

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

False Teachers

February 10th, 2019

2 Peter 2:1-22

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 2 Peter 2:1; that's on page 1018 in your pew Bibles. We've mentioned now a few times over the last couple of weeks that the emphasis in 2 Peter is a little bit different than the emphasis in 1 Peter. In 1 Peter the Apostle was trying to prepare his people for threats coming from the OUTSIDE. Here in 2 Peter the threats are coming from THE INSIDE. He is talking here about false teachers who have snuck in SECRETLY bringing with them DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES.

A destructive heresy is an idea, opinion or teaching that is CORROSIVE to TRUE and SAVING FAITH.

So this isn't stuff that Peter thinks we can agree to disagree on. This is SALVATION LEVEL stuff. This is heaven or hell stuff. So Peter speaks frankly and firmly here. He describes the false teachers and he warns his people to be on guard.

Now, given that this is a fairly long text and given that Peter's purposes are fairly transparent, I think it will be most helpful for us to deal with this text from the 10,000 foot level. Rather than following Peter along at ground level dealing with every colourful metaphor and Old Testament allusion that we meet along the way, we'll hop into our hermeneutical hot air balloon and attempt to look at this forest as a whole. Peter is trying to help these folks identify false teachers so as to

isolate and avoid them – therefore we will read the text and then attempt to deal with it according to those two categories.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, 11 whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. 12 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, 13 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. 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! 15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. 17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. 18 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. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 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. 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." (2 Peter 2:1–22 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

First of all then, in terms of identifying false teachers Peter tells us that they have always been found INSIDE the church.

How To Recognize False Teachers:

1. They operate inside the church

Look at verse 1; Peter says:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you (2 Peter 2:1 ESV)

It was this way in the Old Testament church and it will be this way in the New Testament church. The devil is an old dog and he hasn't learned any new tricks. If he can't knock us down from the outside then he will try and cave us in from the inside. Michael Green says here:

There always have been and there always will be false teachers among the people of God.¹

By the way, this is why it isn't as simple as saying, "Let's get all the churches in Orillia together to do this or that." Sometimes people will get frustrated with me and they will say "Why don't we do MORE with the other churches in town?" Of course we do some things with other churches in town – we are having a joint worship event with Emmanuel across the street on February 17th and we're super excited about that – you should go to that. But we can't do everything with other churches for the simple reason that THIS VERSE IS IN THE BIBLE.

Are you seeing that?

Because if this verse is TRUE then we have to assume that if there are 10 churches in town there may be 5-6 churches that are being run, right now by false teachers. So we can't just get on board, willy nilly with everything that is being done in town. We have to exercise some discernment – because FALSE TEACHERS OPERATE INSIDE THE CHURCH. That's what this text says.

Secondly, Peter wants us to know that false teachers attempt to diminish the authority of Christ.

2. They attempt to diminish the authority of Christ

You can see that in the second half of verse 1; Peter says that they are:

denying the Master who bought them (2 Peter 2:1 ESV)

That's an unusual phrase. Thomas Schreiner says here:

¹Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 116.

“From the remainder of 2 Peter it is evident that the denial of Jesus’ lordship was practical, in that they rejected his moral authority over their lives.”²

So these are people who say that they BELIEVE in Jesus but they deny his Lordship over their lives – they are not identifying, as Peter identified himself in verse 1 of this letter – as a SLAVE of Christ. Did you notice that Peter did that? Look back again at verse 1 of chapter 1 in this letter. Peter says:

Simeon Peter, **a servant** and apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1 ESV)

A lot of modern day North American translations try to avoid using the word “slave” because of the negative connotations – but that’s what the Greek word *doulos* actually means. The HCSB for example translates it:

Simeon Peter, **a slave** and an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1 HCSB)

Whichever English word you like here, the point is clear. These people think that you can have a relationship with Jesus Christ that leaves you FREE to determine your own personal values and morality – which apparently would be news to Jesus. He said to some people in his day:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV)

Do you think you can access my benefits without submitting to my Lordship? That option, my friend has NEVER been on the table. If you don’t submit to Christ as your Lord – then you do not HAVE HIM as your Savior. Few things are made clearer than that in Holy Scripture.

