

Creatures Born to Be Killed, Part 3

2 Peter 2:18b-22

61-22

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 2 Peter chapter 2, coming back to this great chapter in which Peter teaches us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about false teachers, false prophets, how we are to recognize them, how we are to understand them, how God feels about them. It's a strong, almost violent section of Scripture as we look at Peter's full color portrait of the false teachers.

I simply remind you that these false teachers are the agents of Satan who infiltrate the church to lead people away from the truth. And they've always been around, they're around today. I picked up a copy of the Arizona Republic from Saturday. I was over in Arizona the other night and this article says, "In an era when belief in the Bible as the literal Word of God has gained enormous popularity, a group of fifty scholars has been aggressively rocking the boat. `Rather than being historically exact reports on Jesus' words and deeds, the gospels are the early church's interpretation of Jesus and His significance in the decades after His life,' says a press release from that group."

In other words, they are saying that their study has led them to the fact that the gospels are merely some people's interpretation of Jesus. It goes on to say, "The seminar now is preparing to publish its conclusions in the red-letter edition of five gospels which is due out later this year. And the seminar is also the official consultant to a Hollywood director who is making an action film about the life of Jesus. Paul Verhoeven, director of such hit films as "RoboCop" and "Total Recall," is putting together the script for "Christ, the Man." The film is being produced by Mel Brooks." By the way, if you want information on this, you could have attended a meeting at the Church of the Beatitudes where these people will meet with local pastors to try to straighten them out.

Their conclusions are these. "One, Jesus was not celibate and He probably had an intimate relationship with at least one woman. Two, Jesus never advocated celibacy as a lifestyle. Three, Jesus did not promise to return to the world to usher in a new age. Four, Jesus did not write the Lord's Prayer. Next, Jesus was not tried by the Jewish Sanhedrin before His crucifixion and no Jewish crowd took part in His condemnation before Pilate. Jesus' conversations with His disciples at the Last Supper probably are not authentic. And Jesus, while hanging on the cross, did not ask God to forgive His persecutors."

And those are a few of the discoveries of these false teachers. It simply points out that almost any time when there's a religious section article in a newspaper, you can find the things that false teachers advocate and believe. And if you can't find them in some article in the newspaper, just look down to the church advertisements. One after another, false teachers propagates his own enterprise in that manner. They're always around, they always have been, they always will be.

And Peter is urgent and dramatic in his passionate appeal to deal with them, to understand how deadly they are. We ought to be urgent and passionate as well. The impact of this passage really is

very powerful. And I would suggest to you that after we have completed our study of it, some time you go back and just sit down and read all 22 verses through three or four times, or maybe more, until they begin to sink into you in the big picture, because we've been cutting it down into small bites, and the impact is immense when you understand the individual parts, but when you read it through in its dramatic intention.

Now as we come back to the section from verse 10b through 22 tonight, for our study, I remind you that we have already considered several points about false teachers. First of all, their presumption. We noted in verse 10 that they are daring and self-willed. "They do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a railing judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong is the wages of doing wrong."

We noted that they're so presumptuous as to boldly, daringly, blaspheme angelic beings that even holy angels don't revile. They are so presumptuous as to brashly blaspheme truths and realities they are utterly ignorant of. They are so presumptuous as to foolishly assume they will get paid for what they do, instead they will pay wages themselves, wages of judgment.

Then we noted in verse 13, moving from that first point, to their practices. From their attitude to their action, in verse 13, telling us about their practices, it says about their public wickedness. They are stains and blemishes reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you, or as they feast with you.

And then it talks about their more private wickedness. "They have eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children." They are out of control morally, restlessly, lusting for sex and money. They hook the weak and the unwary and thus they are cursed.

And then we noted their premium, that meaning their reward, their prize, their payment, what they seek after. We noted that in verses 15 and 16, "Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." And you remember that we talked about Balaam doing what he did, that is prophesying for money. He was a prophet for sale. He could be bought. He was in it for personal gain, personal satisfaction. Not only money but the story of Balaam also includes a very ugly and terrible sexual situation where he led the people of Israel into sexual liaisons with idolatrous people. And he himself in verse 16 was rebuked for his transgression by a dumb donkey who spoke with a voice of a man and restrained the madness of the prophet. So they operate after the prototype false prophet, that is they are prophets for profit. They do what they do for money and sexual gratification, greedy and immoral, motivated by those kinds of premiums or payments.

