

## Watch Out for Evil Teachers • 2 Peter 2:1-22

Have you ever known a really nice mellow older man who suddenly became so passionate about something that he almost scared you with his intensity? You saw another side of someone you thought you knew. His face turned red, his voice became loud and his anger bubbled to the surface.

Get ready to listen to Peter! By the time he writes the words that we read in 2 Peter 2 he is a senior citizen in the Roman Empire. He doesn't have long to live and he knows the end is near. (He did not die of natural causes. Peter was crucified upside down because he said he was not worthy to be crucified right side up the way Jesus was.)

If we heard him speak the words of chapter one I think he would be calm, cool and reassuring. But, when St. Peter starts speaking the words of chapter 2 you may begin to wonder if he is really the saint he is supposed to be because we hear a different side of this famous friend of Jesus.

But before we read what he has to say there are some things I need to tell you. Number one is that you should see and hear this for yourself in your own Bible, so open your Bible to 2 Peter 2:1-22. Second, this is a long chapter. I thought about taking several weeks to study it because it gets complicated and challenging to understand. However, I found that Peter was so passionate about what he is here saying that it is difficult to interrupt him, so I decided we really need to deal with all of this at once.

The question here is whether you agree with what he has to say because he is passionate about it. He's upset with evil teachers who are damaging Christians in the church. I have to tell you up front that I agree with him. I agree with him because as a pastor I, too, get defensive and passionate whenever I think anyone might hurt Christians or hurt the church of Jesus Christ with inappropriate teaching. So, if you sense passion, intensity and some anger that is not Peter's but mine, you are probably right.

Are you ready? Then let's read 2 Peter 2:

*But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false*

*teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into dispute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

*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 un-*

*righteous 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.*

*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.*

***...while God judges and punishes those who are evil, he protects and preserves those who are righteous.***

*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, reveling 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.*

*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. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior 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.”*

Peter feels strongly about these things. He’s angry. He certainly does not like false teachers!

Peter begins by telling us that there were false prophets messing up Christians back then and he looks forward to today and says, “. . . *there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.*”

Next Peter warns what false teachers will do to you. He lists three warnings of what to watch out for from these false teachers:

- 1.) They introduce destructive heresies.
- 2.) They bring the truth into disrepute.
- 3.) They exploit with fake stories.

First, they introduce destructive heresies. Heresy is a Greek word for “choose”. It came to mean the wrong choice. A heresy is a teaching contrary to the Bible and contrary to the truth of God. These false teachers introduce doctrines that are contrary to God’s word and they encourage Christians to believe them. They pretend these are Christian truths, but they are not.

For example, some were teaching that God forgives anything, so do whatever you please and God will forgive you. Go sin up a storm and you will even make God look good because his greater generosity and grace will be seen in his unlimited forgiveness. That’s heresy.

Today there are allegedly Christian teachers who introduce the notion that the Bible condones homosexual behavior and that God blesses same gender marriages. That’s heresy.

Second, they bring the truth into disrepute. One job of every Christian is to make God look good and attract unbelievers to Christian faith. But, evil teachers behave shamefully and encourage others to unchristian behavior until they “*bring the way of truth into disrepute.*” They do this by teaching that Christians can behave any way they want and God will forgive them.

On a recent trip to Asia I talked with many Muslims. When one man spoke poorly of Christians I asked him what he understood a Christian to be. He told me that Christians are people who “eat pork, drink alcohol and chase women.” How sad that because of false teaching and poor behavior by those who profess to be Christians the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been misunderstood.

I’m not suggesting that any of us give up eating hot dogs, but I am saying that Peter is here telling us to beware of teachers who say we can do whatever we please, because in so doing we will bring Christian truth into disrepute.

Third, they exploit with fake stories. In 2 Peter 2:3 we are told, “*In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.*” Probably these are religious stories, perhaps stories about miracles, visions, dreams, angels, demons or revelations. Not that any of those things are unbiblical. It’s just that some evil teachers make up stories in order to get vulnerable people to do what they want.

Do you remember the news story of the Kansas City pharmacist who was accused of diluting

cancer drugs? Robert Courtney was indicted on twenty felony counts for diluting Gemzar and Taxol to make a larger profit between November 2000 and March 2001. How could he do that? People trusted him with their lives. He changed prescriptions for selfish reasons and really didn't care what he did to those he hurt.

That's what Peter is saying about evil teachers. Christians trust them. But they change the truth of God for selfish reasons and don't care who they hurt.