Thirdly, Peter wants us to know that false teachers attempt to undermine biblical morality.

3. They attempt to undermine biblical morality

There is a Greek word used again and again by Peter in this passage that is translated by the ESV as “sensuality”. You can see it in verse 2, verse 7 and verse 18. It refers to “indecent conduct” and “promiscuous, unprincipled sexual desire”.³ That’s what’s going on here. Remember these

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 329.

³ BDAG page 141 with the “licentious” defined by On-line dictionary.

false teachers deny the second coming of Christ. They deny the final judgment and they deny that holiness is possible. So they are saying: “Believe in Jesus – and you will be saved, but beyond that, live according to the desires that God has given you.”

Are you hearing that?

Look at verse 10 – this is truly amazing. Peter has been talking about the judgment that is going to fall on these folks – he’s talked about the flood – a time when angels were crossing established boundaries and having sexual relationships with human women – and he’s talked about Sodom and Gomorrah – a time when men were crossing established boundaries and having sex with other men – and he says that the judgment coming on these false teachers is going to be just like that. God knows how to judge such people Peter says; now look at verse 10:

and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:10 ESV)

The Tyndale NT Commentary quoting the NIV translation of verse 10 says here:

“The phrase... *those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature* ... suggests sodomy.”⁴

Are you hearing that? Peter is saying that false teachers undermine biblical morality. They say that it doesn’t apply anymore – or they just outright lie and twist verses to mean the opposite of what they are plainly saying. They do it to create permission for unfettered sexual expression – even going so far as to commend and celebrate sodomy. That was written 2000 years ago but it sounds like it could have been written last weekend doesn’t it? Not 2 km from where you are sitting now there is a church flying the rainbow flag. There are churches in our denomination that fly the rainbow flag – so this is an on-going issue brothers and sisters. There will always be false teachers in the church saying that all you have to do is believe in Jesus and you can IGNORE everything the Bible says about sexuality and human ethics.

But Peter says – their destruction is assured. So don’t be taken in friends – or you will share in their fate.

Fourthly, Peter tells us that these false teachers are often motivated by money.

⁴Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 126.

4. They are usually motivated by money

Many false teachers are simply people who have figured out that there is a good living to be had in telling people exactly what they want to hear. Peter tells us in verse 2 that **MANY PEOPLE** buy into this nonsense and then in verse 3 he tells them:

And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. (2 Peter 2:3 ESV)

So it's kind of their fault, but it's kind of your fault too. False teachers only exist in the church because they are willing to tell us – and sell us – exactly what we want to hear.

We want to hear that all we have to do is say a little prayer and sew a little ticket into our underwear and we will be good to go. We can live however we want. We can move in with the boyfriend. We can watch a little Game of Thrones. We can surf a little internet porn. We can have a little something on the side. All of that is **FINE** – because I've got my **TICKET** sewn right here into my underpants.

That's what we want to hear.

And if history proves anything – it is that we will pay **BIG BUCKS** for someone calling himself a pastor to tell us that.

The Apostle Paul said the same thing:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions (2 Timothy 4:3 ESV)

So the fault for this whole mess is kind of 50/50. We have to share some of the blame because we are the people paying the massive salaries of these pastors who are telling us exactly what we want to hear. If we stopped paying for it then they would stop selling it. But as it is now, Peter says, these guys have become champions in the art of greed – he says that in verse 14. They've just figured out how the game is played, he says. They tell you what you want to hear and you pay them big bucks, he says. The solution of course – is to turn off the taps. Stop paying for it – and they will either stop teaching it or they will find another line of business.

Fifthly, Peter says these false teachers are extraordinarily bold.