And then in verse 17 we began to look at their prophecies. And we've gone from their attitude to their action to their motivation and now we come to their words, the things they say. And describing not so much the specifics of what they say, but the character of it, "they are springs without water," verse 17 says, and "mists driven by a storm for whom the black darkness has been reserved." Here we find that there is a very basic deception in their character. We noted last time that they promised to deliver water but they are springs that have no water. They promise to deliver water but they are mists that come along with fog and clouds but are driven away without ever raining. They promise life-changing truth, they promise to be able to bring you what you need to satisfy your spiritual thirst,

but they never can deliver. They put on the show with all their high-sounding words. We noticed that in verse 18, for speaking out arrogant words of vanity, high-sounding words but words with no substance, none at all.

Just stopping for a moment to talk about that, if you were to characterize the typical sort of milieu of these false teachers today and the kinds of words they speak, you would be able to identify them, for example, as authoritarian, authoritarian. Jeremiah 5:31 says that false prophets rule by their own authority, their own authority. They are almost always untrained, almost always without formal training, almost always not ordained by reputable associations, or institutions, and they always seem to live above any biblical or theological accountability and they pontificate like some Protestant popes whose words are not to be questioned. They rule over their people and their organizations and their churches unilaterally, as authoritarian dictators. Whatever they espouse must be true. They are not the products of training, they are not held in check by accountability with sound theologians and godly men. They operate above and beyond any kind of authority and they operate totally on their own. They are authoritarian and they rule with an iron hand their people and their organizations. And their words are words of dominance. They typically use words that denounce all other teachers and all others who would disagree with anything they say.

Secondly, today their words are characterized by being man-centered. They typically are selling something that they think people want to buy. If you're in it for money and sex, you don't give messages that people don't want to hear, right? I mean, if you're in for personal gain, then you sell what you assume people are buying. And what is it that people are buying today? Prosperity, health, wealth, all of that. So they spin off their visions of health, wealth, prosperity, they cry "peace, peace" when there is no peace, visions that come out of their own mind. And like the time of Jeremiah, they prophesy pleasant things. They prophesy illusions and the people love it that way. They preach a positive confession, they preach that Jesus wants you rich, they preach all of the things that God can possibly imagine He wants you to have, they're all at your disposal, have at it. They never preach sin. They never preach holiness. They never preach purity. They never preach repentance, confession, remorse over sin. They replace the true prophet's message of holiness, the true prophet's message of judgment with what men want to hear.

Another characteristic of their speech and their words is they are self-styled. And by that I simply mean that they mock the ancient paths, as it says in Jeremiah 6:16. They disassociate themselves with traditional, scriptural, biblical theologians. They do not want to be associated with them because they want to say something new. They claim direct revelation, superior to all before them, superior to all orthodox truth, all orthodox faith. They contradict the plain, historic teaching of Scripture which in most cases they aren't able to deal with anyway because of a lack of proper training. And they are the ones who have truth that is hidden from everybody but them. If you listen you will find a gross kind of egotism all wrapped up in the things they say which no one else has ever known, supposedly.

Peter says then in verse 18, "This is typical, speaking out arrogant words of nothing." "Vanity" means "emptiness," just hot air. They speak their own useless words which they arrogantly claim are divine.

Now you'll notice at the end of verse 17, I remind you again that the black darkness has been reserved for them. That black darkness speaks of hell. Peter continues to inject those direct statements about judgment because he is so...he is so angry, he is so righteously indignant against the false teachers.

Now let's go back to verse 18 and pick it up where we left off last time. After "speaking out arrogant words of vanity," Peter says, "They entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality those who barely escape from the ones who live in error." Now I want to spend a little time just talking this over with you and I want to give you some very practical insights.

Listen to this. They use their empty words to dazzle people with their arrogant verbosity. They use their high-sounding words and their supposed insights and revelations and hidden secrets and revelation knowledge to dazzle people with what is nothing more than unbelievable arrogance. How utterly arrogant is it for anyone to stand up and say, "Thus says the Lord," when that is not the product of very careful and intense study of Scripture?

