

## **Serving God faithfully to the End**

### **2 Peter 2**

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### **Preface**

This second book on 2 Peter is part of a series to accompany the Sound Words radio programmes on Peter's second letter at the end of the New Testament. For that series we gratefully received the help of Howard Sayers, a pastor of considerable years' experience in the Lord's work.

Peter's second chapter, which this volume is all about, is in many ways one of the saddest parts of Holy Scripture because it has to deal with false teachers, their error and also their destruction. It is one of the most solemn parts of the Bible, but we need to remember that all of Scripture is profitable and designed by God to bring help and blessing to the faithful people of God. Indeed, it gives every genuine believer the call to remain faithful to God through such times when Biblical teaching is under attack, and to persevere to the end. May the Lord in his grace help us to

be such faithful believers in our generation, just as he called Peter's first readers to be so in theirs.

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## **Chapter 1: False Teachers, 2 Peter 2:1-3**

### **Introduction**

We begin now to consider one of the saddest, most heart searching and challenging chapters of the Bible. It is sad because it describes people who teach wrong beliefs under the guise of being true Christians. It is heart-searching because it describes the outcome for all such teachers and all who are led astray by them, namely, their destruction. And it is challenging because we must be clear we are not doing the same or being led astray from God's truth, but hold firm to Christ.

The opening verse begins with the word "*But*" indicating Peter is drawing a sharp contrast to the previous verses. There he had dealt with the inspiration of Scripture, its truth, reliability and authority. He stated clearly that Scripture came from God alone through the prophets. But now Peter has to say there were false prophets who were leading many astray. We cannot help but see something of the daring, audacity and cunning craftiness of the devil in all of this. Daring and audacity because he spoke when

God was speaking and by so doing he was attempting to undermine God, and cunning craftiness because he used individuals who used the same title as God's servants, namely, 'prophets', albeit false prophets. Here Peter is reminding us that we are engaged in a spiritual battle, and we will be opposed by the great enemy of God and man, the devil. He will use people who on the surface look like genuine servants of God and appear to speak like them, but are not! Peter gives us a graphic picture of them by providing a list of five facts about them.

## 1. A sad fact, verse 1a

### a) A lesson from the past

*"But there were also false prophets among the people."*

Peter is here referring to ancient Israel, the Old Testament people of God, and he reminds us they were troubled by false prophets. These individuals were self appointed, not God appointed. They had their own message and not God's. And this is where their danger lay, because they claimed to be prophets. They claimed to speak with divine inspiration. And they were found right amongst the people, and led many astray. One clear example of these false teachers were the prophets of Baal in the days of Elijah, Ahab, Jezebel. You can read about the open challenge Elijah gave them and the people who had been led astray by them in 1 Kings 18 in what is often referred

to as the Mount Carmel incident. So in the past there had been false prophets.

### b) A warning for the future

Just as God's people in the past had been troubled by false teachers, so God's people in both the present and the future will be troubled by such spiritually dangerous individuals. So Peter wrote:

*"...just as there will be false teachers among you."*

Peter is teaching us that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will be troubled by false teachers, and in fact his original readers had already experienced this. These people will teach false doctrine. Some will twist Scripture to mean something it does not teach. Others will do it by adding to Scripture their own teachings claiming they have the same authority as the Bible which alone is the Word of God. Still others would deny or take away parts of Scripture. Others would do a mixture of all of these things. So we must be on the lookout to spot such exponents of error and to do that we must know our Bibles well so we can recognise their false teaching. Indeed, we must resist, oppose and reject all false teaching resolutely. This will take courage, and we must be prepared to face misunderstanding over making such a stand, but it must be done.

## 2. A serious fact, verse 1b

Peter then exposes the secret and deceitful way that many false teachers use.

*“They will secretly introduce destructive heresies...”*

Their approach is sly and cunning. The term Peter uses literally means ‘to bring in alongside.’ In other words they will mix truth with error. They will actually use the Bible and then cleverly introduce their own opinions alongside the Bible. One of their favourite phrases is, “Well, that’s how you interpret it”, when in fact the truth of Scripture is plain for all to see. Peter is quite direct when he tells us how dangerous this is because their teaching is destructive. Their views are not profitable, nor edifying, not helpful, but damaging because they bring eternal ruin. Peter is showing us the great danger of not being biblically based because hell is at the end of that path, eternal misery, the very opposite of eternal life which God’s truth brings to all who believe what he has said. However good the false teachers may appear or offer, they are in fact evil and ultimately extremely harmful. It is because in reality they deny the truth.