5. They are extraordinarily bold

You can see that in the second half of verse 10:

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones (2 Peter 2:10 ESV)

These people are not impressed by anything we would traditionally think of as an established authority. Thomas Schreiner says here:

“These people will not submit to anyone, being supremely confident of their intellectual ability”.⁵

So these people are pretty much the opposite of the folks described in Isaiah 66:2. There, God says:

this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.
(Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

That is the person who has a good standing with God the Bible says. The person who is humble – who knows how little they know and who knows how easily they are deceived. And the person who is contrite – the one who is very aware of his or her own sin and appropriately concerned about their capacity to twist and distort the truth. That’s the sort of person who trembles before the Word of God. They respect it. They know they need it. They NEED God to decide right and wrong. They need God to show them what is true and what is false so they stick very close to unchanging Word of the Lord.

Well that is pretty much the opposite of the person Peter describes here.

These people are theological innovators.

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 345.

It doesn't bother them AT ALL that they are saying stuff that the church has never accepted as true or beautiful or good. It doesn't BOTHER them at all that they are going against how the vast majority of Christians in the world EVEN TODAY are reading the text.

No – that doesn't bother them – because they are sure that they have the right of it. They're seeing what we missed – and wouldn't you know it – it turns out that the text is saying exactly what they want it to say.

Incredible!

That's how much they trust themselves and how little they respect anything that was once called authority.

Peter goes on to say that they even go so far as to blaspheme angels – now we aren't 100% sure what he means by that but it probably means that they dismiss or diminish the spiritual realm. Everything has a physical and material explanation and the spiritual dimension is downplayed. “That wasn't a miracle”, they say, “it was just a coincidence.” “You aren't being spiritually oppressed, you are just experiencing a run of bad luck.” They make WILDLY AUTHORITATIVE pronouncements about things they couldn't possibly be expected to understand – that seems to be the gist of it.

Sixthly, Peter says that these false teachers target people who are unstable in their faith.

6. They target people who are unstable in their faith

He says that in verse 14 and again in verse 18. Look at verse 14; he says:

They entice unsteady souls. (2 Peter 2:14 ESV)

Then in verse 18 he says:

they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. (2 Peter 2:18 ESV)

The first one is pretty obvious. We think of the shallow soil people described by Jesus in the parable of the sower. They had no depth in themselves and therefore they were withered by the sun and blown away by the wind. They were not well rooted – they were not steady and therefore they were vulnerable.

The second one – verse 18 – is a little trickier. Who are these people that are “barely escaping from those who live in error”? Most commentators understand this to be referring to new believers – as per Peter Davids for example in the Pillar commentary series who writes:

This enticement is particularly effective on newer believers, those who “are just escaping from those who live in error.”⁶

So look for churches filled with “newer believers” or people who are not deeply rooted in the Christian faith. That is the only sort of place where a teacher like this can survive. He’s not going to survive in a church filled with people carrying 9 pound ESV Study Bibles with them to church every Sunday. He’s not going to get paid in a church filled with geeks taking Greek on line. Right? This guy NEEDS biblically illiterate, perpetually immature, nominal believers in order to survive. So find a cluster of those people and you will probably find a false teacher trying to take advantage of them and trying to seduce them into ruin.

Lastly, Peter says that these false teachers constantly under deliver on their promises.

7. They consistently under deliver on their promises

Now he has a specific promise in mind; look at verse 19:

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. (2 Peter 2:19 ESV)

So again – it’s not very hard to put all of this together. These false teachers are obviously promising a form of Christianity LIBERATED from the restrictions of the Bible. Just believe in Jesus – and don’t worry about the rest. Follow your heart. Do what seems good to you. God wouldn’t give you these desires if he didn’t want you to give in to them. So BE FREE. Don’t be so constricted. Don’t be a legalist. Don’t be a Pharisee. Live free.

⁶Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 245.

That's the promise.

That's the sweet, sickly, siren song. And if you listen to it, Peter says, it will lure you onto the rocks of addiction, corruption and decay.