But, you see, truth is not their intent, seduction is. It isn't the truth that concerns them. It is captivating people that they're desirous of and so they do that. They entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality. They always appeal to people on the baser level. They're not appealing to their minds. They're not appealing to them because of the majesty of God. They're not appealing to them because of the greatness of truth. They want to appeal to them where they feel, so they preach a fleshly kind of thing, almost a sensual kind of message that feeds the lowest instincts.

We also could interpret that particular statement, "they entice by fleshly desires by sensuality," in another way. We could say also that they even appeal to the lusts of people. This could refer to endeavoring to generate their own attractiveness through some kind of sex appeal on their part so that they can attract women to themselves. We are not going to narrow this statement down when it says they entice by fleshly desires by sensuality. It could be that in their very person, their persona, there is a certain kind of sexual sex appeal that they use to generate response, certain lustful attractiveness. It could be also that what they're saying is they attract people with a message that doesn't ask people to change their lifestyle, like the sexy rock singer who said, "I have been born again but don't think it will change my life or my music." If... If they're going to be effective, they're going to have to offer people some kind of religion that doesn't crowd people's lifestyle. And so they tolerate that and they offer them a kind of religion that they can embrace and still hold onto their fleshly desires and their sensuality.

I have to also say that I think here many false teachers are in the very overt business of seducing women, plain and simple. They entice them by fleshly desire. They entice them by sensuality. And in the case of, by the way, some charismatic women healers, we know that they have their own gigolos, too. And they were involved in enticing men. Many false-teaching counselors use their purported compassion to counsel biblically as a way to seduce their counselees.

False teachers seduce people ideologically. They seduce them into false teaching by their clever ploys. They seduce them by letting them keep their worldly desires and fleshly lusts and still take religion. And sometimes they actually seduce them in a physical way. You see, a false teacher has no capacity to restrain his own flesh because false doctrine can't restrain the flesh, can it? So people who get near false teachers not only end up in a seduction ideologically, but they end up sometimes in a seduction physically. We've seen that exposed in the scandals of our own country. We hear about it constantly, constantly in the religious community, even among many pastors.

And who are their victims? Back to verse 18, "Those who barely escape from the ones who live in error." Who are the victims of the seduction in all of its dimensions, whether it's an ideological seduction, whether it's the seduction that says we offer you health, wealth and happiness at no cost,

you can live anyway you want, or whether it's actually seducing someone physically, who do they seduce? They don't seduce mature Christians, for mature Christians have overcome the evil one and do not buy into those kinds of seductions. They seduce people who barely have escaped from the ones who live in error.

What does that mean? They seduce people who are just making moral resolutions, trying to get help for their guilt and their sin and their troubled life, and they're trying to move out of the world.

You say, "What are you talking about?" I'll tell you who they prey on. Women with broken marriages who know their lives are disastrous and want help. People with lots of guilt, lots of anxieties, lots of problems, struggling with difficulties, who are trying to escape. Now they're not... It's not indicating they've been saved but are trying to escape and they run to religion. And the false teachers exploit them for money and sexual sin.

The phrase "the ones who live in error," would you notice it in verse 18? "The ones who live in error," that simply...that is simply a fundamental corruption as to human nature. The ones who live in error are the unregenerate. They live in error, the run-of-the-mill unregenerate mass of humanity. There are people who are dissatisfied with that. They're unfulfilled. They're lonely. They're troubled. And they seek religion and they seek some kind of way out of that; we would call it moral resolution. They want to clean up their life.

You heard some of the young people giving testimony tonight say, "I came to the point where I wanted to change my life. "I wanted to change the way I was living." There are a lot of people like that, millions of people like that. And so they make a move toward religion and in their dissatisfaction and loneliness and trouble and pain, they are highly vulnerable, very vulnerable for the seducers who pull them into the lair and they become their prey.

Verse 19 says, "They promise them freedom," deliverance from all of life's pain, all of life's troubles, all of life's anxieties. They can't deliver freedom because they themselves are slaves of corruption. They promise freedom, they promise deliverance, they promise liberation. You can have it all, health, wealth, success, happiness, it's all here if you'll just come and follow me, they say. They promise peace and prosperity but they don't have it. They don't have it because they themselves are slaves of corruption, slaves of corruption.

