

2 Peter 2:1–3

Introduction

So far, in Peter's letter, there's been no specific mention of false teachers or of false teaching, and yet everything Peter's written so far has been a response to a most dangerous situation in the churches to which he's writing. So far, there's been no direct attack on any opponent, but it's been pretty easy to see that Peter must be defending himself and the other apostles against accusations made against them. Peter writes in verse 16:

□ 2 Peter 1:16 — For we [apostles] **did not follow cleverly devised myths** when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...

It's obvious that some people *were* accusing the apostles of doing just this – of inventing the idea of Christ's future coming in power in their own minds. We can even guess already at their motives from Peter's emphasis on how essential it is that we all live pious and godly lives. If Christ's coming in power is an invention of the Apostles and there is no final just judgment according to what we have done on the Day of the Lord (cf. Rev. 20:11-15), then as Christians, why should we be such "sticks in the mud"? Certainly, we shouldn't murder, or steal, or lie, or worship pagan gods and idols. No one's saying that. But what about the entertainments and the pleasures of this world? What about, in general, loose moral living? Why, as a Christian, should you be denying yourself the "harmless" pleasures of this life?—"Harmless," precisely because there's no future coming of Christ in power to judge all the world, including us, in true righteousness and justice. In other words, you can be a Christian *and* live it up in the world. There's really no need to be that "stick in the mud." Based on all Peter's said so far in chapter one, we can make a very educated guess that it's exactly this idea that was being promoted in the churches to which Peter was writing. But starting this morning to chapters two and three, we'll see that we don't have to guess any longer.

Peter has defended, first of all, the truthfulness and reliability of the *Apostles'* testimony by saying that they were eyewitnesses of the majesty of Christ when God invested Jesus with royal power and authority to rule and reign over all the earth. The Apostles were with Jesus on the holy mountain when God appointed Him to this very task of judging the world in righteousness. But then Peter works backwards from this reliable eyewitness testimony of the Apostles to the testimony of the Old Testament *prophets* which has now been even more fully confirmed for us in its fulfillment already on the holy mountain. Apparently, in addition to accusing the Apostles of inventing things, someone was also saying that the Old Testament prophecies of a coming "Day of the Lord" were the result of the prophets' mistaken interpretations of their visions and dreams. And so Peter reminds his readers of the importance of "knowing this first of all, that no prophecy *of Scripture* comes from [the prophet's] own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

So far Peter's been in defensive mode – *responding* to the accusations of the opponents and reminding us again of the firm foundation of the testimony of God as it's come to us through the

reliable and inspired testimony of the New Testament Apostles *and* the Old Testament prophets. But now Peter reverses direction (from moving backwards [Apostles to prophets] to moving forwards again) and he switches gears (now he goes on the offensive).

I. 2 Peter 2:1a — But false prophets also arose among the people [the people of Israel], just as there will be false teachers among you...

The Greek word for “prophet” is *prophetes*, and so the Greek word for “false prophet” is *pseudoprophetes* (one word). The Greek word for “teacher” is *didaskalos*, and so the word for “false teacher” is *pseudodidaskalos* (again, just one word). There are other examples of this in Scripture. The Greek word for “apostle” is *apostolos*, and so the Greek word for “false apostle” is *pseud[o]apostolos* (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13). The Greek word for “brother” is *adelphos*, and so the Greek word for “false brother” is *pseud[o]adelphos* (cf. 2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4). The Greek word for “Christ” is *christos*, and so the Greek word for “false christ” is *pseudochristos* (cf. Mat. 24:24). The lesson we learn from this is that wherever there’s the genuine article there’s also the counterfeit. We know that God is “*true*.”

- Revelation 19:9 (cf. 22:6) — The angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true [faithful/reliable] words of God.”
- 1 John 5:20 (cf. Jn. 3:33) — The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.

So, we also know that Jesus is “the *truth*.”

