνευωχούμενοι ὑμῖν*, *eat together with you*, it probably refers to the way they have perverted the Communion meal gathering of the churches. What they teach is a theological stain and blemish. [Rob Bell says it wouldn't matter if Jesus had a physical earthly father named Larry.]



9. *2 Peter 2:14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin.* Literally *having eyes full of an adulteress*. This could mean they think about committing adultery with all the women in the Church. Adultery is also the figure of speech commonly use by the Old Testament prophets referring to Israel's love affair with the world.

10. *Enticing unstable souls.* The people who follow them are the immature, spiritually unstable believers. Today we have nearly a whole generation of those. [Rick Warren promotes religious universalism.]



11. *Having a heart trained in greed.* *Trained* is from the word γυμναζω (*gumnadzo*) from which English gets the word “gymnasium.” They are exercised in greed like a trained athlete.

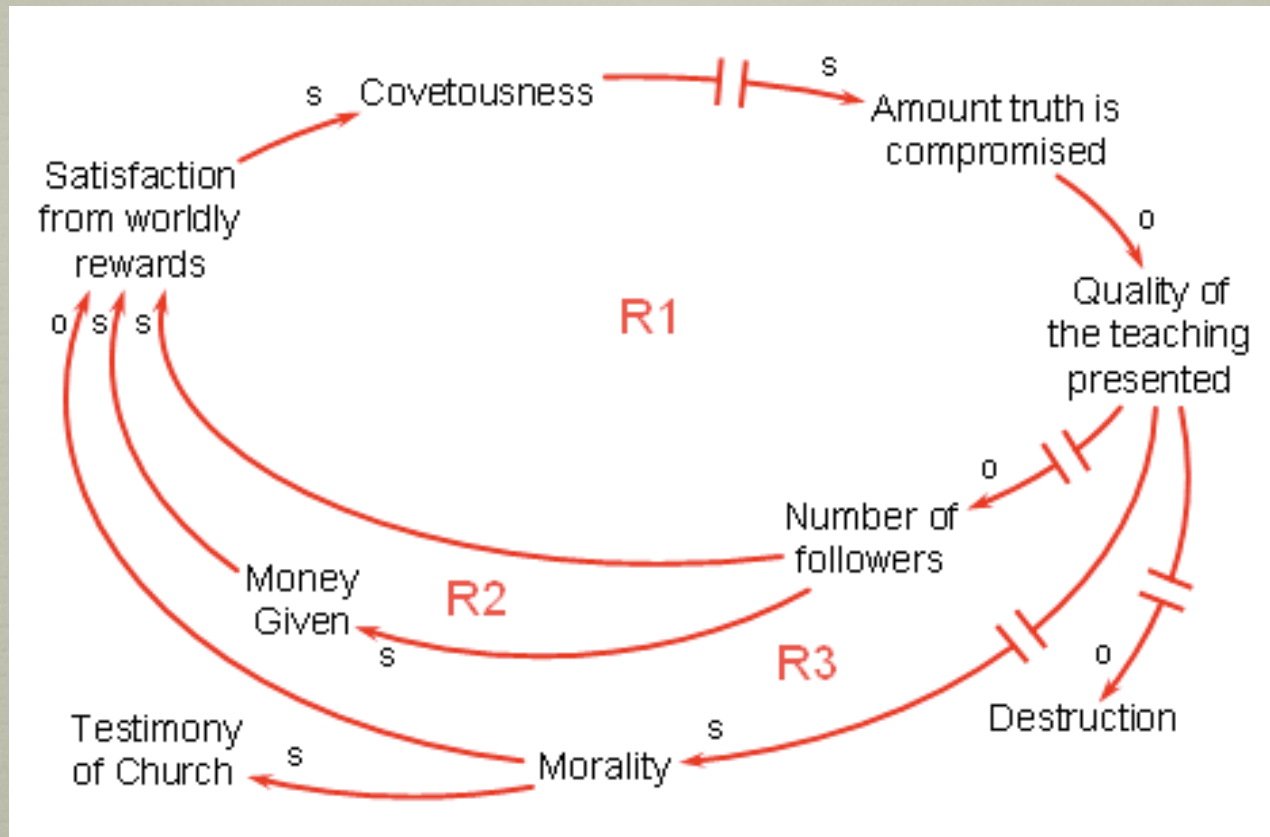
12. *Accursed children.* This could mean they act like delinquent children, or it could mean they are children of God biologically from Adam and Eve who God has determined to be accursed.