Back in chapter 1 verse 4, unregenerate human nature is described as the corruption that is in the world by lust. Unregenerate people are corrupt. And they may claim to represent God, but their teachings are empty verbosity, lies and hypocrisy, verbal nonsense that sounds like spiritual truth. They are over-blown bags of hot air, Peter says. They're trying to justify their lust for money and sex, luring victims to their deadly trap by promising freedom from trouble while they have no freedom at all to give because they are enslaved to the sinful destructive corruption of their own unredeemed condition. The only true freedom comes in Christ.

And then Peter gives the proof of their slavery with an axiom. He says, "For by what a man has overcome, by this he is enslaved." It's a self-evident truth, whatever controls you enslaves you, whatever overpowers you controls you, owns you, enslaves you. In other words, they are creatures of corruption, they are dominated by corruption. Corruption totally controls false teachers like Balaam. Even though he from time to time sounded so spiritual, he was driven by money and sex. It

is the master. Verse 14: "Their eyes are full of adultery and their hearts are trained in greed." And they never cease from these driving sins. They don't have any freedom to offer. They can't free you from guilt. They can't free you from sin. They can't free you from fear and anxiety and trouble and pain and sorrow. They don't have any freedom to offer.

Peter is so angry because he knows that when someone comes to Christ there is true freedom. If the Son has set you free what? You're free indeed. But he says they'll be destroyed in their own enslaving corruption. Look at them. You think they can offer freedom? They are overcome by their own corruption, and by what a man is overcome he is enslaved.

I think I need to give a word of warning here which shall be not only to you but on this tape to many others and probably on the radio to many thousands and thousands more. A word of warning to the would-be victims of lustful, sensual enticers, false teachers: It's a grief to my own heart that so many, particularly women, are seduced by those who claim to be the representatives of Jesus Christ. And so I want to take a moment to warn you women about what to look for, what to be wary of in your teacher or your preacher or your pastor or your counselor, the tell-tale signs of sensuality that prey on women. And I'm going to suggest a list for you here. You don't need to write it all down, but maybe can file some of these things in your mind.

This is the kind of individual you want to avoid, particularly if there's vulnerability in your life, there's need and you are not under the protection of a strong spiritual leader in a father or a husband. Here's what to look for. These are telltale signs of a seducer. One, frequent talk about and preoccupation with sexual matters in personal conversation. When somebody starts to talk to you like that and they carry around, as it were, the title of one who represents Christ and God, you need to be very, very cautious. Secondly, preoccupation with sexual matters and subjects in the pulpit. When they have a certain freedom about what they say in public.

I was driving on the way to speak in another city at a big conference. In fact, the speaker who was before me was speaking on the radio because they were broadcasting it live. And so I was listening to him as I was going in to be the next speaker. He was describing a very wicked scenario at a rock concert which was so sexually explicit that I was offended. And I said to the person I was riding with, I said, "I don't know that man's personal life but I'll tell you right now he is engaged in sexual sin, because only a man to whom sexual sin has been reduced to routine can speak like that in public." It was a matter of weeks after that until the scandal hit the newspapers in his own city and he was defrocked. You can tell if you listen to what a man says and what comes glibly and easily out of his mouth. Pulpit talk that is explicit and without restraint is a dead giveaway that you're dealing with a seducer to whom those kinds of terms are very familiar.

Another thing to be careful about is physical hugging, touching, and kissing, even on the cheek. Those kinds of things may be innocent. They may be done in a proper gracious fashion. But on the other hand, if that is routine, if that is habitual, if that is common practice, and particularly if it is common practice among a selective few, you have much to be concerned about, especially if you're one of them.

Another, a lack of restraint from immoral media. I'm amazed sometimes when I'm gathered together with people in religious circles when they tell me the movies that they have seen, that there are no conditions that I can think of on the face of the earth that would make me darken the door of such a thing. When they will tolerate immorality, visually, without a sense of shame and revulsion, you need

to beware.

