

Week 8 - The Depravity of False Teachers - 2Peter 2:10b-17

Scripture Reading: Jude 8-13

Introduction

There is disagreement in the church today about how to handle false teachers

There are those who believe we should always call out those who teach wrongly by name and condemn them and others who believe Christians hurling accusations at one another only harms the cause of Christ

They believe the better approach is to be tolerant and that being known by our love for one another is more important than doctrinal purity

That certainly fits in with the ethos of our day when tolerance is considered to be the premier virtue

If you were a fan of the original Star Trek series that debuted back in the mid 60's you will remember the handheld weapons carried by the crew called phasers

And you will remember how Captain Kirk often gave the order to his crew to "Set phasers to stun" when he merely wanted to incapacitate someone rather than to kill or completely disintegrate them

In the passage before us today, Peter has his phaser turned all the way up as he takes aim at the false teachers within the church who were leading people astray

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter paints a stark portrait of false teachers because he wants his readers to recognize them - and, as we just heard in our Scripture reading, so did Jude

And the purpose of recognizing them is so that we can avoid them and not get sucked in by their falsehood and the condemnation and destruction that result from following them into sin

The seriousness of the danger means that Peter doesn't mince words or sugar-coat his description of the false teachers as many of our day might prefer because his desire is to be perfectly clear - these people are depraved; stay far away

If you haven't already done so, please join me in your Bible at 2Peter 2 (page 1019) and follow along as I read from the last half of verse 10 through verse 17 [**2Peter 2:10b-17**]

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. 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! 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.

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

If you are taking notes, the first thing we will see is that Peter says the false teachers are **daring and obstinate**

Then we will see him describe them as **animalistic**

And, finally, we will see that they are **chronic sinners** as Peter relates a list of their sins

I want you to notice that Peter primarily focuses on the demeanor and behavior of the false teachers which shows us the results of their teachings in a very practical way

And, having just stated in the first half of verse 10, which we looked at last week, that the false teachers indulged in "defiling passion and despise authority" Peter now expands on those terms in these verses

And he begins by characterizing the false teachers as daring and obstinate

I. Daring and Obstinate

There is a positive aspect to being bold or daring and we often honor men and women who take chances - those adventurous spirits who courageously push the limits

But there is also a sense where being daring is evil and that's the sense that Peter intends here as he is stating that the false teachers are presumptuous and show contempt for convention

These are people who openly and brazenly defy what is right without any thought to the consequences

Then Peter says the false teachers are "willful" meaning that they are self-willed

The Greek word he uses here combines the words for self and pleasure

They are men of arrogant self-interest who stubbornly live for their own gratification without regard for the rights, feelings, and interests of anyone else and will even defy God if they think it will get them what they want

There theme song could very well be Frank Sinatra's "My Way"

We read of this kind of individual in **Proverbs 21:24** which says:

"Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

And he continues in verse 10 saying [**2Peter 2:10**] *"they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones"*

There are some differing opinions as to who Peter meant that it is that the false teachers blaspheme

The Greek word Peter uses is *doxas* which means "glories" but it seems evident that he is referring to heavenly beings or angels

And the attitude of the false teachers is revealing of their self-importance when you consider the usual reaction in the Bible of anyone who comes face to face with an angel which is to be very much afraid

One camp says that Peter is following Jude's argument closely and therefore he means the fallen angels

Another camp says that Peter has in mind holy angels and that would seem to fit better with the term "glorious ones" because it seems kind of odd to refer to Satan and his demons as "glorious"

It's also a bit difficult to imagine angels slandering other angels but that's the way verse 11 would need to be interpreted if fallen angels were the ones blasphemed

If fallen angels are in view then the sense would be that "the false teachers aren't afraid to speak against fallen angels whereas even holy angels with all their power don't speak against fallen angels in the presence of the Lord"

This is one of those instances we come across in biblical interpretation where we simply cannot be dogmatic but I tend to lean toward the interpretation that the false teachers slander the holy angels

With that interpretation Peter would be saying that even though they have been arrogantly slandered, the angels, who would have far more right to accuse them, don't level a charge against the false teachers

In other words, they recognize that pronouncing such judgments belongs to the Lord

Either interpretation serves as a warning for Christ-followers not to take over the Lord's place as judge as we also see in **James 4:11-12** where James writes:

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Next, in verse 12, Peter says that the false teachers are animalistic [**2Peter 2:12**]

II. Animalistic

Whatever the exact meaning of the previous verse, it's clear that the false teachers are overreaching their position and are dealing in matters that they don't understand

