

SECOND PETER

Lesson 8

Apostate Teachers

2 Peter 2:17-22

The church of Jesus Christ has always had and will continue to have false teachers in its midst. In fact, prophetic Scripture tells us that the closer we get to the end times the more false teachers will show up within the professing church. According to the Apostle Peter, these false teachers are apostates. (An apostate is a person who, after professing Christianity, abandons the faith, gives up Christian ethics and deserts his Christian profession and principles. He is a person who has never been truly saved although he may have at some time given external evidences of being a true Christian.)

While an apostate may temporarily give assent to Christ and His teachings, his heart has never been changed and in the course of time he will openly declare his unregenerate state by his words and actions. There have always been apostates among the true people of God as is clearly seen in the exodus of the Children of Israel out of Egypt when a mixed multitude of Gentiles who professed faith in Jehovah came out with them. It was not long before these people showed themselves to be unbelievers and caused the Children of Israel to complain and gripe against their God.

Many who are not true believers are attracted to Christianity for various reasons and as they associate with believers, it is not long before the true saints are infiltrated with a mixed Multitude. Christ, who is the Light of the World, not only attracts to Himself people who are genuinely seeking salvation, but also others who will not follow Him and who, like bugs around a light, become a nuisance to the church. Many of these become apostate and desert the Christian faith altogether.

Let me say that no true, born-again Christian can or will apostatize from the faith. True Christians are saved and they will persevere to the end because God is at work in them. Only unbelievers who make professions of faith in Christ can apostatize. Our Lord taught in the Parable of the Sower that there would be some professing Christians with seemingly pious lives who would fall away.

“And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:13-14).

It is only those whose hearts have been touched by the grace of God who are saved, who hold fast and persevere. *“And the seed in the good ground, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance” (Luke 8:15).* No true Christian can apostatize. Therefore, if we are not persevering, then we might consider whether we are candidates for apostasy.

In this section Peter is going after false teachers. He roasts them with the most vivid and vicious language. His denunciation of them is so strong that it is difficult to see if he had any love for them at all. Peter was a pastor, and he had been commanded by Christ to

feed the Master's sheep (John 21:15-17). He was infuriated with godly jealousy when he saw the sheep of Christ being poisoned by apostates masquerading as teachers of Christianity. His description of these teachers might be used of some in the twentieth century. He accuses them of pride, walking after the flesh, covetousness, being guilty of adultery and maybe even homosexuality, heady, lofty in speech, deceitful, exploiters, despisers of authority, arrogant, animalistic, drunken revelers, tricky, masters of psychology, and, above all, denying the Lord. At one time they claimed they knew the Lord Jesus Christ, but then they fell away, giving themselves over to all kinds of immoral practices. Surely Second Peter has something significant to say to money-mad, sex-mad, materialistic, anti-authoritarian twentieth century man. Let us look at the text.

FOLLY OF FALSE TEACHERS (2:17)

“These are springs without water”

What false teachers have to say may sound good but it is very unsatisfying. It is like coming to an oasis in the middle of the desert only to find there is no water. This is terribly disappointing. False teachers have no true water in their wells, for only the man who knows, loves and obeys Christ has the water of the Holy Spirit in him.

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life’” (John 4:13-14).

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38).

The false teacher's spring is dry. All false teachers have an outward form of godliness but they have no real power. *“...holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these” (2 Tim. 3:5).*

Christian, do you go to unsaved psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors for spiritual help? They have nothing to give you because they do not know Christ and do not have the foggiest idea of spiritual principles for living.

“and mists driven by a storm”

Mist in the sky is quickly driven away by the winds of a storm; so too are false teachers with their novel unstable teachings. They are here today and gone tomorrow. All you have to do is visit a secondhand theological bookstore to get the impact of this statement. There are piles of modern theologies that just a few years ago were the “in thing” and today nobody wants to buy the stuff. Who really cares about form criticism, reaction criticism, ecumenical theology, renewal theology, secular theology, process theology, revolutionary theology or celebration theology. All of these were new and novel at some time during the last 50 years but today hardly anyone cares about them at all. What happened to demythologizing the New Testament or the “God Is Dead” theology? Poof! They are gone and something else has taken their place.

The doctrines of false teachers are unstable, ephemeral, transitory and temporary. The only theology that stays relevant is biblical theology. Someone has said, ‘The man who is wedded to this generation will find himself a widower in the next.’

“for whom the black darkness has been reserved.”

Peter says that false teachers have the darkness of eternal judgment before them because this place of hell is reserved for them. What a contrast with 1 Peter 1:4 where Peter speaks about the Christians’ inheritance which is reserved by God for them. “...*to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*”

False teachers teach darkness (for there is no light in them) and their just reward is eternal darkness. John Calvin said, “In place of the momentary darkness which they now cast, there is prepared for them a much thicker and eternal one.”

IMMORALITY OF FALSE TEACHERS (2:18-19)

“For speaking out arrogant words of vanity”

False teachers use a big, ponderous vocabulary with oratorical flare to impress their hearers. They are masters at mentally stimulating and entertaining people. It is with this ostentatious verbosity that they ensnare new and weak Christians. Yet it is a lofty speech empty of content. It may have a high sound but makes no sense.