Another thing to look for, a lack of deep seriousness about sin. A certain making light of sin, a frivolous joking about things that are heinous, distasteful to God, which in effect means there is a familiarity with that kind of stuff. It's easily on the tongue and it doesn't really offend and it doesn't even shock anymore because that is such common stuff, such commonplace conversation. Watch for the lack of deep seriousness about sin.

Beware of a man, also, who does much counseling of attractive women with marital problems. Pastors who make themselves available for that kind of counseling as a pattern of life are dealing with issues that they ought not to deal with, betraying preoccupations they ought not to have. And, ladies, I tell you this, when you go to share with a pastor, you be very judicious and very cautious about what you say. I have seen with my own eyes some of the most unbelievable notes that were taken in interviews by pastors under the guise that they were trying to help women that were so shocking they couldn't be printed in any magazine without being deemed pornographic. Be very careful about someone, a spiritual leader of any kind, who asks private questions about physical relationships between you and your husband and who seems concerned to know any details.

Be very, very aware of someone, this could be general, all of us need to be aware of this, someone who personally cultivates a woman into significant role of...a significant role of leadership and that keeps her closely involved in his ministry. It's not so much women who are already there as someone who all of a sudden gets lifted up to some prominent place of ministry, very close to that leader.

Another, be very concerned with someone in spiritual leadership who is preoccupied with physical appearance, who is preoccupied with clothing, jewelry, cars, houses, wealth, fancy hotels, fancy restaurants. You say, "Why?" Because it betrays a very fleshly approach to life and it's very difficult to compartmentalize the flesh. And if it's running amok in one area, chances are it's running amok in another one, too.

Be very wary of someone in spiritual leadership who is rarely seen with his wife at church, who is rarely heard speaking lovingly and graciously of his wife, who is rarely seen with his wife in public, who never expresses publicly love for his wife.

Another one, be very, very careful of someone who travels alone frequently, is away from home a lot, and seems to prefer that rather than being at home. There's something about a godly man that is associated with a very intense love for his home. There's something about an ungodly man that sees the home as something to avoid because what he seeks isn't there and what is there may be the unmasking of his life.

Be very wary, women, of a man who gives you gifts. Beware of a man, any man, who gives gifts to any woman other than his wife.

Beware of a man who rejects a high degree of personal accountability. Sin seeks to be alone. It doesn't like a crowd. It doesn't even like anybody around.

Beware of men whose preaching is shallow and who seem never to say anything new...in the sense

of the understanding of Scripture because they're not studying the Word of God.

Be very wary of preachers who are more concerned with relationships to people than they are with people's relationships to God and whose emphasis in preaching seems always relational and infrequently, if at all, God's Word.

Beware of preachers who fail to preach on the holiness of God and His hatred for sin.

Beware of preachers who emphasize feelings and emotions rather than doctrine, who are shallow and not profound.

And beware of the man who has fallen before, who has fallen before, for if he has fallen before, the percentage is he will fall again.

And if you are finding yourself around this kind of man, even though he purports to be your spiritual leader, my advice to you is to run the other direction.

So Peter is deeply concerned that the church be aware of the presumption, the practices, the premium, the prophecies of these kind of false teachers. And as I noted to you all the way through, he repeats their damnation. He designs to call them perverts, those, he says in verse 15, who have gone astray. That's what a pervert is, perverted from the right course.

Having said all that, he closes with a look at their perversion in verses 20 to 22. We have noted the words of strong judgment against them all through the passage, and here is the final blast of doom given. Verse 20: "For if they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first." Now in first reading that might not come crystal clear. Let me help you with it. The word "they" means the false teachers. If after the false teachers have escaped the defilements of the world. What does that mean? In what way have they escaped the defilements of the world?

Remember what I told you about those in verse 18 who are barely escaping? Do you understand that these false teachers at some point in their life were pursuing religion? There was some point in their life when they tried to pull themselves up and out. If after they have escaped already, they've already escaped the defilements of the world.

Well what does that mean? Let me help you with that. The word "defilements" is the Greek word *miasma*. Have you ever heard the English word miasma? Not two words, my asthma, but miasma. Some of you were looking a little started for a moment there. The English word "miasma" comes from this Greek word by the same pronunciation, "miasma." It's a graphic word. The dictionary says this, "Miasma is noxious exhalations from putrid organic matter. Miasma is poisonous vapor or germs infecting the atmosphere with deathly influence." Wow.

