

## Characteristics of False Teachers and Teachings

### 2 Peter 2

Brothers and sisters, as we continue to study the letter of 2 Peter and how it speaks to the issue of being duped by fake good news – it might feel like our responsibility to be on guard against deception and discern these counterfeit blessings to prevent them from getting into the church and being passed on to others is a daunting task for us as Christians.

And while it certainly is a tough challenge, I don't think it's the most difficult.

From what I've seen, the toughest challenge that we face as Christians, as people who belong to God and are followers of Jesus Christ, is knowing what is right – but having to resist what we want to do that is wrong, or knowing what scripture says about something but having our own opinions on the matter. Do you know what I mean?? The struggle is real.

I vividly remember experiencing it as a teenager, knowing that the party lifestyle of my non-Christian friends with all the drinking, drugs, and sex outside of marriage was wrong according to scripture, but still wanting to pursue it because it looked like so much fun and I didn't think there was much wrong with it.

Maybe you can relate to that or maybe you've felt similarly about something else.

And so, our greatest struggle as Christians is being pulled between what we know is right... and how we want to do what is wrong... what the scripture teaches us and what we have as our own opinions. And we all wrestle with this in some way, especially when we are just starting out as young believers.

So, I'm sure some of our teens and young adults are wrestling with this right now, and for those of us who have a bit more kilometers on us - think back to when you remember really struggling with this in your own life, and as we empathize with

how challenging and difficult it feels to go through this, consider this for a moment... How great would it have been to have someone – like myself – tell you that there is no need to struggle with this?!

To say that what you are trying to resist isn't actually wrong, its not sin... that notions of "god" punishing sin and a final judgment with eternal consequences are just outdated antiquated concepts.

What's important to focus on in the bible is the concept of freedom - liberation from whatever you are struggling with. Obviously - this denial of your desires is a difficult struggle for you and it's not bringing you any peace and happiness – so be liberated, embrace your desires!! That's the christian message.

We would have felt so relived wouldn't we. To have a minister or a church leader tell us this is how to live as a Christian - we would have heard it as good news! Hey we

don't have to live with the struggle anymore, wow being a christian is totally awesome!

Even long-time believers might hear this as good news because some of our sinful desires don't just fade away with time, and many believers grow tired of constantly having to resist them year after year after year – while living in a society that is constantly saying "*just do it!*"

Do you see what I'm talking about here?

Because brothers and sisters, this common struggle that is shared by all those who belong to God, this wrestling with our sinful nature is why God's people in the past were plagued by false prophets... and its why Peter warns us that the Church will be plagued by false teachers who offer us fake good news.

So please, if you haven't already done so, pull out your bibles and follow along as we look at 2 Peter chapter 2 and learn more about the characteristics of false teachers and their teachings.

And the overall key characteristic that comes out in this chapter is “destructive.” False teachers sneak *destructive* heresies into the church (vs.1), their depraved conduct *destroys* the reputation of the Christian faith – bringing it into disrepute (vs. 2) and they themselves are facing *destruction*. (vs. 3)

And Peter gives examples of that *destruction* with a reference to the flood in vs. 5 to Sodom and Gomorrah being consumed by fire in vs. 6, to animals who are caught and *destroyed* in vs. 12, that false teachers will be paid back for their harm in vs. 13, with blackest darkness that is set aside for them in vs 17 and as a result in vs 20 Peter concludes that these false teachers will be worse off at their end... than they were at their beginning.

So false teaching and false teachers are characterized by destruction.

But if we are looking for a cause and effect type of destruction in the lives of false teachers – we’re going to be disappointed.

It would be nice if preachers and teachers who taught destructive heresies would get hit by lightning as they walked out to their car after a service... or that they lose their voice and not be able to speak anymore... or that the donations to their churches would dry up and they would have to close.

But in fact, brothers and sisters, false teachers tend to be popular and have large followings and are fairly successful. Peter says “*many will follow them... and they greedy and exploitative*” (vs.2-3) and he makes reference later on in vs. 15 to Balaam who “*loved the wages of wickedness*” So it’s profitable to be false prophet or teacher.