- John 1:14 — The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- John 14:6 — Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

But if God is *true* and if Jesus is the *truth*, then we know that the devil “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (Jn. 8:44) In this fallen world, as long as there’s the truth, there will *always be* the perversion of that truth in lies and deceits. *So*, not only were there prophets in the Old Testament who spoke the word of God as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit, but there were also *false* prophets who pretended to speak for God, but who were actually speaking lies on their own authority (cf. Jer. 14:13-16). In the same way, Peter says, just as there are New Testament Apostles who bear faithful witness to what they’ve seen and heard, so also there will be *false* teachers arising *from the very midst of the churches* who will claim to be speaking God’s truth, but who will actually be speaking lies on their own authority. The point is that we shouldn’t be surprised by this. Instead, knowing these things ahead of time, we should be all the more devoted to the truth – simply loving and cherishing the truth as our most prized and precious possession. And also, knowing this ahead of time and cherishing the truth as we do, we should be all the more ready to boldly call a lie, a lie – and also to boldly call a liar, a liar.

II. 2 Peter 2:1b — But false prophets also arose among the people [of Israel], just as there will be false teachers among you, **who will bring in teachings that lead to destruction**...

The false teachers themselves will arise from *within* the church, but the actual teachings that they introduce will be “*brought in*” from the *outside*. That’s the main point of that Greek word for “brought in; it emphasizes something wholly foreign and alien (cf. Gal. 2:4) – something that originates not in the church or in the apostolic teaching, but in the world. These teachers who arise from inside the church will introduce teachings that are shaped and influenced entirely by the thinking and the philosophy of the world. So we think today of those *within the church* who are teaching a “Christianized” version of the *world’s* philosophy of “social justice” (the so-called “social gospel”). We think of those *within the church* today who are teaching a “Christianized” version of the *world’s* idea of becoming one with the divine—or being absorbed into the divine—in a “mystical” fellowship and communion with God. We think today of those *within the church* who are teaching a “Christianized” version of the *world’s* philosophy of evolution – so-called “Theistic” evolution. We think today of those *within the church* who are teaching a “Christianized” version of the *world’s* philosophy of pragmatism and utilitarianism” – The Gospel is true—or at the very least it’s worth trying—only in so far as it worked for me and will also work for you. Do you see how what all of these false teachings have in common is that they’re shaped and influenced entirely by the thinking and the philosophy of the world *outside* and yet they’re *brought into* the church by those who have arisen from within and are recognized members of the church? This is what we need to watch for and be able to recognize – when what’s being taught in the church is actually—ultimately—nothing more than the ideas and philosophies of the world cloaked in Christian garb.

And why is this such a big deal? Why is it so important that we be on the lookout for these false teachers and their lies? It’s because these are teachings that lead to destruction. Almost all translations refer here to “destructive heresies.” In Peter’s day the word for heresies (*haireisis*) wasn’t necessarily in itself a negative word – like it is today. It was really just a name for any particular “party” or “school of thought” whether good or bad. So in the book of Acts we hear about the “party [*haireisis*] of the Sadducees” [Acts 5:17], and the “party [*haireisis*] of the Pharisees” [Acts 15:5], and Christianity, too, is referred to as a “party” or a “sect” by the Jews (cf. Acts 24:5; 28:22). In 2 Peter, the reason we know that these ideas from this particular school of thought are of the bad and dangerous kind is because Peter says not just that they’re potentially harmful or destructive, but that when they’re embraced, they lead always to destruction. Peter says, literally, that these are teachings **of destruction**.

When we truly come to the word of God in faith and think on the word “destruction” it will always have the effect of sobering us. The point of this particular word is everlasting death and punishment – the opposite of eternal life and salvation (when the object of the word is people and not things; cf. Rev. 17:8, 11).

□ Matthew 7:13–14 — Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to **destruction**, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to **life**, and those who find it are few.

- Philippians 3:19–20 — Their end is **destruction**, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a **Savior**, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Philippians 1:28 — This is a clear sign to [your opponents] of their **destruction**, but of your **salvation**, and that from God.
- Hebrews 10:39 — We are not of those who shrink back unto **destruction**, but of those who have faith and **preserve** their souls.