*“...even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.”*

They in fact deny the substitutionary death of Christ. But the rest of the Bible is clear that Christ’s precious blood

was the ransom paid to redeem those who were slaves to sin. His death satisfied the just demands of the high court of heaven paying the penalty for the sinner. His death for sin was the way our righteous God could be just and justify the believing sinner.

Now so often false teachers claim to be Christians. They claim to belong to and be purchased by Christ. But they deny the very work of the cross, and by so doing trample underfoot the blood of Christ. Nearly every heresy that has arisen ultimately is because of a wrong view of Christ, either in his person or his work. The old hymn writer John Newton put it like this:

*“What think you of Christ? is the test to try both your state and your scheme.*

*You cannot be right in the rest, unless you think rightly of him.*

*As Jesus appears in your view, as he is beloved or not; so God is disposed to you and mercy or wrath is your lot.”*

Because all false teaching is dangerous we must beware!

## 3. A shameful fact, verse 2

*“Many will follow their shameful ways...”*

This is a tragic statement. It indicates that many who are religious, show some interest in spiritual matters but are

not clearly based on the Bible, become the target for these false teachers. The Greek word which Peter uses and is translated ‘*shameful*’ means to be licentious and to have wrong behaviour, being reckless and with hardened immorality. The lesson is that false doctrine results in wrong conduct and that in turn has another tragic result:

*“...and will bring the way of truth into disrepute”*

Quite literally Peter says God’s truth will be blasphemed. Because of the wrong conduct of some who claim to be genuine believers but are not, the truth is undermined. Indeed even the witness of genuine believers, the true church of Christ and the Bible is undermined. Those observing this shameful behaviour done under the deceitful guise of being genuine, will be heard to say, ‘If that’s Christianity, I don’t want it.’

#### **4. A subtle fact, verse 3a**

*“In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.”*

The main reason why they spread their false doctrines is their greed or covetousness, pampering to their pride for personal gain. They do it for what they can get for themselves, not what they can give to others. Their intention is to exploit the vulnerable and unsuspecting, a bit like a corrupt tradesman. Their teachings are really fabricated or made up stories. The term Peter uses means

to mould, as with clay or wax, to whatever shape they want. That is they use words suited to their own imaginations and not the teaching from the Bible.

#### **5. A solemn fact, verses 1c & 3b**

*“Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping...bringing swift destruction on themselves.”*

God’s assessment of them is that they are guilty of great sin and therefore are condemned by him already. Judgement will not fail to reach the mark for which it was appointed of old, namely their utter ruin and eternal misery. They will receive eternal misery and be cut off from God and locked outside of heaven. Many think they will never be punished, but Peter declares their destruction has not been sleeping but simply waiting for God’s appointed time when it will come on them suddenly. Each false teacher is totally responsible for this. It was entirely their own fault and so they will each reap their just deserts, and none will escape.

#### **Conclusion**

The lesson from these verses is so clear. To tamper with the truth of God or to ignore the truth of God is a most serious sin. Therefore we must ensure we are not like those who do. The way to avoid this grave error is to ensure we know the Bible and study the Bible and believe

the Bible and love Christ. When we meet those who are false prophets we are to lovingly and firmly point them to the truth before it is too late.

How we have cause to praise God that in spite of the certainty of such things happening, he will still build his church (see Matthew 16:18) Hallelujah!

## Chapter 2: God Is Able, 2 Peter 2:4-10b

### Introduction

Peter closed verse 3 with the warning that those who do not follow Christ in truth, that is false teachers or counterfeit Christians, will perish. His words are most solemn. Peter, and the Bible at large, never makes light of the destruction of the wicked. It is a most solemn and certain fact and cannot be considered as trivial or irrelevant. Having stated this fact, Peter anticipates two questions that need an answer:

- i. That raised by unbelieving sceptics who question the whole idea of eternal punishment and who sceptically ask ‘How can this be?’ as if it could never happen.
- ii. That raised by true believers, who being sensitive to their own failings and weaknesses and the pressure of this false teaching who ask, ‘How can it ever be

possible for me to remain faithful to God when there are false teachers who sound so convincing?’

