

Sunday, April 14, 2024 pm

STUDIES IN 2 PETER

The Character of False Teachers

2 Peter 2:10-17

As we continue our study through 2 Peter we are in the midst of a study of false teachers, the primary focus of this letter as we have noted. In 2 previous lessons we have noted, 1) That false teachers exist and that they deceive the simply by covetous means; 2) How God views these false teachers. In this lesson, we will notice the character of these false teachers – self-willed.

I. The context,

- a. Peter has reminded them that God knows how to deliver the godly, citing the example of “righteous Lot” being delivered for Sodom. We have noted what a source of comfort that ought to be to us.
- b. BUT, in this text his main point is that in the same way that God knows how to deliver the godly, He knows how to, and WILL, reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment. There is a day of reckoning coming and the wicked, INCLUDING the false teacher will be dealt with.

II. The character of these false teachers (1)

- a. In our text today, we notice the character of false teachers, including how God views them. The next few verses describe these who are deliberate in their actions.
 - i. **They walk according to the flesh, in the lusts of uncleanness** – The NASB describes this as, “*those who indulge in the flesh in its corrupt desires.*” Often these false teachers are caught up in immoral practices and lifestyles. Their lifestyle often drives what they teach as it is clearly self-serving. They are not living godly lives, so why would care whether their teachings were true to God’s word? NOTE: This expression, and the next are TIED to vs. 6-9 and the sin of Sodom. This expression is related to the depraved, homosexual lifestyle prevalent in that city. Here it is descriptive of the TYPE of behavior we are dealing with in these teachers. Recall Romans 1:24-27, Ephesians 4:17-20. Jude 7 which parallels this context speaks of Sodom as being given over to fornication and having gone after “strange flesh” and “*set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*”
 - ii. **Despising authority** – literally it is despising “lordship.” Who they despise is debated: Worldly leaders? While plausible, often worldly leaders tolerate immoral behavior. But it is possible for an ungodly false teacher to have disregard for civil authorities as well. Many a false teacher has broken laws in their pursuit of gaining a following, especially if you are of the disposition Peter describes here, e.g., embezzlement, deceit, perhaps even moral laws, etc. If one has no fear of God they are likely to have little fear of governing authorities.
Divine authority? God or perhaps his angels. Clearly, they are rejecting God! 2 Peter 2:1, they denied “the Lord who bought them.”
Spiritual leaders (elders, etc.)? Vs. 5 gives the example of Noah being rejected as a preacher of righteousness. Also 2 Peter 1:16 where Peter was likely answering a charge that they had followed “cunningly devised fables”. This fits the context. Consider the responsibility of elders to exhort and convict those teaching error. Titus 1:9-13 describes this responsibility and notes there are many who are insubordinate and deceivers.

NOTE again, if this is related to the rejection at Sodom, Genesis 19:5-11 describes how the depraved men rejected both Lot and the angels who had come to the city. Such are often not interested in changing and will reject correction.

- iii. IN our text, these false teachers were of this disposition. Perhaps they despised authority at all levels.

b. Their character further described

- i. **They are presumptuous** – daring and improperly bold. In this term I see a willful blindness. In Matthew 23:16 Jesus called the corrupt, religious leaders “blind guides”. Matthew 15:14 He said that they are, “*blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch*” (see 2 Peter 2:3). 2 Corinthians 4:4 speaks of those “*whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*” This is one who presumes (acts like it) he is right EVEN if he knows he is not.
- ii. **Self-willed** – arrogant, stubborn and selfish. They want their own way and will reject anything else. Clearly THESE false teachers care more about themselves than anything or anyone else, including God.
- iii. **Not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries** – (glorious ones),
 - 1. The word for “speak evil” is the basis of our English word, “blaspheme” a word meaning to revile or speak against with the intention of doing harm. Going even further than angels would dare to go (consider that an angel is a direct messenger of God that knows its limitations).
 - 2. The “dignitaries” is again a challenging word.
 - a. It is based upon the word for “glory” or “glorious ones” (LSB, ESV). The NASB uses the term, “angelic majesties”. Thus we can see some tie this to angelic beings. BUT, the word for angel is not used here. It COULD refer to angels or spiritual leaders (who are messengers of God) such as the apostles, elders or preachers.
 - b. Furthermore, vs. 11 declares that angels (which IS the word for angels), who are of greater authority and might, do NOT bring reviling accusations against them (the false teachers) before the Lord.
 - c. Because of this, I believe these *dignitaries* are a reference to spiritual leaders (apostles, elders, preachers, etc.) who have challenged them in their errors.
 - d. Whoever these godly leaders are, these false teachers reject those sent by God or perhaps even God Himself. Much in the same way the corrupt Jews blasphemed Jesus (Matthew 27:39 – they passed by Jesus on the cross and blasphemed Him; Luke 23:39, the criminals who were hanged with Him blasphemed Him). AND Paul (cf. Acts 13:45 where in Antioch, Jews filled with envy, contradicted and blasphemed, opposing what Paul taught, Romans 3:8, Paul was slanderously reported as saying things he did not say, etc.)
 - 3. This is descriptive of a rebellious attitude. If these men are confronted with the truth, they will strongly and harshly reject it and those who challenge them. Jude 8-10 parallels our text, though it gives reference to Michael the archangel did not rebuke the devil (a fallen being) in reference to the body of Moses. Why? He

didn't need to! God would take care of that JUST LIKE He would take care of these wicked false teachers.

