

Book: 2 Peter
Series: True Faith vs. False Teaching:
Add To Your Faith, Knowledge
Lesson 9: General Description of False
Teachers
Text: 2 Peter 2:1-3
Date: Sunday, October 28, 2012

Colonial Hills
ABE
Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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TEACHING TIP

In this lesson, you will want to avoid two potential issues that might arise from the phrase “denying the Lord that bought them”—limited vs. unlimited atonement and questions relating to lordship salvation. I think if you keep to the notes, you will circumvent these discussions.

NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

2 Peter 2:4-10a – *Great Destruction of False Teachers*

INTRODUCTION

*Two roads diverged in a [yellow] wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

~ Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” 1916

Although not written with this passage in mind, Robert Frost’s poem provides a fitting picture of what we’ve learned so far through 2 Peter compared to 2:1-3. We’re at a crossroads—two paths diverge in front of us. One path is labeled “truth”; the other, “error.” The paths seem to differ only a little at first; however, the further from our sight the paths extend, the further from each other they become, for truth (truth → excellence → godliness → confidence) and error (error → lust → debauchery → destruction) could be no more different.

Like Frost’s road, we also notice that one path is frequently traveled, while the other is chosen by only a few (cf. Matthew 7:13-14). However, as with him, taking “the one less traveled by” will make “all the difference,” for only that path provides “an

entrance...into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (1:11).

In our study of 2 Peter so far, we've carefully explored the path marked "truth" (i.e., "true faith"). Throughout the next three weeks, we turn our attention to the second path marked "error." We will examine this path in similar detail via the following three-week outline:

- 2 Peter 2:1-3 – *General Description of False Teachers*
- 2 Peter 2:4-10a – *Great Destruction of False Teachers*
- 2 Peter 2:10b-22 – *Grim Details of False Teachers*

This week, we begin with an overview of this path, and our aerial view helps us understand the origin, character, and destruction of those who lead people along this path of error.

THEIR ORIGIN

Verse 1 begins by telling us about the origin of these false teachers. In the Old Testament, while some "men from God" (1:21) were "borne" by the Holy Spirit to write those things that truly were "from God" (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10-12), there were also "false prophets" (Gk. *pseudoprophetes*) among God's people. Nothing has changed, Peter warns, for even today "there shall be false teachers [Gk. *pseudodidaskalos*] among you" (v. 1). These teachers have "followed after" fables (1:16), allowing their own imagination and impulses to drive them into falsehood.

Paul likewise warned of this subtle beginning to deviation. In Acts 20:28-32, he counseled the pastors at Ephesus:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that...of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.



Application: Why is this particular origin so difficult and dangerous? (1) *relationships and friendships have been formed; trust has been built; personalities have been enjoyed—all this stands in the way of a believer who needs to make a clean break from error unto truth;* (2) *it's easy to overlook things that are close at hand—so, error may mushroom secretly in our own midst until it blows up in our face;* (3) *open discussion*

What did Paul say was the antidote to such "arising from within" false teaching? *For the church leadership to "take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock" by "feeding" it God's Word and "warning" it about falsehood, thereby commending the church to God and the Word of His grace which alone can build up the flock. In other words, men are not the answer, but we have the answer in God's Word. We will know deception from without and within when we know the truth regularly ("watch and remember"—cf. 2 Peter 1:12-15).*

What commitments should we make among ourselves in light of the propensity for some from "among us" to deviate and indoctrinate? (1) *to be more committed to God's Word than to personalities;* (2) *to test all of our counsel to and from each other by God's Word;* (3) *to warn one another when we begin in our attitudes and beliefs to stray for doctrine, even when it is physically and emotionally wearying ("three years...night and day...with tears");* (4) *to hold our pastoral leadership to a high standard of truth-exposition;* (5) *to engage corporately in the "ministry of memory" (cf. 1:12-15);* (6) *open discussion*

Transition: Having briefly reviewed their origin, Peter now spends the majority of his time revealing the character of false teachers.

THEIR CHARACTER

Notice a progression in their nature of deception.