13. 2 Peter 2:15 *forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness*
2 Peter 2:16 *but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.* The Balaam sin is that of someone who hires himself to do religious work, and disobeys the Word of God for personal gain (Numbers 22, see also Jude 11).

14. **2 Peter 2:17** *These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.* The idea is that they appear to be springs of water able to nourish and refresh. But they have nothing to actually build people up. This is very similar to the description given in Jude 12. Although Jude was written 6 to 8 years later, he uses these figures to say *These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear.* Both Peter and Jude are probably describing what went on in the gathering of the churches. [Joel Osteen teaches a prosperity gospel, with wealth and prosperity in this world.]



15. **2 Peter 2:18** *For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error.* The NET Bible translates this: *For by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error.* So the false teachers are using deceptive speech to drag new believers back into the world they left for the sake of the Gospel.



False teacher spiral from escalatedthinking.com

16.2 Peter 2:19 *promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.* Ryrie says: *They promise freedom from moral restraints, though they themselves are enslaved by their own depravity.* Apparently, they are criticizing the moral code of the apostles and living a morally loose lifestyle. Peter's point is, their immorality will enslave them with things like addictions and diseases.

2 Peter 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit" and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

In this last paragraph of the chapter, Peter confirms that these false teachers were clearly part of the organized church. They considered themselves to be Christians, the other believers thought they were Christians, and they were part of the assemblies of the churches. But they were never actually believers, and they came out of the world only to go back into it. Peter says it would be better if they had never *known the way of righteousness*. They have returned to the *vomit* and *mire* of the world they came from, but worse off than when they left.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

It is truly fascinating that Peter would spend so much time and energy writing about false teachers. Actually, Christ and all the apostles wrote or taught extensively about false teachers. If we apply Peter's basic points we must conclude:

- False teachers are one of the biggest problems, if not the biggest problem, in the Church.
- False teachers will be present at every age of Church history.
- False teachers will increase as we near the end of the Church Age.
- False teachers will function from within the assembly of the Church.
- False teachers will always take people back in the direction of worldliness. That could be sensual pleasures and materialism (like the prosperity Gospel), but it could also just be progressive liberalism (like the emergent church).
- False teachers will virtually ignore mature Christians. They will write them off as old, out-of-date legalists, who can't communicate with the new generations. Instead, they focus on new and immature Christians, who are more impressed by emotions, mysticism, numbers, numbers, and more numbers.

Peter's statement at the end of the chapter about the final state of false teachers gives us some interesting applications:

- It is possible for an unbeliever to *have escaped the defilements of the world* and be part of the Christian community without ever being saved. They become morally better unbelievers.
- Unbelievers can learn something about *the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. That is how false teachers become effective, they know and teach things about God. They may be able to teach effectively for years before their false teaching becomes evident.
- It is better to never hear about Christ than to know about Him, leave the world, and then return to it. So, for example, if I become a believer and give up on sexual immorality, then later decide to cohabit with my girlfriend or boyfriend, my last state is worse than the first.

- The more people know, the harsher their judgment – at least for unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment. So it is not good to set up a church meeting aimed at bringing in unbelievers who feel comfortable and learn about Christ. It is okay to have a church service aimed at giving the Gospel to unbelievers, but only if it calls for their salvation and does not encourage them to continue to come to church as unbelievers.
- Peter calls the Gospel a *holy commandment*. So the Gospel is not freedom from commandments. It is freedom created by keeping the commandments. It's like flying my airplane. By following the laws of safe flying and having an airplane that follows the aerodynamic and mechanical laws that allow an aircraft to fly, I can fly. My freedom depends upon keeping the rules. If I break them, sooner or later I will crash, and my *last state has become worse ... than the first*.