

2 Peter 2 False teachers and their destruction
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Last week we began a short series on 2 Peter.

In chapter 1, Peter has a two part message.

Here's what I want you to do -

live a godly life.

Here's how you'll know what to do when I'm not here -

Listen to the voice of God.

“God has spoken to us.”

“God has spoken to the eyewitnesses of Jesus majesty.”

Chapter 1 verses 16 -18.

And “God has spoken through the prophets.”

“It’s not a matter of the prophets’ own interpretation,
those prophets spoke as they were moved by God’s HS.”

Chapter 1 verses 19-21.

That’s what Peter says.

The prophets have left you a written record.

And I’m leaving you a written record.

And it’s by those scriptures

that you measure the leaders of the next generation.

You pass the baton to leaders

who will uphold the apostolic and prophetic message.

That's how you will know what to do when I'm not here.

It’s important context for chapter 2

because it tells us why Peter wrote the letter as a whole.

He wrote because he wanted to make sure

the church stays on track after he dies,

it’s a passing the baton letter.

But that leaves us with the question of chapter 2.

How does chapter 2 fit in with the letter as a whole?

Why does Peter write chapter 2?

If we were to sum up chapter 2 in a sentence,

it’s ‘Watch out for false teachers’.

The whole chapter is about the ways of the false teachers,
 what God is going to do about the false teachers,
 and what happens to those who get caught up with the false teachers.
 How does that fit with the letter as a whole?

Well if the letter as a whole is about passing the baton
 to leaders who will uphold the apostolic and prophetic message,
 then this chapter says,

‘Here’s the alternative!

I’m warning you.

If you don’t follow the right sort of leaders,
 then this is what you’ll get.

Steer clear of these false teachers.’

The interesting thing is

that despite having a whole chapter devoted to these false teachers,
 Peter doesn’t concentrate of the content of their false teaching.

He takes aim at their character.

His number 1 instruction to Christians is about good character -
 adding to your faith, goodness, to goodness knowledge,
 to knowledge, self control and so on.

The number 1 way you recognise false teachers
 is by their bad character.

We have to wait until chapter 3

to get a clear picture of what they actually taught.

As Jesus said,

By their fruits you will know them.

So what is the character of the false teacher?

Peter mentions 3 dreadful character traits:

they’re greedy, depraved and lawless.

In verse 3,

‘in their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories.’

In verse 14, ‘they are experts in greed.’

They actually go to the greed university and get a degree!

In verse 15 they’re like Balaam who loved the wages of wickedness.

These are false shepherds who want to fleece the sheep.

They're in it for what they can get out of it,
 at the expense of the people they're leading.
 Now we should contrast this with Peter's view of a good leader.
 In his first letter 5:2, Peter says,
 elders should tend the flock
 not for sordid gain but willingly.
 So a good leader is enthusiastic for the sake of the ministry,
 but a false teacher is in it for what he can get out of it.
 You know a greedy teacher will be teaching you the wrong things,
 because they will change what they say
 so you will give them more stuff.
 'In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories.'

I guess the exemplars of this character trait are the telly evangelists.
 "Send in your hanky and a cheque for \$50,
 and the pastor will bless your hanky and send it back to you."
 But if you scratch beneath the surface you can find it closer to home.
 In some denominations, ministers can negotiate their salary.
 You'd be surprised how much some think they should be paid.
 In other denominations, there's a set wage.
 But some ministers decide
 to keep the payments from weddings and funerals for themselves.
 I knew one minister
 who used to moonlight on the public speaking circuit.
 He used to charge a thousand bucks a pop for an after dinner talk.
 And that was in the 1980s.
 Beware of greedy teachers,
 you can bet they'll be false teachers.

Peter's false teachers aren't just greedy,
 they're depraved.
 That's not a common word.
 What does it mean?
 It means they have no sexual boundaries.
 You want to live with your girlfriend – that's OK.

You want to practise homosexuality – that's OK.
 You want to invite all your friends around and have an orgy
 – that's OK too, so long as you invite me.

They're depraved.

It's a sexual free for all.

What does Peter say about their depravity?

Verse 2. Many will follow their depraved conduct,
 and because of this Christianity and hence Christ
 will be brought into disrepute.

Well it's happening right now, isn't it?

Muslims blaspheme Christ

because of the depraved ways of some Christian leaders.