1. *They teach deception.*

These false teachers use “feigned words” according to verse 3. The word “feigned” [lit. *fabricated, false*] refers to something that is “mentally constructed without a basis in fact” (BDAG), that which is “molded...[or] shaped as desired” (WSDNT), or that which is “made-up, invented” (LN).

Illustration: “Interestingly, the English word *plastic* is derived from the term false/[feigned] (*plastos*). In keeping with its etymological roots, *plastic* originally had the connotation of something not completely authentic. After all, plastic items often look as if they are manufactured from another substance, such as wood, metal, china, and so forth. Thus plastic at first glance ‘deceives’ consumers. In a similar way, false teachers deal in phony doctrine. Their theology is not really based on biblical truth, but only molded by false reasoning to appear genuine (cf. Col. 2:8, 20–23; 2 Tim. 2:14–18).”¹

Verse 1 further identifies these “false teachers” as those who will “privily...bring in damnable heresies” (v. 1). The idea underlying “privily bring in” is that they introduce something in addition to something else, and usually do so through manipulation and secrecy. Thus, the deception is doubled—deception in both message² and method.

The only other time this word is used is in Galatians 2:4. In that passage, we discover that when Paul, Barnabas, and Titus arrived in Jerusalem, they were confronted by “false brethren secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (NKJV). The particular error that these false teachers were “bringing in” alongside truth was that certain works must accompany faith for

salvation (cf. 2:11-16). So subtle was that erroneous addition to the gospel message that Peter (and Barnabas) would be led astray by it (2:11-14)—and notice, it didn’t cause him to start preaching that gospel message, but it certainly caused him to shy away from the true message in practice. This subtle, erroneous addition actually caused him to sinfully separate when he should have been boldly fellowshiping!

Application: So, local church believers must especially guard the true gospel; they must “watch” and “take heed” lest the gospel be diluted (in proclamation or practice) through addition to it.

2. *They deny Jesus.*

The deviation of these believers extends to “even denying the Lord that bought them” (v. 1). “The conjunction even underscores the unthinkable magnitude of the false teachers’ arrogance.”³ The word “denying” means “to disdain, repudiate, disregard” and is used in Luke 9:23 when Jesus informed His would-be disciples that they must “deny [themselves] and take up [their] cross daily and follow [Him]” (cf. Titus 2:12). In direct opposition to that call, they reject their sovereign and saving Master (Gk. *despotes*). Therefore, in the words of Paul, they have “a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5)—they are self-deceived first of all (cf. Titus 1:15-16).

Illustration: MacArthur explains the historical context underlying the phrase “denying the Lord that bought them”:

The phrase who bought them fits Peter’s analogy perfectly. He is alluding to the master of a house who would purchase slaves and put them in charge of various household tasks. Because they were now regarded as the master’s personal property, they owed their complete allegiance to him. While false teachers maintain that they are part of Christ’s household, they

deny such professions through their actions—refusing to become servants under His authority. Bought (agorazō) means “to purchase,” or “to redeem out of the marketplace,” and in this context is parallel to Deuteronomy 32:5-6 (cf. Zeph. 1:4-6). The false teachers of Peter’s day claimed Christ as their Redeemer, yet they refused to accept His sovereign lordship [Prov. 19:3; cf. Ex. 5:2; Neh. 9:17], thus revealing their true character as unregenerate enemies of biblical truth.⁴

This is the heart of their character—they have spurned Jesus. Thus, they know nothing of the precious nature of faith, for its substance is a relationship with God through Jesus; they have never been a partaker of the divine nature (including living in grace, peace, and everything necessary for life and godliness) through Jesus (1:1-4). Therefore, they have no faith to which to add excellence, and so, as we will see, all the other virtues that true faith produces are absent in their lives.

3. They are driven by lust.

Since they have rejected Christ’s saving lordship, they have not “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (1:4). Therefore, instead of adding to their faith excellence (leading to self-control), as a true believer would, they add to their deception lust (which also is a natural addition).

Verse 3 records that “through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.” The goal of these false teachers is to “make merchandise of” or “to exploit” people—we’ll discuss this in our final main point; their means of doing this is with “feigned words”; and their motive is “covetousness.” This word is used throughout the New Testament to primarily refer to material (Luke 12:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:5) or sexual

(Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5) greediness. BDAG uses the word “insatiableness” as a fitting translation. Their base and insatiable appetites will be described in more detail through the rest of the chapter.

