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MINISTRIES

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Confirm Your Calling: The Danger of False Teachers (2 Peter 2:10b-22)

Welcome back to our verse-by-verse study through 2 Peter. In this teaching, we will be going through 2 Peter 2:10b-22, where Peter continues his condemnation of false teachers.

But before we look at this section of Scripture, here's a summary of what we discussed last time.

1. Peter observes that there were false teachers among the people in the Old Testament, and so we should not be surprised to discover false teachers among God's people today. He notes that members of the community have brought in “destructive heresies,” including denying the reality of future judgment. They have also rejected the Messiah's authority through their sinful lifestyle, a lifestyle that includes sexual immorality.
2. Peter assures his readers that God rescues the righteous and punishes the wicked, citing several biblical examples and certain popular Jewish traditions that his readers were familiar with. We argued that Peter's reference to angels sinning might be drawing upon Jewish traditions influenced by Genesis 6:1-4. Peter also cites God's actions in saving Noah's family and punishing the wicked during the flood, along with rescuing Lot and punishing the wicked during the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.
3. Peter emphasized that “belief” and “lifestyle” are connected. The immoral lifestyle promoted by the false teachers was ultimately borne out of their belief that God would not hold them accountable for their actions on judgment day. Peter warns the false teachers and their disciples that they are in for a rude awakening.

In this section, Peter continues his rebuke of the false teachers. With the hope of convincing his readers to denounce the false teachers, Peter describes their immorality and coming destruction. Peter already mentioned that they engage in sexual immorality and despise the Messiah's authority. He continues this critique by saying that they arrogantly “[blaspheme the glorious ones](#)”. Here's what he says:

2 Peter 2:10b-11

[Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels,](#)

though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.

What does Peter mean when he says that the false teachers “blaspheme the glorious ones”? Who are the glorious ones? Well, in Greek, the term literally translates to “the glories.” Interpreters have often understood this phrase to denote angels. In his epistle, Jude also characterizes his own opponents as those who “blaspheme the glorious ones” (Jude 8). Jude then goes on to tell of an incident involving the archangel Michael, who refrained from personally rebuking the devil but deferred that judgment to God (Jude 9). Based on this parallel in Jude, many think Peter refers to angels as the “glorious ones.” But we shouldn’t just assume that Peter uses the term the same way Jude does. In the context of his own epistle, when Peter uses the term “glory,” it is always associated with either God the Father or the Messiah (2 Peter 1:3, 17; 3:18). So, based on how Peter uses the term elsewhere, it seems he may have God the Father and the Messiah in mind when he speaks of the glorious ones. But either option is possible.

Regardless of how one understands the meaning of “glorious ones”—that is whether it refers to God the Father and the Messiah or to angels—the overall point would be the same. Scripture describes angels as God’s messengers and states that even the Torah was “delivered by angels” (Acts 7:53; cf. Galatians 3:19). Earlier in the chapter, Peter said that the false teachers blaspheme “the way of truth” (2 Peter 2:2), and later he states that the false teachers have turned away from “the way of righteousness” and “the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Peter 2:21). In other words, they have rejected and blaspheme God’s revelation and moral standards. Ultimately, God is the source of the revelation; he is the source of the Torah, even if he uses angels as his messengers. So, if Peter is referring to angels when he speaks of the “glorious ones,” when the false teachers blaspheme the messengers of God’s truth and righteousness, they are ultimately blaspheming God.

In any case, how do the false teachers blaspheme the glorious ones? By calling into question God’s revelation: namely, the truth of the Messiah’s Second Coming and the final judgment. God said through the prophets that the Messiah would return to judge the world, and the Messiah himself spoke of the final judgment many times. By rejecting these biblical doctrines, the false teachers are essentially calling God and the Messiah liars.

In contrast to the false teachers, Peter says that the angels, even though they are “greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them.” Here, “them” might refer to the false teachers. If that is the case, Peter is saying that the angels, being more powerful than the false teachers, refrain from pronouncing judgment against the false teachers. Alternatively, “them” may refer to other angels. If that is the case, Peter is saying that angels do not dare take it upon themselves to pronounce judgment against other angels. The parallel passage in Jude may lend support to this second option: Michael refrained from pronouncing judgment upon the devil. Similarly, if this is what Peter is getting at, the angels do not pronounce judgment upon other angels but defer that judgment to God.

In any case, Peter’s point is to expose the bold arrogance of these false teachers. Here, Peter uses a *Kal v’chomer* argument, an argument from “light” to “heavy.” If even the angels, possessing greater power than the false teachers, refrain from pronouncing judgment, how arrogant must these false teachers be? As mere men, they have way less power and strength than angels, and yet they have the audacity to utter blasphemous judgments against the glorious ones? As Peter goes on to say, their pride will lead to their destruction.

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 2:12-14

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, 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, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

Peter does not pull his punches in describing these false teachers! His main point is that these false teachers are destined for destruction, and he gives several reasons as to why. They blaspheme, engage in revelry and deception; they are greedy and have eyes full of adultery. Moreover, they target vulnerable believers with the intention of leading them astray—a point that Peter elaborates on a few verses later (2 Peter 2:18-22).