So, what's going to happen to these evil teachers? Peter paints a vivid picture of God's judgment on those who mislead God's people. And he does it by telling three stories of great judgment from God in the Old Testament.

Story #1 is about sinful angels. It goes back to before the creation of the world when there was an attempted overthrow of God in heaven led by Satan. A large number of angels joined the rebellion and God dealt severely with them.

What were those angels thinking? They were angels! They should have known better. But they deliberately sinned against God and as a result God doomed them to hell.

Story #2 is about Noah and the flood. God became so disgusted with human sin that he sent a flood that covered the earth and eradicated most of the population of the world.

The third story is about Sodom and Gomorrah. The people of these cities were sexually promiscuous and violent. God warned them again and again and they didn't care. So, God sent destruction and obliterated those twin cities and everyone in them.

It is obvious what Peter is saying will happen to evil teachers. The God who sent angels to hell, flooded the world and burned down two cities because of sin is the same God who is going to judge those who teach others heresy and encourage sinful behavior.

Peter does throw in a pair of parentheses in his explanation. He explains that while God judges and punishes those who are evil, he protects and pre-

serves those who are righteous. He saved Noah and his family from drowning in the flood and he saved Lot and his family from getting burned to death in Sodom and Gomorrah.

I read this and I think, okay, so where am I in this? Am I counted among the good guys that Peter's talking to or am I one of the bad guys? Peter actually gives us the key to be able to tell which list we're on. He says in verse 8 that Lot "*was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.*" So here's the test: When we see sin around us do we like it or does it make us uncomfortable? Does the sin we see attract us or torment our souls? It's a clear test of which team we're on.

What are these evil teachers really like? Here's where Peter gets very emotional and uses some of his strongest words. It is a devastating description.

In 2 Peter 2:10-12 he says that evil teachers think they are superior. They are "*bold and arrogant.*" They speak with a cool confidence. They think they are better than angels and can criticize anyone and everyone—including angels. They speak with an air of authority on matters they don't understand and don't know what they are talking about. Beware of teachers who are convinced they have all the answers and think they are smarter and better than everyone else!

In verses 13-16 he says that these evil teachers pursue personal pleasure. They are out for themselves. They may be secretive at first but they become open in their misbehavior. The two most likely sins are adultery and financial greed. They especially prey on unstable and vulnerable people. They gather around them the weak and vulnerable.

Peter says they are like an Old Testament character named Balaam who seriously considered an offer from a pagan king

to curse the army of Israel and bless the army of the enemy. God sent a donkey to speak out loud and tell him what a fool he was. That's just like these evil teachers—foolishly and flagrantly out for themselves, doing whatever they want and taking

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advantage of those who are most easily misled.

In verses 17-19 he again emphasizes that these evil teachers take sinful advantage of others. They hurt the very people they should be helping and are especially dangerous to new and immature believers. They promise them whatever they want. It sounds so good but it is really destructive. They do not speak the truth of God but make up promises to take advantage of vulnerable people.

Peter's last description is that they keep on returning to what is wrong. Here he is embarrassingly graphic. He says they may repent for a short time but they keep returning to their old selfish and manipulative ways—like a dog that returns to vomit and like a cleaned up pig that rolls back in the mud. He's saying that evil teachers just cannot keep from doing what is wrong.

Peter takes my breath away with his words and emotions. But, I want to tell him, "Yea Peter! Let 'em have it! Blast those evil teachers as hard as you can."

So what are we supposed to do? Watch out for religious teachers, leaders, prophets, influencers (or whatever they may be) who are false teachers and can lead people astray. But, how do we know which is which? The answer is fourfold:

- 1.) Ask God for wisdom.
- 2.) Beware of self-appointed teachers.
- 3.) Compare what teachers say to what the Bible says.
- 4.) Carefully choose who you trust.

Robert and Angela Barry had a great vacation in Florida. It was the last day and they were packed and ready to head home to Grove City, Ohio, when a young girl showed up at their room and gave a teddy bear to their ten-year-old son. When their luggage was x-rayed at the Orlando airport it showed a loaded .22 caliber handgun stuffed inside the toy. The Miami Herald later reported that the gun had been stolen in California in 1996.

The lesson is that we should neither be paranoid nor live in fear. We should be wise and careful. When Teddy Bear teachers, prophets and religious leaders come our way we need to run them through the x-rays of the Bible, prayer, wisdom and common sense before we snuggle up too close.

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