Verse 10. They indulge the corrupt desires of the flesh.

Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight.

That's drunken revelry.

They have eyes full of adultery. That's verses 13 and 14.

They're compared to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 6.

These cities were destroyed by God in the OT

because of their sexual depravity.

Watch out for these depraved teachers!

They're dangerous.

Don't kid yourselves that it's their private lives and it doesn't matter.

Don't let them use the Clinton excuse!

'We all sin in our private lives

and it doesn't effect their suitability to be leaders in the church.'

That's nonsense.

Apart from causing Christ to be blasphemed by the pagans,
 they have a different gospel.

It's inevitable.

Along with that sort of behaviour

comes a message that's about self expression and self fulfilment
 not purity and obedience.

Instead of a gospel that's about Christ's death for sins
 and his lordship over his people,

comes a gospel of freedom from any restraint
so you can express yourself and find fulfilment any way you choose.
It's alluded to in verse 19.

"They promise them freedom".

But we want the gospel of freedom from sin
not freedom to sin.

So watch out for these depraved teachers!

You don't need me to tell you,
they're everywhere.

Peter's false teachers aren't just greedy and depraved,
they're lawless.

In verse 2 they deny the Sovereign Lord who bought them.

In this context it's not that they say,

"I don't believe in Jesus."

But that they deny that he's their boss.

"I believe in Jesus,

but I don't have to do what he says."

What ever they say,

it's clear by what they do that Jesus is not their Sovereign Lord.

In verses 7 & 8 they're compared the lawless
and doers of lawless deeds.

In verse 10 they're those who despise authority.

They're bold and wilful.

They're unafraid to heap abuse.

In verse 18, they mouth empty boastful words.

It's not just the rubbish they speak,

but they speak it with an unrestrained force.

These people feel no restraint,

they're unafraid of any authority,

they have no master.

they're a law unto themselves.

They don't believe that God will judge,

They are completely lawless.

Peter's put his finger on a piece of Australian culture there.
To generalise,
we Australians are an anti authoritarian bunch.
They say it stems from our convict roots.
We don't like having anyone tell us what to do.
I have to admit I'm up there with the worst of them.
When I was at Ridley they would write,
'Resistant to authority figures on my report.'
We ought,
I ought to take more notice
of those God has placed in authority over me.
But these false teachers have taken it one step further,
they're despising God's authority over them.
They've stopped believing that God will judge.
We must watch out for lawless false teachers.
Teachers who have no fear of God.
Teachers who think they're immune from God's judgement.
James tells us that Christian teachers will be judged more strictly.
Christian teachers need to hold their position
of expounding the word of God
with fear and trembling.
We need to recognise we're accountable for speaking God's words,
speaking on his behalf.
If you run into lawless teachers,
who despise the authority of the master,
watch out for them!

Why do we watch out for them?

Because they're dangerous.

In verses 17-22

we find out what happens to those who get caught up in the ministry
of these false teachers.

Because of course it's not just the false teachers themselves who suffer,
otherwise Peter wouldn't bother writing about it.

Those who get sucked in by the false teachers suffer too.

It's a deadly ministry!
 Two people with covid drive to Queensland.
 It's not just them who suffer.
 Every town they passed through suffers.
 And everyone suffers who gets caught up with false teachers.

Who do the false teachers go after?
 Verse 14 says they entice the unstable.
 The word for unstable
 is the opposite of the word for 'established' in 1:12.
 They entice people who aren't yet firmly grounded in the faith:
 New converts or people who haven't had substantial Christian teaching.
 Verse 18 says they entice people who are just escaping
 from those who live in error.
 New converts.

How do they entice them?
 They entice them with lustful desires of the flesh. Verse 18.
 They entice them by telling them they don't really have to leave behind
 the sins they are so attracted to.
 Think about it.
 You're a person on the fringes of the church.
 You're thinking about becoming a Christian.
 You hear somebody teaching,
 "Be part of my Christian group,
 you don't have to stop sleeping with your boyfriend.
 You can have freedom."
 It's quite enticing, isn't it?
 You get to belong without the cost.

But Peter says, you don't actually have freedom you have slavery.
 In fact Peter says that those who get sucked in by the false teachers
 are worse off than before they became Christians.
 In verse 20,
 "Their last state has become worse for them than their first."