Peter also compares these false teachers to “irrational animals.” Like animals, they have no concern for living virtuously (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-11). Instead, they behave purely out of carnal instinct. Therefore, just as animals are made to be hunted and killed for food, these humans, who behave like animals, are destined to be slaughtered on the day of judgment. While believers who live virtuously will be granted entrance into the eternal kingdom (2 Peter 1:11), Peter states that those who blaspheme and continue in sin will “suffer wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing.” When Peter says that they “suffer wrong,” he does not mean that they do not deserve to suffer. The repetition of the words “wrong” and “wrongdoing” is a wordplay (See Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 192). The idea is that those who engage in this immoral behavior will get what’s coming to them—they will be judged accordingly.

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 2:15-16

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

So, according to Peter, the false teachers are not only like irrational animals but also like Balaam. The fact that Peter describes the false teachers as following the “way” of Balaam is significant. In the book of Numbers, Balak, the king of Moab, hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel. But on his journey to curse Israel, the angel of YHWH appeared and blocked Balaam’s way. Balaam’s donkey saw the angel and refused to continue on the path, prompting Balaam to beat the donkey. Finally, the donkey spoke, and Balaam’s eyes were opened to see the angel, who then warned Balaam to speak only what God directs. Thus, instead of cursing the Israelites as Balak desired, Balaam blessed them.

In this story, we see that “the way of Balaam” was an actual path that would have led straight to death had he continued it (Numbers 22:33). The angel said to Balaam, “I have come out to oppose you because **your way is perverse before me**” (Numbers 22:32). The story implies that Balaam’s wrongdoing was motivated by selfish gain, which set him on a path that would have led to death had the angel not intervened. Similarly, like Balaam, these false teachers are on a destructive path that leads to death. They need to be opposed and rebuked, and so Peter is providing that opposition.

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 2:17

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

Peter now characterizes these false teachers as “waterless springs.” In other words, despite their outward appearance, they fail to satisfy thirst. Scripture often uses water as a metaphor for wise instruction that spiritually nourishes believers (e.g., Proverbs 10:11; 13:14). The instruction of these false teachers does not benefit anyone. Peter seems to echo Jeremiah here:

Jeremiah 2:13

they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Peter also describes these false teachers as “mists driven by a storm.” Again, like a mist that swiftly disappears, leaving the land dry, these false teachers do not provide any benefit. Therefore, because of their false teachings and immoral lifestyle, all that awaits them is “the gloom of utter darkness.” Here, Peter may be alluding to Isaiah 8:16-22. In that passage, Isaiah condemns those who do not speak according to “the teaching and to the testimony” (Isaiah 8:20) and instead turn to mediums and necromancers. They have rejected God and his word for a different path—a path that leads to “distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish” (Isaiah 8:22). The way of Balaam ends only in darkness and misery.

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 2:18-19

For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

So, the false teachers specifically target vulnerable or “unsteady” (2 Peter 2:14) believers, “those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.” The false teachers entice them to engage in “sensual passions of the flesh,” such as sexual immorality. They promise these vulnerable believers “freedom” from consequences because they claim that the return of Messiah is simply a “cleverly devised myth” (2 Peter 1:16). They think there will be no judgment, so why not indulge the flesh? But this promise of freedom is empty. These false teachers are not free—in fact, they are “slaves of corruption,” and their way leads to becoming enslaved. Those who indulge in sin become slaves to sin (cf. Romans 6:16).

Let’s continue:

2 Peter 2:20-21

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua], they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

At the beginning of his letter, Peter wrote that, through knowledge of the Lord, believers have “escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:4). For Peter, knowledge of the Lord brings salvation and everything needed for a godly life (2 Peter 1:3). Apparently, these false

teachers used to be on the path of righteousness and had escaped the world's corruption through the knowledge of the Messiah. However, they have become entangled in the world's defilements once again, according to Peter. They used to know and follow the Lord but have now renounced him.

Because of this, according to Peter, it would have actually been better that these false teachers never came to know the way of righteousness to begin with. He writes that “[the last state has become worse for them than the first](#).” As Thomas Schreiner writes:

The former state, of course, refers to their lives before conversion, when they were still enthralled by the desires of the world. The last state designates their recent rejection of the Christian faith. Why was the last state worse than the first? It was worse because those who had experienced the Christian faith and then rejected it were unlikely to return to it again. They would not grant a fresh hearing to the gospel, concluding that they had already been through “that phase.”

—Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 361

Peter describes knowing and following the Lord as “the way of righteousness,” which is an expression taken from the *Tanakh*, the Old Testament (Proverbs 8:20; 12:28). The Psalmist uses a similar expression: the way of the righteous.