Peter’s answer is simply this, ‘God is able!’ He can punish and he can preserve. The question is then raised, how can we be sure? The answer given is, because God has done so before. Peter then proceeds to give us three examples of God at work in this way. Before you read these verses below we need to explain something. The ‘if’ that occurs in this passage is not the ‘if’ of uncertainty, rather it is the ‘if’ of assurance and could be translated ‘since’ or ‘in view of the fact.’ This is what Peter wrote:

*“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who*

*follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.”*

Peter uses three illustrations to make his point.

### **1. The angels who sinned, verse 4**

The precise detail of their sin is not given, simply its fact and the all important result. Scripture does give us a glimpse of this sin under their leader in the fall of Satan. They were given great honour and dignity as servants of the Lord. Heaven was their dwelling place and holiness was their experience. But they sinned and made a fearful mistake. Scripture indicates they were guilty of pride and rebelled against God, rejecting his sovereign rule over them. Consider 1 Timothy 3:6:

*“He (an overseer) must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.”*

So here we can see that Satan’s fall was because of pride. Then in Jude 6 we read:

*“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”*

That is, they were rebellious against God. And so, Peter declares, the great result of their sin was this:

*“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;”*

These are quite dreadful words. Almighty God cast them down. That they were angels and had been his servants did not save them. For them there was no escape. “Hell” is the place of punishment and torment for these wicked angels now. Peter pictures them in the deepest darkness, confined in a deep prison, like an underground pit. And there was no way out, but to wait for the final judgement (see Revelation 20:10 & 14). If God can do that to angels, then there will be no escape for false teachers nor counterfeit Christians!

### **2. The world that sinned, verse 5**

Peter’s second illustration is from the time of Noah. The characteristic of the world of Noah’s day was that its people were ungodly. They were individuals who lived with complete disregard for God. This is what we read in Genesis 6:5f:

*“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The*

*Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”*

There was arrogant and flagrant disobedience. The people had no fear of God and no time for God. They were utterly careless and indifferent when it came to God and obeying him. And the outcome of their behaviour was that God did not spare them! They were wiped off the face of the earth, they all perished as the world was destroyed by the flood. These people reaped what they sowed. And that is exactly how it will be for those who teach and those who follow false teaching, all of them will perish. However, there was one man who stood against the prevailing tide of ungodliness, Noah a preacher of righteousness. His lone voice declared God’s Word faithfully just like a spokesman for an emperor, or an ambassador to another country. Noah alone called the people back to God in repentance and warned them of the impending flood. He was the only one who remained faithful to God, with his family. What courage that took for Noah to be like this. His conduct and life was so different from the rest of the crowd. He laid his life on the line and declared his loyalty to the Lord. We know that the people failed to take heed to his preaching. Some no doubt taunted and ridiculed him, perhaps accused him of insanity, or being a kill-joy or the like. But he did not move from the straight and narrow way God had set before him. God’s will was far more important to him than the prevailing ideas of men’s minds. And what was the outcome for this godly man? God “*protected Noah*” verse 5. He guarded Noah so that he remained safe and he was

preserved without any injury. God upheld his servant, and will do so again in our day. The true people of God who endeavour to pursue righteousness will be kept secure by Almighty God. Though all hell should come and fight against them and attempt to carry them away from God, God will keep them safe!

### **3. The cities that sinned, verses 6-8**

Peter’s third illustration is the ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were the most immoral places on the earth at that time. They were famous for the sensuality of the worst kind that was rife there: adultery, homosexuality, filth and crime of every sort. They thought they had outgrown the need for God! What a most serious mistake to make! The result was that God destroyed them by fire and burning sulphur, and they were burnt to ashes and devastated. Their total destruction is intended by God to bring home to every succeeding generation that turning away from God will result in ruin. And those who try to pervert the Word of God by adding to it or taking from or denying it, or choosing some alternative to it will all perish! But in that place there was one man who remained righteous, Lot. In spite of all the sin and degradation around him he trusted in and followed God, not without fault and by God’s grace he trusted in the Lord and hated evil. He was grieved by what he saw all around him. His love for God was such that he rebelled against all the vile filth, unbridled lust and wonton shamelessness of the people. It grieved him to see such disregard for God, but

God delivered him. Even this was not too difficult for the Lord!