The reality of this destruction is a major theme for Peter as he uses this word five times just in chapters two and three (cf. 2:1, 3; 3:7, 16). *We* need to always remember that this destruction of soul and body in hell is real (cf. Mat. 10:28) – not so we’ll be paranoid, but so we’ll be sobered and cling tenaciously to the truth by God’s grace. If we’re not clinging to the truth, do we really believe the truth? The difference between the truth and the lie is the difference between eternal salvation and everlasting destruction.

III. 2 Peter 2:1c — But false prophets also arose among the people [of Israel], just as there will be false teachers among you, who will bring in teachings that lead to destruction, **even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.**

Peter’s point here—and all throughout this chapter—is to emphasize how wicked and how abhorrent and how dangerous these false teachers are. The word for “Master” is *despotes* from which we get the word “despot.” It emphasizes the absolute authority and rights of a master who in this case has purchased a slave’s freedom from another master in order that that slave might now belong to himself. And, of course, in this case, the purchase price that this Master paid was His own shed blood (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rev. 5:9; Gal. 3:13). *Despotes*—“Master”—is used of God only three times in the New Testament, and it’s used of Jesus only twice (cf. Jude 4) – so that gives you an idea of the point Peter’s really working to drive home. What are these false teachers doing with their false teaching? They’re “*even denying the Master who bought them*”! Isn’t that something that should make us shudder with a real dread and fear? Isn’t that something that should make us want to get as far, far away from these false teachers as possible? Because what can the only possible result of *such* a denial be? What do you think? Peter says that in denying the Master who bought them, the false teachers are bringing upon themselves swift destruction (cf. Jer. 14:13-16; Mat. 10:32-33; 2 Tim. 2:12). The word for “bring upon” is ominous in itself, and could even be translated “bringing *down* upon themselves.”

- Genesis 6:18 (cf. 2 Pet. 2:5) — Behold **I bring a flood of water upon the earth**, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven, and whatsoever things are upon the earth shall die.
- Exodus 33:5 — The Lord said to the children of Israel, You are a stiff-necked people; take heed lest **I bring upon you another plague**, and destroy you.

What the false teachers are “bringing down upon *themselves*” here is “swift destruction.” Again, the tone is one of dread and fear. Their destruction will not long delay. It will *surely* come. I think of Korah’s rebellion in the Old Testament book of Numbers, when the ground opened its

mouth and swallowed Korah and all his household alive. Just before this terrifying event, Moses spoke to the congregation, saying:

□ Numbers 16:26 — “Depart... from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.”

This is really the essence of what Peter’s saying here and throughout this whole chapter. He’s warning *us* against even the remotest possibility of being swept away ourselves in the destruction of these false teachers. You don’t see how close you can get to Korah’s tents and still avoid being swallowed up by the earth. Neither do you go only to what seems a reasonably safe distance. You get as far away as possible, and you stay as far away as possible. I want to remind you that I’m not the one making such a big deal out of this. This is the Apostle Peter who’s writing, and we know that his testimony is *true*.

IV. 2 Peter 2:2 — And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

What do we learn about the false teachers from these verses? They weren’t just *speaking* and *teaching* lies and deceptions, they were also *living* these lies and deceptions. They weren’t just denying the coming of Christ in power to judge all the world in righteousness, they were *practicing* this denial by the lives they lived, indulging the lusts and desires of the flesh (cf. Titus 1:16; 1 Tim. 5:8). And then they were teaching others to do the same. “There’s no need to be that ‘stick in the mud.’ Within certain limits, you can live how you want. You can enjoy the entertainments of the world and the “harmless” pleasures of this life. You can be a Christian and still ‘live it up’ in this world.”

What are these false teachers doing? They’re telling people exactly what their flesh *wants* to hear. They’re giving them an excuse to gratify their own fleshly desires by telling them that it will still turn out all right for them in the end because they’ll never be called to account (cf. Jer. 14:13-16; Ezek. 13:10; Jer. 6:14). Now isn’t this a lie that every sinner wants to believe? That’s why Peter can say that *many* will *follow* their sensuality—even many professing *Christians!*—and as a result of this the way of truth will be blasphemed. The world will say, “Look at the Christians, they’re really no different from us.” Some might even say, “Look at the Christians, we’re even better than they are.” And so in this way the “way of *truth*” is treated as though it were no different from the *lies* of the world. Should we think that the God who is “*true*” will really overlook this? Should we comfort ourselves with the thought that Jesus, who is “*the way and the truth*,” will not bring full retribution? That’s Peter’s point here. He wants to convince us even more fully of the swift destruction that will come upon these false teachers *so that WE* will avoid—at all costs—being swept away with them in their destruction. Stay as far away from the false teachers as possible. Don’t listen to them or believe what they tell you. It will *not* be well with those who “follow after” their sensuality. They will not escape destruction.