The word "irrational" means to be without reason or brutish

The same word is found in Jude 10 where Jude uses it in the same manner as Peter does here and also in **Acts 25:27** where Luke records Festus saying that it seemed "unreasonable" to him to send a prisoner without charges

And that helps us to get a sense of what the word means

The false teachers claim to have special wisdom or insight, but in fact they are more like beasts that are unable to reason and talking smack about things they know nothing about

And Peter says they are simply acting on instinct which is to say their behavior isn't governed by reason but by their base desires - they are controlled by feelings and not facts

Like animals they live in the moment with no thought to the consequences of their actions

Well-known minister and commentator Matthew Henry described this kind of person this way:

Men, under the power of sin, are so far from observing divine revelation that they do not exercise reason, nor act according to the direction thereof. They walk by sight, and not by faith, and judge of things according to their senses; as these represent things pleasant and agreeable, so they must be approved and esteemed. Brute-creatures follow the instinct of their sensitive appetite, and sinful man follows the inclination of his carnal mind; these refuse to employ the understanding and reason God has given them, and so are ignorant of what they might and ought to know.

People haven't always been as sentimental toward animals as we are today and they didn't tend to personify them as readily as we do

But, believe it or not, they were debating the rights of animals and whether or not they should be killed or could rightly be mistreated as far back as the fifth century BC

And the debate centered on the beasts' lack of rationality or ability to reason

Aristotle, and later both the Epicureans and Stoics, denied animals the faculty of rationality and concluded that they didn't need to be shown justice

Animals, as irrational creatures, were for the slaughter - that was their purpose

That became the prevailing school of thought that was handed down and set the stage for Peter's denunciation of the false teachers as irrational animals and his conclusion that they were destined for destruction

Peter goes on to say that the false teachers' nature dooms them to destruction and, like animals, they are born to be caught and killed

I don't think Peter would have been a friend of PETA

Earlier, in 1:4 [**2Peter 1:4**], Peter said that Christ-followers have "escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire"

And the word translated there as "corruption" is the same word here translated as "destruction"

So, in a sort of play on words, Peter is saying that the false teachers haven't escaped the corruption - in fact they will be corrupted in their own corruption

In seeking to destroy the faith through sensual living and enticing others to join them, they themselves will be destroyed as their very nature puts them on the path to certain destruction - it's their destiny

It's what they have earned as we see in the first part of verse 13 [**2Peter 2:13a**] where Peter says their destruction is the wrong they suffer for doing wrong or *"the wage for their wrongdoing"*

And in the remainder of verse 13 through verse 17 Peter shows them to be **chronic sinners** as he reels off a list of their sins

III. Chronic Sinners

First, he says [**2Peter 2:13b**] *"They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime."*

To count something is to make a calculation - to think about a thing and come to a conclusion about it

So the first thing we want to notice is that they have considered their ways and decided to delight in doing wrong right out in the open

Reveling in the nighttime is nothing new

It's the normal state of affairs as Jesus taught in **John 3:19-20** –

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But here Peter says that the false teachers show no restraint and practice their hedonism in the daytime for all to see

They have cast off all restraints and find it all the more pleasurable to flaunt their wickedness

And their lack of public shame is astounding

Then, as if he hadn't made his point clearly enough, Peter adds that these people are *"blots and blemishes"*

He says they are defects that exist as unsightly and unwanted stains

The community of Christ-followers is to be without "spot or wrinkle" as we read in **Ephesians 5:27** meaning that it is to be morally pure

But here we see the false teachers within the assembly and taking part in the Lord's Table and marring what would otherwise be a righteous time of remembrance turning it into a time for carousing

That's the meaning behind the word "feast" - it indicates not a simple meal but an elaborate banquet

And he again says they joined *"reveling in their deceptions"* meaning that they transformed the holy ordinance into a time to pursue their carnal appetites - under their influence the Lord's Table became a drinking party

They were not there to commemorate the Lord but to indulge themselves

Like a foul odor or an unsightly stain, their mere presence polluted and marred that which should have been holy

Second, in verse 14 [**2Peter 2:14**] Peter says that these men are sexual predators and unsafe for the community of believers

Their hunger for lechery is limitless as he says their eyes are full of adultery and their appetite for sin is insatiable

Sadly, sexual sin has been the downfall of many a minister as they use the trappings of their office to meet their needs

Many use their position to give them access to women who are vulnerable and they are prone to prey on the weak and lead them astray

Peter paints a very sordid picture as he says there are those who have actually disciplined their hearts in having their desires met as the word translated as "trained" refers to the training Olympic athletes endured