### **Application, verses 9-10a**

It is as if Peter was painting a large canvas for us to view and right in the very forefront of the picture is the salvation of the believer. And he concentrates first on the outcome for the true Christian. If God could save Noah and Lot, then we can rest secure that he can rescue us. He knows precisely what trials and temptations we have to face. No temptation within or without is too great for God to keep us faithful to him. He can be relied on completely to supply all we shall ever need to go through this life and into the next so that we are brought to glory. What comfort for every true Christian, every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ! How this ought to make us ensure we walk close with the Lord! And how it ought to fill us with praise to him and determination to stay true to him and never forsake the way of righteousness!

But just in case any become presumptuous, the background of Peter's canvas is one of solemn, certain and everlasting judgement for all who do not faithfully follow the Lord. It would appear that the characteristics of these false teachers were those of the three examples set before us: pride, disobedience, sensuality and as God knows how to deliver his people, he also knows how to punish the guilty. They may laugh, ridicule, scoff and mock but they will not escape. Just as the angels, the old world, and Sodom and

Gomorrah did not escape; all who have despised the lordship of Christ and followed their own lusts will meet this end.

The only way anyone can be ready to face the judgement of God is by being in Christ. Are you in him?

## **Chapter 3: The Character, Conduct and Danger of False Teachers, 2 Peter 2:10b-22**

### **Introduction**

Peter has said God will always preserve and save his true people as, for example, he did with Noah and Lot. Also God condemns and will bring judgement and destruction on those who are not. This raises the question, "*Why is this so? What are they like to warrant such condemnation?*" We need to consider this so that we shall be able to recognise such and so we may be able to help those who have been led astray back to the Lord.

### **1. They can be detected by their speech, verses 10b-12**

*"Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute*

*beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.”*

They not only speak when they should be silent, but they speak in a wrong way seen in both their content and their attitude. They speak about things they are not to comment on and which they know nothing about, and yet they do so with arrogance and pride. Their approach is something like this, “Look at me and what I know.” Like Diotrephes in 3 John 9ff, they proudly parade themselves. They are also bold, defiant of both God and men. They display a complete lack of reverence for God, because they do not tremble before him and they display a complete absence of fear. They come full of their own self importance, so confident that they are the only ones who are right and everyone else is wrong. We have to say that so often these attitudes are seen in the cults and isms of today. These particular people were

*“slandering celestial beings.”*

Literally the glories or dignitaries. It is a term that can refer to either angels or Church leaders. If it is angels, then these people make light of unseen powers. They ridicule or deny their existence, particularly the existence of the devil, or speak disrespectfully of the angelic help given to the saints, (see Hebrews 1:14). If it is church leaders, it means they fling abuse at them, especially when these show that their teaching is not in accord with Scripture and that their conduct is not that which becomes true followers

of Christ. They are headstrong, rebellious to God’s Word and contemptuous of others. By contrast (v11) the angels who are greater than them, and who have more right to speak on these issues, do not do. They do not have this arrogance in speech even when displaying the greatest zeal in a righteous cause. Yet these false prophets do so in an evil cause. In other words, their speech betrays them. The question to be answered is, ‘What does your speech betray?’

## **2. They can be detected by their actions, verses 13-16**

The way of the Lord is righteous, pure, good, kind and holy. David’s testimony about the Lord’s leading him in this way is stated in Psalm 23:3.

*“He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”*

We see it also in David’s prayer to the Lord about this in Psalm 27:11.

*“Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path.”*

And we can detect if a person is following the Lord by the way they live, by comparing their actions with the conduct required by the Scriptures. Peter applies this to the false teachers his readers were battling against like this:

*“They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.”*

Peter graphically describes some of the conduct of these particular false teachers. They were blatantly licentious (13b), just like the rich fool (Luke 12:12-21)! Theirs was a life of pleasure, drunkenness, entertainment and laziness. They even abused the fellowship meals of the Church as an excuse for excess. They are like those Paul describes in Philippians 3:19.