When Peter speaks of the “way of truth” we’re reminded that the truth is not *just* doctrines to be believed, but doctrines to be lived – every day. That’s *how* we cling to the truth. The *truth* that we confess and that we love is ultimately a lifestyle—a “way”—that we walk in. The

truth—including the truth of Christ’s coming in power and glory—is believed only when it’s lived. Many, however, will follow after the sensuality of the false teachers, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed...

V. 2 Peter 2:3a — And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

False teaching always “sells” better than the truth; it has a way of filling the seats and filling the coffers faster and causing all people to speak well of you (cf. Lk. 6:26). And so the false teachers don’t *really* care about the sheep. What they really care about most is their own position, and power, and wealth, and advantage. When Peter says, “and in their greed they will exploit you,” that word for exploit is the same word that James uses when he says:

□ James 4:13 — Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and **trade** and make a profit.”

So what Peter’s saying here is that the false teachers are merchants looking to trade and make a profit in human souls – the false teachers are those who would exploit the very Christians he’s writing to with *false* words. Can you see the contrast, here, between the false teachers and Peter? Why is Peter even taking the time to write this letter to Christians and churches who are so far away – to Christians and churches with whom he’ll never have any opportunity at all to promote his own advantage? Because contrary to the false teachers, Peter cares, sincerely and genuinely, for their souls. If he didn’t, he certainly wouldn’t be writing this letter. From a worldly perspective, there’s absolutely nothing in this for Peter.

So who will we listen to? Who is it that comes with the *truth*? Those who are filled with greed and who would exploit us for their own personal advantage, or those who truly care for our souls without any agenda of self-promotion? This is one of the things that really should strengthen the *already* 100% certainty of our faith. We see the truthfulness and the reliability of the Apostles’ testimony in that every single one of them could write to the churches even as the Apostle Paul wrote:

□ 1 Thessalonians 2:5 — We never came with words of flattery, *as you know*, nor with a pretext for greed—*God is witness*.

Shouldn’t it be clear to us, then, that rather than the Apostles following “cleverly devised myths” when they made known to us the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:16), it’s actually those who deny this coming and who teach that we’re free now to live how we want— it’s actually *they* who would exploit us with “*false*” (“invented” and “made up”) words?

And so now Peter concludes (for the present):

VI. 2 Peter 2:3b — Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

There's a very real horror and dread about these words, and so the "application" here, for us, is to very much feel ourselves this horror and this dread. This isn't just death personified as the grim reaper; this is hell itself personified as a living being, ready and waiting to swallow up the false teachers. Their condemnation from long ago (we'll talk about "long ago" next time) is not idle – it's coming closer every moment; and their destruction (that's the third time in three verses Peter's used this word) is not asleep – it's awake, and it's ready, and it's waiting.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, the message here is to run – to get as far away as possible from the tents of Korah. The message here is to hate the lie and all that is false and to love and cherish all that is true – and to live that truth faithfully every day. This isn't to say that we'll have total freedom from our sin and from the lusts of our flesh, but it is to say that we are never, ever able to live at peace with our sin but are always engaged in a deadly, mortal combat against it. As the Apostle Paul says:

□ Colossians 3:5–6 (cf. Eph. 5:3-9) — *Put to death* therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of *these things* the wrath of God is coming.

We ought to praise God for the *truth* that has been "made known" to us (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16). We know the truth, and we know that no lie is of the truth (1 Jn. 2:21). So then, let us show that we know the truth by practicing it and by living it with joy. It's in this way that there will be richly provided for us an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11).