What is he saying here? That the world gives off a miasma, the miasma of the world, the wretched pollution, the noxious, poisonous vapor and germs that come out of the world that are deadly influences. He says at some point in time these false teachers wanted to escape that. They wanted to get up and out of the muck, if you will. That's why they turned to religion. The pollutions, or the

miasma of the world, is the sin, the iniquity, the wickedness in every conceivable form that belongs to the noxious swamp of the world system. Every person is contaminated by the filth of it and the unregenerate are literally up to their proverbial eyes in the muck. They feel it. They taste it. They smell it. And some people seek to escape it.

Liberal seminaries across America have students who are going there. Why do they go to seminary? Because there's something in them that wants to elevate themselves to some religious level and so they go and quote-unquote "study theology." They're trying to escape from the miasma, the pollution of the world. Some of them, it says here, do this by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What kind of knowledge is this, a saving knowledge? No. The word here does mean a complete knowledge; that is some precise and true knowledge about Christ, who He was, what He did. So rather than turn to Mohammed or turn to some other false religion of the world, they want to come up out of the miasma by turning to the truths about Jesus Christ. It's moral reformation again through religion. And they have chosen the religion of Christianity.

And, beloved, I am telling you Christianity is full of these people. I read about some of them a few moments ago who are sitting around in committees deciding what Jesus did or didn't say. By the way, they have quite an interesting way to determine it. I didn't read it to you, but I will just so you'll know. They vote on whether Jesus said it or not. Instead of a ballot each participant drops a marble; red, pink, gray or black marbles. Each marble has a meaning but the meanings are hard to translate in a nutshell, Funk said, the man who leads it, but basically a red marble means, "that's Him," pink means "sure sounds like Him," gray means, "well maybe it's Him," black means, "there's been a mistake." The obvious pun is that they in putting their marble in a ballot box have lost their marbles.

But there are... If you bring them all into the room they're going to say, they're all about Christianity and they're all about studying Christ and it is by the true knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that they have come up out of the muck and they are elevated from the riff-raff of society. And some of them wear even elevated garments to identify themselves as holy men in their clerical garb. They at one point in their life wanted to get out of the miasma. They claim even to be Christians. They claim Christ. Although, as Peter said earlier, they deny His lordship over their lives and they want Christ and their lustful passions and their money and their sexual favors. They are often accepted as Christian teachers, evangelists, preachers and pastors, but there's no real relationship with Jesus Christ. No salvation terms, by the way, are used here.

How do we know they're not really in Christ? Back to verse 20, even after they've escaped the miasma and they've gotten themselves at least up and out of the muck to some degree by identifying with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled back in the muck, the miasma, and this time they're overcome and the last state has become what? Worse than the first. Since there's no real salvation, there's no true power over sin, there's no Holy Spirit indwelling, there's no grace operating, they can't maintain their position in religion, they fall back into the miasma of the world from which they have barely lifted their heads. They barely got out of the muck and they retrogress right back into it because moral reformation can't change the heart. And eventually they reject the Christianity and they become apostates. They fall back and are entangled again and are overcome, dominated, because they have no true power to resist. False teachers eventually fall back into the muck. It dominates them as it once did, even though they may carry on externally their ministry. Once they came out hoping for the best.

I remember a student that I went to college with who really used to say he wanted to serve God. He

went to seminary. And by the time seminary was over he was a bartender, went to a liberal seminary. They destroyed everything that he had thought true about God and Christ. He fell back into the muck from which at one point in his life it seemed he desperately wanted to escape to deliver himself from sin and the wretchedness he saw in his own life. But he couldn't do it.

And the last state of them, far worse than the first, the last state far worse than the first. Why? Why is the last state far worse than the first? Because it is a much more severe eternal punishment in hell to one who having known the truth regressed from it than to one who never knew it in the first place.