What's worse than being a non Christian who hasn't heard the gospel?
Being someone who has tasted Christianity and spat it out.
Presumably because it's so much harder to turn back to Jesus
if you've tried being his friend and rejected him.
They're less likely to repent now than they were originally.
Don't be fooled by the saying
'as happy as a pig in mud'.
These pigs have returned to their mud.
They're wallowing in it.
But there's no happiness for them.
Peter says their position is grim.
The ministry of the false teachers is deadly.

Well other than watching out for them and avoiding them,
What should we do about the false teachers?
Well mostly this chapter is a warning to avoid them.
But there is the interesting story in verses 15 and 16.
Peter recalls the false prophet Balaam.
You can find his story in Num 22-24.
He's been talking about how the false teachers are greedy.
And so he compares them to Balaam
because Balaam was paid by Balak for his prophecy.
"He loved the wages of wickedness."
But he doesn't stop the story there.
He recalls how Balaam's donkey spoke to him
and told him it wouldn't go on
because an angel with a sword was opposing it.
Why does Peter include that part of Balaam's story?
I think he's saying to us,
"If a dumb animal,
a donkey no less,
can stand up against a false teacher,
you can too!"
Watch out for them and avoid them,
but why not speak up about it too.

You know sometimes
 I think we're a bit overawed by the false teachers.
 The impressive positions they hold in the church.
 The erudite and sophisticated arguments they use.
 The approving noises they get from the secular media
 when they speak their empty boastful words.
 (That's Peter's description not mine.)
 We get cowered into saying nothing.
 Or in my case I'll say nothing in the deanery meeting or wherever
 then tell Cherida exactly what I think when I get home.
 I think Peter's trying to encourage us.
 If God can use a speechless donkey to restrain the false teacher,
 maybe he can give us the words too!

But the big question is not
 "What should we do about the false teachers?"
 It's "What is God going to do about them?"
 And Peter leaves us in no doubt about that.
 He spells it out explicitly in verses 3-9.
 Let me read it again.
 "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them,
 and their destruction has not been sleeping.
 For if God didn't spare the angels when they sinned,
 but sent them to hell,
 putting them in chains of darkness
 to be held for judgement;
 and if he didn't 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 depraved conduct of the lawless;

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 the godly from trials,
and to keep the unrighteous for punishment
until the day of judgement.”

These false teachers are like Bagdad Bob.

Remember him?

Doing TV interviews about how the Americans weren't in Bagdad,
and you could see the tanks in the background
while he was saying it to the cameras.

These false teachers don't think God will judge,
but God's judgement is rapidly approaching them while they say it.

What does God do?

First of all he warns.

Time and time again.

This letter is a warning from God.

Every time this letter is read or preached,
it's a warning from God.

God warns time and again.

But the false teachers are lawless.

Lawless men are not interested in warnings.

Secondly God judges.

Peter is very clear.

The angels who rebelled are kept for judgement.

The people of Noah's day were drowned.

Sodom and Gomorrah were covered in burning sulphur.

God will judge the unrighteous.

Thirdly God saves.

Peter is again very clear.

Noah the preacher of righteousness was saved.

Lot the righteous man was saved.
God will save the righteous.

How was Noah a preacher of righteousness?

I don't imagine that Noah stood with a megaphone
on his half constructed ark
shouting out "repent or be drowned".

I imagine that the very fact of building a large boat on dry land
got people interested.

I imagine that word got around that he was expecting judgement day.
In that way, he preached God's displeasure on the wickedness of the
people of his day.

I imagine he was mocked.

I imagine he was laughed at
for expecting God's judgement to fall on the unrighteous.

But he was saved.

And they were drowned.

I imagine that we will be mocked,
if we expect God to judge the unrighteous one day.

But we know from this story that God will rescue true believers
and bring us safe to be with Jesus.

God didn't spare Sodom.

If God spares the nation of Australia,
he'll have to apologise to Sodom one day for singling them out.

No. God's judgement on Australia is sure.

But God will rescue the true believers
and spare them.

Those who like Lot are distress by the depraved conduct of the lawless.
God's judgement and God's salvation are sure.

God's judgement and God's salvation are sure.

So avoid false teachers.

You'll know them because they're greedy, depraved and lawless.
They suck people in who aren't well grounded in their faith.

And they leave them worse off than before they'd even heard of Jesus.
Don't be intimidated by the false teachers into keeping silence.
But be encouraged because
God's judgement and God's salvation are sure.