*“...their god is their stomach...”*

They were in effect saying, ‘Salvation is so sure it does not matter how you live.’ But it does matter. The Lord saved us from sin, not to continue in sin!

Linked with this these false teachers were guilty of gross immorality (v14a).

*“With eyes full of adultery...”*

They had filthy vulgar minds.

*“...they never stop sinning”*

They were unable to stop and did not want to stop their vile behaviour. This is the very opposite of the true Christian. Sadly these people had no moral standards. They were just like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Further, they adopted a cunning approach (v14b).

*“...they seduce the unstable...”*

The word ‘seduce’ literally means to catch by bait or to set a trap, and the word ‘unstable’ means people who are not anchored securely. Peter is describing those who do not know Christ nor are built on his Word, with the result they are dragged away from the Lord easily.

Finally, Peter describes their uncontrolled greed (v14b-16). They were experts in covetousness who wanted more and more things they had no right to nor any need of, the result being they were:

*“...an accursed brood!”*

Literally children of cursing. They were under God’s wrath, for they had rejected Christ. They were like Balaam

(Numbers 22-25) for they had forsaken God's way for his way. Balaam was a hired agent of Balak to curse Israel. He acted from selfish gain and his own donkey restrained and rebuked him. These false teachers are just like Balaam, out for what they can gain, thinking only of self whether it be prestige, pleasure or profit.

You would think Peter had just been reading our daily newspapers, or watching many of our television programmes where the gods of sin, immorality, material possessions, pride and lust are regularly paraded as the normal way to live! But God says that is not the way to live. It is the evidence of those who have turned from God and are on the road to destruction.

### **3. They can be detected by their failure to meet the need of the human heart, verses 17-19**

*“These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.”*

They fail to truly satisfy because they are:

*“...springs without water...”*

They are the exact opposite to Christ. The hymn writer has helpfully put it like this:

*“Now none but Christ can satisfy, none other name for me,  
There's love and life and lasting joy, Lord Jesus found in thee.”*

We read in Acts 4:12 about the name of Jesus Christ:

*“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

Those who come to Christ and drink will never thirst again! He does not leave our need half met but fully met. He gives us complete pardon for our sins, justification, reconciliation, adoption and eventually glorification. Not so with these people. They are like drinking sand, dry, barren and useless. And they are temporary because they are like:

*“...mists driven by a storm.”*

They and what they offer will not endure and will fail at the last day to be any benefit at all. By contrast what God gives us in Christ endures as Paul declares in Romans 6:23:

*“...the gift of God is everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Sadly these false teachers not only sink into moral decay, but they drag others with them (v18). They promise freedom, freedom to do whatever you like (v19), but this freedom is slavery, slavery to sin and all its tragic consequences and heartache and pain in this life and a lost eternity in the next. All that they offer is destructive. By contrast what Christ gives is constructive, edifying, profitable and good.

#### **4. They can be detected by their turning away from Christ, verses 20-22**

These particular people tragically had once acknowledged the truth of the Gospel and had even begun to benefit from it and are typical of so many. They were church goers who looked outwardly respectable and seemed outwardly reformed as they agreed with the standards Christ has set. They saw the righteousness of his claims and the wisdom of his directions. For a time they turned away from the corruption of this world. But that was all it was, an outward change, not an inward, spiritual, heart change. This is how Peter describes them:

*“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on*

*to them. Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit,’ and, ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.’”*

Sadly, when they discovered outward change was not enough, they returned to their former sinful ways and acted according to their nature like dogs or pigs! Over the years there have been many people who have come to this place, heard about Christ crucified, acknowledged the rightness of all this but today they are not seen amongst the people of God? They are back exactly as they were before they had heard of Christ. And Peter solemnly warns us that for such it had been better that they had never heard of Christ, than to have heard and to have turned from him (v21). It is to be like Judas Iscariot, of whom Jesus said it would have been better if he had never been born (Matthew 26:24).

#### **Conclusion**

These tragic descriptions of the ungodly false teachers bring 2 Peter 2 to a close. They stand as a warning to all of us not to be deceived like them or by them. Instead, let us seek the Lord fully, follow him wholly, love him deeply, be devoted to him constantly and base our lives upon his Word alone.

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