The truth is we won’t see the destruction of false teachers happen quickly – not the kind of destruction we expect. Rather the swift destruction that Peter speaks of in vs. 2 is the destruction of their relationship to Jesus as their Lord, as their rightful owner and master... and their teaching will also destroy the Lordship of Christ in the lives of those who follow them.

We see this happening in the lives of many popular progressive christian authors and bloggers these days.

In their early writings they say all the correct things, support the orthodox teachings of the church and scripture, but then gradually heresy begins to sneak into their content. And it sneaks in because heresy is a one-sided application or twisting of the truth, it's the counterfeit that looks and sounds like the real thing because it uses part of the real thing.

And in the original Greek the word simply referred to opinions – so in some respects we can say that when these authors and bloggers started to elevate their own opinions on matters of the Christian faith – especially on matters we struggle with – over and against what the scripture clearly teaches, it very quickly destroyed their relationship to Jesus as Lord and destroyed their willingness to obey Him unreservedly.

And it doesn't take very long after that before they are beginning to downplay God's wrath against sin, doubting there will be a final judgement, questioning how a loving God

could send people to hell, or put his own Son to death on a cross and how that would pay for our sin??

I've watched this sad destruction happen to teachers like Rob Bell, authors like Brian McLaren, mom-bloggers such as Jen Hatmaker, even the once great Tony Campolo is no longer solid on orthodox teaching, and we've seen this progression occur in our own denomination as well.

False teaching is quick to undermine the need for obedience to Christ as Lord in the life of the teacher and those being taught, in fact it breeds a contempt for authority as Peter says in vs. 10.

So, if you want a test that can help expose a false teacher or teaching, see how they react to Paul's statement 1 Cor 6:19-20 where he says *"You are not your own, you were bought at a price – therefore honor God with your bodies!"*

In other words *"You're not the boss of yourself!"*

And try it on yourself as well to see how you react... the new nature given to you in Christ by the Holy Spirit will love it – the old sinful nature in you will get triggered by it, and the same thing will happen when you put it up against false teachers and their teaching.

Now as I said, it would be nice for everyone involved if there were more immediate supernatural negative consequences for false teaching, because this would reinforce the notion that there are consequences and judgement for the other sins and sinful desires we struggle with.

How many times do you give into the desire to pet a dog when the dog bites back – that desire goes away pretty quickly, or at least you are motivated not to give into that desire right?

But when the destruction is subtle and not so noticeable, it only reinforces the false teaching that there is no judgement, the cleverly invented story that God's wrath against sin is just something people in power made up to

control others and oppress them and we should be freeing people from such oppression.

Now here's the irony brothers and sisters, it seems that no one makes as much of a fuss about being free and freedom and whether other people are freed as someone who is not truly free.

Look at vs. 19 where Peter says that false teachers promise freedom *“while they themselves are slaves of depravity – because people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”*

Which means that if we believe that we are the masters of our own destiny and no one else has any right to tell us what to do, or what to think, or how we should live, or who we are – we're the masters of ourselves - then we have become slaves to ourselves.

And this means you will rather quickly become ensnared by your own worst desires.

Now you might think our worst desires are some of the behaviors that Peter describes in this chapter, such “*depraved conduct*” in vs. 2 or “*pleasurable carousing or hedonistic indulgence*” in vs. 13, or “*revelling in gluttonous pleasures, having eyes full of adultery, seducing the unstable, being experts in greed*” in vs. 14 – and they certainly sound like they good candidates.

Be if we go back to vs. 10-11 Peter says that “*the corrupt desire of our sinful nature*” results in despising authority – brothers and sisters – that... is our worst desire. All of the other sinful desires and behaviors that we struggle with are the result of it.