I have often heard Christians say, “Wasn’t that a great sermon! He is such a good preacher (speaker). He can really use the King’s English.” Then I ask them what he said, what were his major points, and often the reply is, “I’m not really sure, but it really sounded great.” It is so easy to deceive people by words.

“they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality”

False teachers allure, ensnare or bait young or weak Christians by appealing to their sinful natures. They promise that a Christian can have heaven and still raise hell on earth; that a person can have salvation and a sinful lifestyle too; that Christ can be Savior when He is not Lord. False teachers imply that you can be materialistic, have a dirty mouth, have an affair with someone, drink as much alcohol as you want, cheat, or whatever as long as you are committed to their system. This kind of philosophy most certainly appeals to the flesh.

What these false teachers do merely builds upon the sinful practices of the mystery cults in the pagan religions of Greece and Rome. In these, the deeply religious people were encouraged to express their religion by gross immoral sexual acts. These false teachers, masters at the art of beguiling, accommodated to their culture and led simple professing Christians astray.

“those who barely escape from the ones who live in error”

This could be translated, “...those who are just about escaping from those who are living in error.” This indicates that these new and weak professing Christians were in the

process of escaping from the paganism of the mystery cults and refers to individuals who had made a profession of faith in Christ and given up some of the outward trappings of paganism but who had not really become Christians.

We can make an analogy between conception and actual physical birth. During the nine month gestation period a baby may die or be aborted and there is no real birth. When a person makes a profession of faith in Christ it is like conception. That profession might be real or false; the real, resulting in actual new birth and the false aborting somewhere along the line.

The false teachers were getting these new professors of Christianity who were just coming out of paganism (they may or may not have been saved) and were leading them astray. They were easy prey.

How can we tell a true profession from a false profession? At first it is almost impossible. The Bible speaks of newborn Christians as babes, and babies desire food. Any baby who does not desire food is sick. All healthy babies love food. All true new believers in Christ will want to live upon the spiritual food of the Bible.

If a person who professes Christ does not have a love for the Bible (a desire to know and do what it says) he may not be truly saved. Also, a true profession in Christ will result in spiritual good works and a true believer will persevere in the faith. A false profession in Christ will soon fizzle out; it will not persevere. It is possible for a baby Christian to stay a baby because of malnutrition.

If, after the new birth, a Christian does not get into the Bible, learn doctrine and practice Christian living, he will be abnormal. Just as an undernourished infant is open to all kinds of childhood diseases, so an undernourished babe in Christ is a likely target for false teachers and may be led astray.

One of the great tragedies of Christianity is to have new Christians who are filled with zeal for Christ, excited about their newfound faith, and desirous to grow in grace, fall under the influence of older Christians who have stopped growing spiritually. They throw cold water on the new converts' zeal for Christ. They may have no desire for vital Christian living and prayer, avoid small group Bible studies, never witness, rarely express any emotion for Christ, operate more on logic than on faith, and so really deter the growth of new Christians. They may not be teaching false doctrine but they are teaching false practice. This kind of attitude and life goes on constantly in local churches and Christian organizations, and it is sin.

“promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption”

False teachers promise liberation from all moral restraints. Their motto is, “If it feels good, do it!” They teach liberty but are really slaves to their own sin and corruption, for all sin ultimately enslaves and shackles the human soul.

Modern day false prophets tell our society that using drugs will bring mind stretching, an opening of the mind, a freeing of the self, a new experience. When drugs are tried there is a superficial sense of freedom, but drug use leads to enslavement (to the drug) and a person is destroyed.

Men also tell our society that premarital sex is all right as long as no one is really hurt. Extramarital sex is fine because it may set one free from a miserable marriage. Yet, the sins of fornication and adultery bring a person to real slavery, anguish of soul and

ultimately the judgment of God. *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4).*

Why is this kind of teaching so prevalent today? Because of the new morality which has cast away the Word of God as the final-standard for life. Absolutes are set aside and all truth becomes relative for the false teacher. If this philosophy were only in society it would be bad enough, but it is also in the church of Jesus Christ.

An Anglican Bishop described the adulterous liaison in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* as, in a real sense, an act of Holy Communion. When people call Christianity prehistoric, Victorian or Puritanical, they are saying that God has no right to rule over one’s life.

“for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”

It is an unchanging spiritual principle that when a person gives himself to a thing that thing overcomes him, enslaves him and becomes his god. If a person gives himself to sin because he wants to be free of all moral restraint, then he will become a slave to sin. If a person gives himself to Christ, he will be set free spiritually because he understands that moral restraint in Christ brings liberation from sin and its overcoming and damning influences.

The Bible teaches that slavery to sin is the heaviest of all servitude. *“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is the slave of sin’” (John 8:34).* It is only Christ who can truly set a person free. *“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:32, 36).* Christians are set free, not to sin but to serve Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

THE APOSTASY OF THE FALSE TEACHERS (2:20-22)

“For if after 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.”