4. They practice debauchery.

James writes in 1:14-18 that

Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err [lit. be deceived], my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

This natural progression is illustrated by these false teachers. Their commitment to deception (James 1:16) and rejection of Jesus’ sufficiency (James 1:17-18) perpetuates a spiritual blindness that feeds their lust and produces debased living (James 1:14-15). In our passage, such debased living is called in verse 2 “pernicious ways” (KJV), “shameful ways” (NIV), “sensuality” (ESV, NASB), or “debauched lifestyles” (NET). That last rendering best expresses the sense of this term (cf. Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 2 Peter 2:7; contrast with 1 Peter 4:3). Louw and Nida define this term (Gk. *aselgeia*) as “behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness—‘licentious behavior, extreme immorality’” (BDAG, “self-abandonment”; in the vernacular, sensuality “on steroids”). These who pretend to be spiritual guides and moral teachers practice immorality to a degree that isn’t even generally accepted by the world!



Application: So, what are we to make of a self-proclaimed, seemingly enlightened spiritual leader who is unrestrained in his moral choices? *that he is a false teacher who has given himself to a message of deception, the fountainhead of such debauchery*

Why is this the only right conclusion? *Because of the unbroken chain that starts with deception, as described in these verses by Peter.*

In light of this and our next point (#5 below), why does Paul elsewhere insist on qualifications for pastoral leadership (requiring that pastors be removed if they fail to meet the qualifications)? *It is very likely (as our own personal experience unfortunately testifies) that even genuine men of God will fall into a sin of debauchery (e.g., David, Noah, etc.); however, when God's people deal with that sin by confronting, removing from office, and eventually restoring the erring pastor, that church's faith is demonstrated to be in keeping with chapter 1; on the other hand, false teachers teach and do falsehood, without any accountability. Thus, as proclaimed "spokesmen for God," they do terrible damage to the true reputation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the attractiveness of His gospel.*

5. ***They defame the gospel.***

The terrible result of this corrupt progression of character is that "by reason of [these false teachers] the way of truth shall be evil spoken of [or maligned]" (v. 2). "The way of the truth refers to right doctrine and the accurate proclamation of the gospel (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; cf. Matt. 7:14; John 14:6; Acts 16:17; 18:25-26)."⁵ More immediately, it refers to Peter's doctrinal teaching on true faith in chapter 1. Deception and debauchery among those who profess biblical and spiritual guidance cause the Word of God to be blasphemed (Titus 2:5), the adversary of God to be bold (Titus 2:8), and the gospel of

Christ to be blemished (Titus 2:10). So, the saving ability of Christ is mocked and the sufficient reputation of Christ is rejected by those who have been further blinded by the deceiving debauchery of false teachers.⁶

Now, such a slanderous outcome is combated by godliness—in other words, while deception and debauchery are powerful agents of blasphemy, truth and godliness are powerful agents of witness. Peter already expressed in his first epistle that the progression of true faith (i.e., truth → excellence → godliness) will inevitably result in glory to God and the salvation of some onlookers (cf. 1 Peter 2:11-12, 15; 3:16). However, in this epistle, when he considered the progression of true faith in chapter 1, he only delineated the personal benefits (i.e., truth → excellence → godliness → personal confidence [1:8-11]). But, when he explains the progression of false teaching in chapter 2, he shows the corporate consequence (i.e., deception → lust → debauchery → Christ slandered and people destroyed). It is as if he contrasts the personal benefits of true faith with the corporate consequences of false teaching to heighten our sobering need to choose wisely between these two paths!

Application: To the one who has preached to himself the gospel (1:1-4) and is adding to his faith excellence (1:5), the natural result of false teaching should be grievous and angering (cf. Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-16). Do you lament the blasphemy suffered to the name and reputation of Jesus, or do you not even recognize that He has been offended? Do you stand strong as an ambassador for a pure picture of your Lord and Savior, or do you quietly ignore the important battlefield called truth vs. error? By your own lifestyle are you contributing to the defamation of the gospel? Orthodoxy and orthopraxy cannot be divorced.