- iv. ***They speak evil of things they do not understand*** (12). This is willful ignorance.
1. Again, the Greek word for *blasphemy* is used here. They slander ignorantly spiritual truths.
 2. In this I think of critics of truth who are willing to twist scripture to prove their point or condemn some truth they do not like. E.g.,
 - a. 1) the skeptic will list the supposed contradictions in scripture or inconsistencies they do not like, BUT they fail to consider the context of such verses.
 - b. 2) the critic who says we teach a merit-based plan of salvation (thus nullifying faith), etc.), failing to understand what scripture actually teaches about genuine faith. You have NEVER heard me teach that we can earn our salvation! But I will teach God demands that I obey His commands and will hold me accountable if I don't (cf. Matthew 7:21-23, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Hebrews 5:9, etc.)
 3. 2 Peter 3:3-5 which addresses a false teaching about when the Lord will return, and likely one of the teachings of these false teachers, (i.e., we have plenty of time before the Lord returns OR rejecting His literal return) notes, "*For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,...*"
 4. 2 Timothy 3:7 speaks of such as those who are "*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" This is at the conclusion of this "list of selfishness".
 5. Philippians 3:19 speaks of enemies of the cross of Christ, *whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things*. According to 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 the "natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned." The point is their thinking is such that they will not understand God's truth because they refuse to TRAIN their mind toward Him.
 6. A problem we are facing today (and it is not new) is criticisms made against preachers and teachers who challenge error and expose false teachers (especially of the "sincere"). It is not uncommon for words or phrases to be twisted and taken out of context to malign the one challenging their errors. Such literally speak evil of that which they do not (and often times WILLINGLY) understand. Just remember this – that is EXACTLY what they did to Jesus continually (cf. Matthew 26:62 – they said Jesus said He could destroy the temple and build it in 3 days. But John 2:19-20 explains His meaning). One might say, "But did they know that is what He meant?" My answer is, "If so, WHY did they not investigate to clarify?" BTW, let us NEVER be guilty of this either!

III. **Application: Who is a false teacher?**

- a. Peter is very concerned about these false teachers. That is evident in the way he described them. In this lesson we have only addressed part of this description (next month we will address their immoral character). As we can see, their character was as defiled as their errors.

- b. What made them false teachers was BOTH their teaching and their corrupt character. One leads to the other.
- c. **NOTE: We need to clearly understand what makes a false teacher is what he is teaching.**
 - i. Character is often behind it, but it is NOT what makes him false.
 - ii. Consider Philippians 1:15-18 – some taught TRUTH though their character was corrupt, hoping to cause Paul grief, while others taught truth with love. NOTE vs. 18, *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. Paul WANTED Christ preached regardless of motive and rejoiced that He was taught.* AND consider that even a corrupt teacher can convert the lost IF he is teaching the truth.
 - iii. Contrast that with Paul who was sincere but teaching error about Christ, UNTIL he was converted. His sincerity did NOT negate his false teachings. The point is TRUTH is what brings us to Christ. If you are teaching or FOLLOWING error, motives do not matter. You are still in error! If your motives are corrupt, YOU will answer!
- d. The point: While false teaching is ALWAYS false (and the one teaching error IS a false teacher in those areas), their character is revealed when confronted with truth. Will they continue to advocate their errors and malign those who challenge them, or will they repent and begin teaching truth (like Apollos – Acts 18:25-28).

The whole point that Peter is making in this text is to show how God feels about the false teacher who refuses to repent and renounce his errors. It MATTERS what teach and what we believe. What about you? Are you willing to accept “the whole counsel of God”? Think about it!

- i. They count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime (openly). Typically, evil is associated with darkness.
 - ii. They are spots and blemishes
 - iii. Carousing (reveling) in their own deceptions while feasting with you
 - iv. Having eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin
 - v. Enticing unstable souls – they go after the weak
 - vi. Hearts trained in covetous practices.
 - vii. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray
 - viii. They follow the example of Balaam who loved the wages of righteousness and was so driven in their pursuits that they don't even realize how foolish they are acting (related to when Balaam was speaking to his donkey).
- e. Their fate as described in our text.
- i. They are like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed (vs. 12).
 - ii. They will utterly perish in their own corruption (12).
 - iii. They will receive the wages of their unrighteousness

IV. Application

- a. Being false can be more than teaching error (though that is certainly part of it).
- b. Our hearts will determine what we do and become
- c. Where is your heart?
 - i. Are you walking according to the flesh?
 - ii. Do you despise authority?
 - iii. Are you self-willed?