Our Lord had something to say about this. Look at Matthew 12 and verse 43, this is graphic. Matthew 12:43, "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man it passes through waterless places seeking rest and doesn't find it." Then it says, "I will return to my house from which I came," and when it comes it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits, more wicked than itself and they go in and live there, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation." Now we know where Peter got his quote, don't we?

Well, what's this about? This is the danger of moral reformation. Jesus is speaking eyeball to eyeball with the Pharisees who were the classic illustration of people who tried to pick themselves up out of the miasma by their own bootstraps, right? And morally reformed their own lives. And apparently what you have here is a picture of a man who makes a moral decision to get religious, to leave his sin behind, to clean up his act, to be a better husband, better father, to be a better worker, to be a more honest man, a man who wants to be delivered from his own guilt. And so he makes this moral decision to get religious and to put sin behind him. And the demon that's controlling him temporarily leaves. But the demon can't find a new home. He can't find a place he'd like to live, so he goes back to the same guy. And he says I'm going to go home. And this, by the way, reminds us that demons live in the homes of the unregenerate in their physical bodies. The demon went back. And you know what he found when he went back? That place was cleaned up. The guy cleaned up his act. People can clean up their act, you know.

You say, "Well what would cause a person to do that?" Oh fear of imprisonment. Maybe he was a criminal and he got sick of going to jail. There are a lot of homosexuals that have cleaned up their act not because they love God but because they fear what? AIDS, disease, social stigma. By the way, as a footnote, you might be interested to know that the incidence of venereal disease among homosexuals in San Francisco is twelve times as high as the normal population, not just AIDS. That would make somebody clean up his lifestyle, social stigma, rejection by family, by friends, financial ruin. A lot of things can move people up and out of the muck, even love for somebody.

It's amazing how many men want to clean up their act when they fall in love with some lady or vice versa. But when the nature isn't changed, when the miracle of regeneration hasn't happened, they come up and out of it but they can't sustain it. And if they come up and expose themselves to Christianity but never embrace Christ, finally they're going to fall right into the muck again, they're going to become apostates, morally, spiritually perverted. And it's going to be worse than then it ever was; worse here and now because they will have given up on the ability to reform and worse in eternity because hell will be hotter for them then, than for those who never knew.

Notice what he says then in the next verse, verse 21, "For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than having known it to turn away from the holy commandment

delivered to them." My, what a statement.

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness. What's the way of righteousness? Christianity, the Christian faith. It is called the way of truth in verse 2. It is called the right way in verse 15. Back in the book of Acts Christianity got the name "the Way." It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, that is Christianity, than having known it to turn away from the holy commandment. What's that? Scripture. Better they never knew about the Christian faith, better they never knew about the Scripture, better they never knew about Christian doctrine, better they never heard it than to have heard it and understood it and known it and rejected it. Their professed Christian experience gave them access to the precise knowledge about Jesus Christ and to the true teaching of Scripture. They had it. They had it. It says at the end of verse 21, "It was delivered to them." And they sometimes even preached it, right? But they rejected the true One and His truth. They turned away. It describes again their perversion, their defection, literally means to turn back. It would have been better if they had never ever known.

Why? Climax comes in Hebrews chapter 6. Listen to this, verses 4 to 6, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Amazing. Here are these people who have tried by their own bootstraps to pick themselves up and pull themselves out of the muck and they have been enlightened and they have tasted of the heavenly gift. They've had a taste of the power of the Holy Spirit and they have tasted the good Word of God and they've tasted the miraculous power of Christ, the powers of the age to come.

But having tasted all of that and seen it all, and understood it all, it is their choice to reject. They fall back. It's impossible to ever renew them to repentance. They have chosen to stand with the ones who killed Christ and put Him to open shame.

Hebrews 10:26 says the same thing in other words. It says in verse 26, "For if we go on sinning willfully," that is living in sin willfully, "after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer remaining a sacrifice for sins." There's no way to be saved. All you can be doing is having a terrifying expectation of judgment, the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. If you have received the knowledge of the truth like false teachers have and even propagated it, but go on sinning willfully as a pattern of life, driven by lust and seduction, there's no sacrifice for sins. All you can look forward to is judgment, fire.