And of course that is exactly how it goes.

These false teachers always promise LIBERTY – but if you listen to them you always end up in slavery. See that's the great lie. Sexual LIBERTY – because that's what we're talking about here – is in fact, the shortest route to personal slavery. Some of you know that FROM EXPERIENCE. You wanted to be free – so you had sex with whomever you like. Then she got pregnant. You're the father – and so you're not free now are you?

No.

You are a slave now for the rest of your life. You're chained to something. You are chained to a person you might not have chosen as a life long partner – but she's your life long partner now isn't she? At least in some respects.

That's the truth.

And that truth works out in other ways.

How many people in here wanted to be free to look at whatever they wanted on the internet?

How's that working out?

Do you have any idea how many men are DESPERATE TO BREAK FREE from the bondage of internet pornography? They don't want to do that anymore – but they can't stop. They've re-wired their brains. They are basically crack addicts now and they can't get free.

So it is with every promise of sexual progress. They say this will make us free. In fact it will make us slaves. Slaves to a cruel, hateful, murderous master.

That's the truth that they aren't telling you.

So be on your guard against false teachers.

That's what Peter is driving at here – that's the intended landing place. Peter wants his people to protect themselves against the destructive doctrines being taught by the false teachers. So let's respond as I think he would want us to do. Let's spend our final few minutes speaking about how we can protect ourselves from these people.

How To Protect Yourself From False Teachers:

The first thing you can do is the most obvious and I think you could argue, the most important. You can read, read, read YOUR BIBLE!

1. Read, read, read your Bible

Remember these people PREY upon the unstable and uneducated – the untrained newer Christians. So don't be one of them. Read, read, read your Bible. Know what's in there so that when they say what isn't in there you will be able to show them CHAPTER AND VERSE.

That's the first and best thing you can do to protect yourself from false teachers.

Secondly, you can go to a church with a strong board of elders.

2. Go to a church with a strong Board of Elders

Can I let you in on a little secret? Most abuse in churches happens in places where one leader has an inordinate amount of authority. If you go to a church where the pastor is like a little pope – then you are in danger. Spiritually, sexually, financially and eternally. If one man has all the power then he will be corrupted by that power if he wasn't already – meaning I think corrupt men gravitate towards churches where they will be granted that kind of power. But I also think that good men are corrupted WHEN they are granted that kind of power.

So just don't go there.

Go to a church where there are 10-12 people in charge. It would be very hard for one bad man to get 11 other men to permit or ignore his indiscretions.

It would be very hard to preach destructive nonsense in a church where there are 10-12 biblically literate people holding you accountable to an agreed upon statement of faith.

I'm not even sure how you would do that – so I imagine that you simply wouldn't want to try – you would just go someplace else where those safeguards are not in place.

So you should go to a church where those safeguards are in place – you should go to a church that insists upon a PLURALITY OF LEADERSHIP.

And then lastly and I think we would say foundationally; you need to abide in the Christ of Scripture.

3. Abide in the Christ of Scripture

Of course that is the main objective that Peter has in writing this chapter. He wants them to abide in the Christ of Scripture – the one he was talking about in the last chapter. The one who is anticipated by the Old Testament prophets and explicated by the New Testament Apostles. That Jesus. Abide in him and you will bear much fruit. Depart from him and you will wither and perish forever.

He buttresses his argument here with a few appeals to well known Old Testament stories. He talks about Noah. Noah survived the judgment because he was inside the ark. Peter is saying – STAY IN CHRIST and you too will survive the judgment that is coming.

Then he refers to Lot. He says that Lot was different than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact he says that Lot was deeply distressed by their moral and sexual degradation. He was DIFFERENT. He didn't join in. He stayed SALTY. You need to do the same Peter says.

Stay inside.

Stay salty.

Don't drink the Kool Aid.

Don't join the revolution.

Abide in the Christ of Scripture.

That is the sum of his pastoral counsel. That's the heart of his fatherly concern for these people and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.