And if you can see this – and I pray the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to be able to do so... If you are able to see this in yourself and be aware of it... then you will have a trigger warning against false teachers, because vs. 18 says they appeal “*to the lustful desires of the flesh*”

You will know someone is trying to entice you into false teaching because their appeal will try to trigger that worst desire of our sinful nature - to despise the authority that is over us; Jesus as our Lord, Scripture as God’s Word.

But instead of despising authority this realization will cause you to discern the false teaching and reject it.

Now – brothers and sisters, everything that we have looked at in this scripture passage thus far is because of that struggle we have with our corrupt and lustful desires.

And its great to know that this is a weak spot, and how to guard against false teachers taking advantage of it and exploiting us because of it... but is there any real good news for us??

Yes – of course there is! And we find it in vs. 9 – Peter declares that “*if this is so – then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgement*”

And what Peter is talking about is how God protected Noah and his family from the flood and how God rescued Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And this is good news because these are examples of godly men who persevered in the struggle that we all face, being pulled between what they knew was right... and the wrong they wanted to do, which everyone else around them was doing.

Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness and Lot a righteous man – and if you're wondering what qualifications would make them righteous since there wouldn't have been any 10 Commandments or Old Testament writings at that time – it would have been the fact that they did not despise the authority of God as Creator and they submitted themselves to live according to God's Word as revealed in the Creation as an act of faith and to what they knew God had specifically said to them.

But this put them at odds with the people who lived around them.

Consider Noah building a giant ark, as God had instructed him, far away from any significant body of water, telling people that there was a flood coming... and think about the ridicule and mockery that he would have endured for that.

And Lot – Peter makes a point of telling us how Lot was tormented in his spirit by the lawless deeds he saw and heard living in Sodom and Gomorrah. He lived among those people but he did not live as they did.

So, brothers and sister let me say that God knows the struggle each of us faces as we are pulled between His Word and our sinful will. He is not impassive to this – and in fact this leads to the good news that He will rescue us.

Now you might have thought that I was going to say that if Noah and Lot could persevere in their struggles then we must persevere too and God will reward us for our efforts. But

that's another sneaky way that heresy can creep into the church and promote righteousness that comes from the self.

Peter's emphasis here is the Lord knows how to rescue us from the struggle, not that we emulate Noah's and Lot's examples.

In Noah's case God provided the ark which carried him safely through the flood – regardless of how Noah persevered and struggled against his own sinful nature, he would not have survived the flood had it not been for the ark.

And in Lot's case let us remember that Abraham interceded for Lot with God, pleading for the city to be spared so that Lot would not be destroyed along with them.

And God listened to Abraham because of the Covenant promise He had made with Him, remember God said – *"I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* (Gen 12)

Lot's perseverance in his struggle would not have carried him through the fire, but Lot was blessed by Abraham's intercession because God rescued him from the judgement.

Now where is this going... brothers and sisters its where all scripture goes – to Jesus Christ.

Listen to what Peter has already said about Noah and the ark and Jesus Christ in his first letter; *"God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."* (1 Peter 3:20-22)

So, brothers and sisters the good news is that Jesus Christ is our ark that protects us from God's judgment on sin – we are IN Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of God the Father and He is interceding for us – for God to spare us from the destruction in the coming judgement, and God will listen to His Son on our behalf.

So, let this good news encourage and refresh you - God knows how to rescue us from our struggle against sin, in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Put your faith and trust in that.

And the truth is that being reminded of this – strengthens us and enables us to persevere in our struggle.

We are strengthened to resist the desire to do what is wrong and empowered to do what is right in obedience to the authority of Christ as our Lord and the scripture as His Word.

That's what our life as followers of Christ is all about – yes, it is a struggle, yes that struggle makes us vulnerable to the destructive heresies of false teachings and false teachers.

But as Peter has already written to us *“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord and be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you”* (1 Peter 3:15)

And that answer is – “The Lord knows how to rescue us from trials” (vs. 9)

So may the Lord Jesus keep us faithful to Holy Apostolic faith through this teaching today brothers and sisters – all for His glory and Honor. Amen