Application: “To counter these relentless, satanic efforts, the church must be doctrinally pure, and Christians must live the kind of righteous lives that make the transforming power of Christ believable. With this in mind, the apostle Paul exhorted the Philippians, ‘Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world’ (Phil. 2:15; cf. Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10; 5:8; 1 Thess. 2:12; Titus 2:5, 7, 14; 1 Peter 2:9-12).”⁷

Transition: As Peter surveys these false teachers before he dives into the details of verses 4-22, he finally overviews their destruction.

THEIR DESTRUCTION

Peter discloses two aspects of the destruction of false teachers.

1. *They bring ruin on others.*

This is pictured in two phrases in our text—“many shall follow their pernicious ways” (v. 2) and “they shall...make merchandise of you” (v. 3). False teachers have “followed” fables (1:16) and the “wages of unrighteousness” (2:15), and they have not done so alone. No, some have “followed” them in their deviation.⁸

Furthermore, they exploit people, for that is the idea of “making merchandise of.” They dupe people into enriching their own pockets. The very ones to whom they “minister” are actually deceived into ministering to them.

Verse 18 summarizes well the ruin these evil men bring into the lives and home of those they lead—“For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error” (NKJV).

2. *They will be ruined.*

Three times in these three verses, the word “destruction” (Gk. *apoleia*) is used, and once “judgment” or condemnation is used (Gk. *krino*). While this is the emphasis of verse 4-10a, we learn much about the ruin of these false teachers in the first 3 verses.

a. *It is pronounced by God.*

Verse 3 reads, “Their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (NASB). Like an executioner, their judgment is wide awake, ready at God’s word to bring justice to bear upon them. This will not be surprising for “throughout history, from the first pronouncement of judgment on the serpent in the Garden (Gen. 3:13–15), God has condemned all those who distort divine truth (cf. Isa. 8:19–21; 28:15; Jer. 9:6–9; 14:14–15; Zeph. 3:1–8; Rev. 21:8, 27).”⁹

b. *It was picked by them.*

While this judgment has been decreed by God in eternity past, these false teachers have asked for it through their series of choices. They “bring upon themselves swift [or imminent, cf. 1:14] destruction” (v. 1). It is unavoidable.



Application: Do you pity people who are led astray; like Christ, are you “moved with compassion” for those who are like sheep without a shepherd or in the selfish care of a hireling? Do you grieve over the blindness of such people, or do you spurn their ignorance?

How big of a deal is the whole truth vs. error issue? *a very big deal*
According to Titus 1:9-16 (esp. v. 13), what should be our ultimate desire in confronting false teaching? *“that they may be sound in the faith”*

CONCLUSION

*Two roads diverged in a [yellow] wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

~ Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” 1916

Chose your path wisely.

ENDNOTES

¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *2 Peter and Jude*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 78-79.

² The word “heresies” refers to “that which distinguishes a group’s thinking: opinion, dogma” (BDAG). Part of their opinions would certainly be contrary to what Peter has already grounded these believers in throughout chapter 1—the precious nature of our faith, the necessity of productivity in our faith, the importance of remembering truth, and the very sure foundation of our faith upon God’s Word.

³ MacArthur, 72.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶ “True Christianity is blasphemed, reviled, cursed, condemned by outsiders who see professed Christians running to all manner of excesses. ‘If that is Christianity,’ they will say, ‘curse it!’ When many follow such excesses, outsiders are unable to distinguish and so blaspheme the whole ‘way.’ These false exponents seem true products of the way to them” (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* [reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966], 307 in *Ibid.*).

⁷ MacArthur, 78. Perhaps a review of what we learned in lesson 3 of our study through Titus—<http://www.singlefocusindy.org/titus>.

⁸ “The Bible is clear that many more people follow the broad way that leads to destruction than adhere to the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13–14; cf. 24:10–12). In part, credit is due to false teachers for the popularity of the ‘wide road,’ as they usher people onto the broad way and encourage them not to look back. Their message of independence, personal freedom, and self-exaltation is inherently appealing to fallen human hearts, who would rather serve themselves than submit to Christ” (*Ibid.*, 76).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.