And how severe will it be? Look at verse 29, "How much severer, (more severe) punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has regarded as unclean the blood of the Covenant by which He (that is Christ, should be a capital "H", by which He) was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace." Who's going to get the most severe punishment in hell? The people who understood who Christ was and trampled on Him, the people who understood what His bloodshed on Calvary meant and saw it as unclean, the people who were wooed by the grace of the Spirit and rejected it. For those people, verse 30 says, "Vengeance is Mine, God says, I will repay." And verse 31 says, "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

You see, an apostate, a false teacher as Peter is describing him, can only be bred, listen to this, can only be bred in the brilliant light of the truth of the gospel and the Scripture and can only be bred in

proximity to Jesus Christ. They are not made outside Christianity, they're made inside. They're made inside the church. They are bred in the church, half exhumed from the muck of wickedness, half out, half in. They eventually reject truth and try to seduce all they can to fulfill their self-gratification and then fall back in the muck. They go on sinning willfully and habitually. For them there is no sacrifice. For them there is the greatest judgment, the hottest hell, for they have sinned against light and they have sinned against knowledge and they have sinned against understanding.

In Luke 12:47, "That slave who knew his master's will and didn't get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes. But the one who didn't know it and committed deeds worthy of a flogging will receive but a few." He's talking about hell. A few lashes for the ones who didn't know, many for the ones who did.

Now do you know why Jesus said looking at Judas, "Better for that man if he had (what?) never been born?" Because better for that man if he had never known the truth.

Peter looks one last time at the despicable false teachers and leaves us with graphic imagery in verse 22. It has happened to them, that is they're sinking back in the muck from their original days of wanting to get out of it. "It has happened to them according to the true proverb," by the way this is quoted from Proverbs 26:11. "A dog returns to its own vomit." Boy, that's pretty graphic. And then Peter adds, "A sow after washing returns to wallowing in the mire."

The Christian church, beloved, is full of people who at some point in time wanted to pull themselves up out of the miasma and get religion and clean up their life. And many of them have become teachers and preachers and pastors and self-styled prophets. They couldn't get out of the muck and eventually they sunk back into it, even though they carry on the ministry, they're driven by the premiums of lust and greed; and every once in a while we see them exposed. And Peter says they're like dogs who go back to their vomit and pigs who get cleaned up and go back to the muck.

By the way, Peter's borrowing from Jesus in Matthew 7:6 where Jesus said, and this is obviously in Peter's mind, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Don't give what is holy to dogs and don't throw your pearls (what?) to swine." Hogs and dogs.

"Why does the Bible use those terms to speak of false prophets?" In biblical times dogs were very rarely kept as household pets. They were used sometimes to herd sheep. They were largely half-wild mongrels, dirty, greedy, snarling, often diseased and vicious, dangerous and despised. And they were just as likely to eat their own vomit as anything else. The Jews treated dogs with contempt because of their filth. They lived on garbage. They carried disease. They ate the garbage and then returned to eat what the garbage produced in them, filthy creatures, filthy creatures.

Pigs were the epitome of uncleanness; greedy, vicious, filthy animals that Jesus said would tear you to pieces. Jesus said don't give holy things to dogs and don't give pearls to swine, they only trample them on the way to their vomit and back to the mud. Both return to the filth and so do the false teachers.

And so, says Peter, this is their characterization. Stay away from them. In fact, would you let me read in closing the first two verses of the next chapter? "This is now, beloved, the second letter I'm writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the

words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles."

Beloved, listen to the holy prophets, listen to the apostles, not the false teachers.

Father, we thank You again for the wisdom of God imparted to us through the text of Scripture. How profound, how shaking this passage is. May it find its way into our hearts and may it become for us a source of discernment. Oh God, how we hear the heart-cry of Paul when he says, "I know that grievous wolves will enter in, not sparing the flock and of your own selves perverse men will rise up and lead you astray." How we plead with you to protect the church. There are many who would say such a sermon lacks love. That's not true. Such a sermon bleeds love from Peter's heart for the purity of the church and the blessing of the people who hear the truth and reject error. We pray that You'll continue to unmask the false teachers that we might know who they are. We pray that You'll deliver those who are caught in their clutches, like brands snatched from the burning, that they might be rescued to hear the truth and believe it, the truth which is in Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

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