Psalm 1:6

[For the LORD \[YHWH\] knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.](#)

Earlier, the Psalmist described the way of the righteous as finding delight in the Torah, meditating on it day and night, and avoiding the bad advice of the wicked (Psalm 1:1-2). The way of the righteous leads to blessing and good fruit, while the way of the wicked leads to death (Psalm 1:3-6). For more on these two ways, see our teaching, [Studies in Psalms: The Way of the Righteous \(Psalm 1\)](#).

Peter picks up on this familiar biblical theme of the two ways. For Peter, those who have been rescued by God and who have come to know the Messiah must walk the way of righteousness, a life characterized by obedience to God's laws. The false teachers have rejected the way of righteousness for the way of Balaam: “[Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam](#)” (2 Peter 2:15).

Peter also says that the false teachers have rejected “[the holy commandment delivered to them](#)” (2 Peter 2:21). Here, “the holy commandment” is another way of saying “the way of righteousness” (Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), 196). This holy commandment was “[delivered to them](#)” (παράδιδωμι), which is the same Greek word Jude uses when he speaks about the faith that was “delivered” to the saints (Jude 3). So again, Peter's concept of “faith” or “knowledge” of the Lord necessarily includes walking in righteousness; it is a “holy commandment.” Peter's opponents were taught this way of righteousness but decided to walk a different way—the way of Balaam, the way of the wicked—a way that ends only in death.

Peter concludes this section with a Proverb:

2 Peter 2:22

[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.”](#)

So, like a dog that returns to its vomit, or a sow that sullies herself after washing, these false teachers are in an even worse position than they were in before they came to know the Lord. As Callan writes:

The dog and sow both behave in ways that parallel the backsliding against which the author warns. Having expelled something harmful from his body, the dog returns to it. Having been washed clean, the sow makes herself dirty again...they are not improving their situation but, rather, are returning to a worse situation, from which they had escaped.

—Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), 190-191.

Believers often debate whether it is possible for someone who puts their faith in the Messiah to then walk away from the faith. Many say no. In fact, one of the “five points of Calvinism,” known as perseverance of the saints or eternal security, declares that it is impossible for someone who truly puts their faith in the Messiah to then abandon that faith. But 2 Peter 2:20-22 strongly indicates that it is possible. According to Peter, the false teachers and their followers apparently had knowledge of the Lord by which they escaped the world’s corruption. They apparently knew the way of righteousness. They were believers! But they “turned back” to the ways they walked in before they knew the Lord. They understood the “[way of truth](#),” but walked away from it—even worse, they “blasphemed” it (2 Peter 2:2).

Peter’s words here should be received with their full force, just as they were intended to be received. Peter was trying to warn his readers of the consequences of deliberately turning away from the Lord and going the way of Balaam. As we learned in the previous teaching, God will punish the wicked (2 Peter 2:4-10). May we take these warnings from Peter seriously. May we hold fast to the truth and not depart from the way of righteousness.

“Forsaking the Right Way, They Have Gone Astray”

Every so often, you’ll hear about some Christian “celebrity” who has decided to renounce their faith. Often, it is a former worship leader, megachurch pastor, or another person of influence. They’ll post an announcement on social media talking about how they were involved in ministry their whole life, and how they truly loved Jesus, but ultimately they have decided that faith is just not for them. Posting “deconversion testimonies” online is a popular trend.

Many who decide to “deconvert” will then cite what they consider problems with Christianity, such as the Bible’s stance on sexual ethics or “problematic” Bible passages that they think paint God as mean and judgmental. Instead of pumping the brakes on their public platform, they reorient their platform to revolve around why they now believe Christianity is the scourge of the earth. It’s not enough for them to leave the faith personally; they want to take others with them, targeting vulnerable believers who have doubts or weaknesses for certain sins. They want to free people from what they consider such a terrible and restrictive belief system.

“People don’t need to abide by the Bible’s antiquated constraints on sexuality!” They proclaim. “There will be no eternal consequences, so do what you want! And by the way, judging others is bad and Christians are bad for doing it!” This is the typical message that such people promote.

Until the end of the age, there will always be those who renounce the faith and try to take others with them. We must stay steadfast in our faith and boldly preach the truth, despite the pressure and mockery

of scoffers (2 Peter 3:3-4). This often means calling out false teachers and refuting their arguments, exposing them as opportunistic frauds. Like Peter, we should make it clear that their promise of freedom is a lie; they themselves are, in fact, slaves of corruption (2 Peter 2:19). Despite their promises, abandoning the Bible's sexual ethics and indulging the flesh ends in misery and emptiness, not happiness and freedom.

It is also our responsibility to minister to vulnerable believers, those who have doubts (Jude 22). We should offer them encouragement and assist them in finding answers to their questions about God and the Bible, ensuring that we thwart the efforts of false teachers to lure them away. This requires becoming equipped in apologetics and acquiring the knowledge and tools to articulate a positive case for the faith and answer objections from critics. For resources in this area, you might consider 119 Ministries' **Answering Atheists** series as a place to start.

May we stand firm and take this responsibility seriously, as Peter did.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

*Remember, continue to test everything.
Shalom!*

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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