The “they” refers to the false teachers, not to their followers who appeared to have escaped the pollutions of the world. This verse makes it clear that at one point these false teachers had claimed to be orthodox Christians. They had a full intellectual knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and they had outwardly seemed to escape the defilements of the world system. They made a profession of faith in Christ and seemed, for a while, to be Christians, but then they drifted from orthodoxy and began to deny the Master who they claimed had bought them (2 Pet. 2:1).

Apparently they had some kind of religious experience, their lives seemed changed and they had experienced some kind of temporary moral reformation, but their hearts had never been touched by the grace of God. Sometime after conversion they apostatized, turning completely from the true Christian doctrine and ethics, and became followers of false teaching. These apostates went back to their old forms of life, especially in the area of morality. The process may have proceeded slowly over a long period of drifting away from Christ. Peter says that this state was worse for them than when they were rank pagans. Why? Because when one has full knowledge of Christ and turns away, his judgment shall

be greater. In fact, it may be that these apostates had reached the point of no return where God would never save them.

“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” (Heb. 6:4-6).

These apostates did not have salvation and then lose it. They never had salvation in the first place. They had reformation not salvation. They had been delivered from some of the more gross elements of paganism and gained an appreciation for Christendom, but they did not have true Christianity. They had knowledge about Christ, but they did not have a heart for Christ.

Saving faith is made up of knowledge, conviction about the truth of that knowledge, and a trust in Christ about whom that knowledge is concerned. It is possible for a man to have a full and complete knowledge of the gospel intellectually, be convinced and convicted of its truthfulness, and yet never come to the place where he relies on the Lord who is the person around whom the gospel is given. Many people in evangelical churches are like this. Usually they are second-generation Christians—children of saved parents. They are influenced by godly parents; they know the gospel; they are touched by spiritual things at times, but they have no real heart for God or for holy living. Often these children can quote the gospel as well as the preacher, but their hearts are not changed. They may not be apostates but most certainly are candidates for apostasy if the state continues.

“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.”

These apostate false teachers once clearly understood the way of righteousness, gave assent to the holy commandment, appeared to know the way of Christ and have a heart for holiness, but afterward they drifted from Christ and then apostatized.

“Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away (apostatizing) from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13).

They turned back to their old lives, which brought destruction of their souls, for outside of Christ there is no possibility of true salvation. *“But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39).*

“It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘A dog returns to its own vomit,’ and ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.’”

Here is the true character of apostate false teachers. They are dogs and sows, both unclean animals. Jesus had something to say about dogs and swine. *“Do not give what is*

holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matt. 7:6).

These proverbs teach that it is possible for a person to have knowledge of Christ, even some outward conformity in morality, and still not be saved. One who has a full intellectual knowledge of Christ and then turns away is guilty of apostasy. When he turns from his profession, he has apostatized from the faith. He then returns to his old life of sin because he has no real heart for God. This only proves that the person was never saved in the first place because Christ calls His people sheep who will persevere to the end.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28).

A dog who vomits up his food seems for the moment to rid himself of the corruption inside him, but he cannot leave well enough alone and in time goes back and licks it up. This is the professing Christian who seems to have had a change of heart about Christ but after a while goes back to his old life, showing that he was an unclean dog rather than a sheep. The sow can be temporarily cleaned up on the outside as pigs sometimes are at state fairs, but as soon as the sow is placed back in her natural environment, she goes right to the mud puddle and wallows in it. It’s sheer ecstasy for her to return to the mud because this is her basic nature. She is a pig and acts true to her nature.

This is like a professing Christian who cleans up his life for a while without a changed heart. In time he goes right back to his old life because it is basic to his sinful nature to live in sin.

CONCLUSION

What does God want Christians to learn from this section of Scripture? First, false teachers can never be of any help to a Christian for they have absolutely nothing to give in spiritual matters. The Christian should seek Christian counselors, psychiatrists, and psychologists and pastoral help in spiritual matters. Second, do not follow the novelties of modern-day theology but stick with the biblical theology of Scripture, which always stays up to date. Third, because of the slick talk and immoral promises of false teachers who tell us it is all right to sin if it is not hurting anyone, we must avoid them. Their teaching will only lead to slavery. Fourth, we should examine our hearts to see if we have true saving faith in Christ. If we find the slightest bit of faith, then we should rejoice and move on for Christ because we will persevere, even though we will never do it perfectly. Fifth, apostasy for professing Christians is a real and awful possibility, but apostasy can never happen to a true Christian.

Where are you spiritually? Are you a rank rejector of Christ? If so, Christ has the power to draw you to Himself. Are you a seeker and desirous to know more about Christ? If so, He opens His arms to you and bids you come to Him just as you are. Are you religious, a churchman, a mere professor but not a possessor of Christ? If so, Christ despises your hypocrisy and commands you to change your mind about Him and bow to Him as your Lord and Savior lest you perish as a good church member. Are you someone who has followed false teachers and their false teaching? If so, flee to Christ or you shall face eternal destruction along with all false teachers. Are you on the verge of apostasy? If

so, turn immediately to Christ, give up those foolish ideas of deserting Christ and going back to your old life. You are in great danger of passing the point of no return where you will never be saved. Come to Christ before it is too late. The Bible says, “...*now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Cor. 6:2).