And accordingly Peter says they are under God's curse

Remember, Jesus taught that it would be better to have a millstone tied around one's neck and be cast into the sea than to lead another astray [**Matthew 18:6**]

At this point Peter segues a bit in verses 15-16 as he relates the false teachers to the false prophet Balaam

We read about Balaam in Numbers 22-24 and there we see that his main sin was greed

Although he claimed to speak only what God permitted, he was actually a devious, profiteering sort who prophesied for money

It's kind of an amusing account to read because Balaam kept insisting that he could only prophesy what God permitted and that turned out to be true as he couldn't put a curse on Israel

In the end, when all of his attempts to curse Israel failed, he tried to ruin them through moral corruption as he used his influence to promote marriages with Israel's enemies that God had forbidden

So it turned out that Balaam had abhorrent sensuality in common with the false teachers as well as sharing a love of money

Peter's point is that the false teachers patterned their lives after Balaam rather than Christ which was something so foolish that even a donkey saw better and tried to dissuade Balaam

Verse 17 acts as something of a transition between this theme and the next where Peter deals with the deceptions of the false teachers [**2Peter 2:17**]

He refers to them as "*waterless springs and mists driven by a storm*"

I like western stories and this summer I read a few old novels written by Louis L'Amour

A recurring theme in Mr. L'Amour's stories is the cowboy's search for water as he travelled across a barren desert

Water holes and springs were landmarks in those days and a source of water that was good to drink was quite valuable and necessary to survival

There was little that was worse than arriving at a waterhole only to find it dried up - it was emotionally devastating and life-threatening to arrive at a place of promise and be let down

Peter's original readers would have understood his metaphor in just that way

A spring without water ceases to be of any use whatsoever despite its promise

The false teachers aroused great expectations that they were unable to fulfill - they had no life-giving water to share

Right now, our country is experiencing a drought with 43 states experiencing at least moderate drought conditions and it's particularly grim in the western and southwestern states

It's easy to imagine watching for rainclouds to form and to see a promising cloud on the horizon and to have it grow closer and darken the sky only to blow right on by without shedding a drop

That's the picture Peter has in mind when he calls the false teachers "*mists driven by a storm*"

Like dried-up springs and rainless clouds the false teachers mock the thirsty and leave them wanting

Promising much, they are in actuality, spiritually barren

And, for that reason, Peter says that the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved for them

Seeing as they promote themselves as the true light-bringers it's ironic that they wind up in darkness - in fact they wind up in the place of darkest darkness

Conclusion

The world, now as it was in Peter's day, is hostile to believers and the threats come from both the world outside the church but, more insidiously, from inside the church

Jesus told his disciples that he was sending them out as sheep among wolves and the church is still facing wolves that intend to harm us and the most dangerous wolves are those who come in sheep's clothing speaking nice words

So, how can we handle the false teachers biblically?

Especially when we can expect those false teachers to warn us that the Bible says, "Don't judge"

That's a misrepresentation of that command by the way but that's just what you should expect from a false teacher

Peter has just shown us the depravity of the false teachers by revealing their traits

That's not to say that every false teacher will have every one of the traits - after all, many of the false teachers hanging around the churches today are female

But they do show us the general pattern of their lives so we can recognize them

Again, we need to recognize that Peter focused on the behavior of the false teachers and not just their false teachings because we can know them by their fruit

And we can stand for the truth without becoming animalistic ourselves

In Matthew 10, where Jesus told his disciples he was sending them out as sheep among wolves he gave them a general principle about how to conduct themselves in the world

In **Matthew 10:16** he said:

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Part of wisdom is knowing and recognizing those who are working for the enemy

Remember, those who teach falsely aren't the enemy - they are just working for the enemy

We need to recognize them and be wary of them and their schemes but we don't need to blast them

Notice, we also need to be innocent, or harmless, as doves which means that we are to be pure and not take on the tactics of the world in dealing with those who are against us

Peter wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but that doesn't give us license or require us to also put our phasers on destroy when talking about false teachers - after all, they may yet be winnable for the Lord

Paul wrote to the Colossians in **Colossians 4:5-6** -

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

There is the admonition to be wise again - we need to always be awake and wary - but also gracious which means to be nice, to be kind - like a dove

But we are also to season our speech with salt which means we need to make certain what we say is pure and penetrating - after all, we are the salt of the word

False teachers are dangerous but they are also pitiable because they are deceived and, if they don't turn to Christ, doomed

So know them, avoid their schemes, and know your Bible so well that you know how to answer them with grace and salt

Let's pray

Jude 8-13 (page 1027)

Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.