

12. The Epistle of 2Peter—2:1-3

(1/9/19)

Seeing as we haven't met for a few weeks because of the holidays—let's review a little.

We have entered into 2Peter 2 where the emphasis of the chapter is a warning against false prophets (pastors, teachers, evangelists etc.).

For the last three weeks that we were in 2Peter 2 before breaking for the holidays we simply read the first three verses and used them as a 'springboard' to launch us into a three-week topical study which we entitled, "*Beware of False Prophets*".

In that series we focused our attention primarily on Matthew 7 verses 15-20 where the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to beware of those who would come dressed in sheep's clothing but inwardly would be *ravenous* wolves.

The Greek word translated '**ravenous**' means "*destructively vicious*"—because, as Jesus said, they seek to snatch people away from the truth and carry them down the broad way to hell.

2 Peter 2:1 (NKJV)

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you...

Peter is saying that those who *falsely* claim to speak on behalf of God as His prophets is nothing new—they were among God's people in Old Testament times.

As we have already said, much of the ministries of God's true prophets in the O.T. was taken up with confronting, correcting and rebuking false prophets who were like a cancer in the land of Israel.

But Peter said they would plague the Christian Church as well (and they have)—and Jesus prophesied they would continue and reach their apex during the Tribulation Period all the way up to His return to establish His Kingdom:

Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24 (NKJV)

⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many...¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many...²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

2 Peter 2:1 (NKJV)

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, **who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.**

“**Destructive heresies**” literally means *‘teachings that will destroy a person in hell’*.

There are ‘non-destructive’ heresies—in other words, teachings that are wrong but will not damn a person to hell if believed.

The word *heresy* originally meant “*to make a choice*”—Greek scholar Marvin Vincent explains: “*A heresy is, strictly, the choice of an opinion contrary to that usually received.*”

However, in time the word came to mean “*a sect, a party* (not as in revelry but as in ‘*a group gathered for a special purpose or task*’—like a political party).”

Warren Wiersbe said,

“Promoting a party spirit in a church is one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). Whenever a church member says to another member, ‘Are you on my side or the pastor’s side?’ he [or she] is promoting a party spirit and causing division. A false teacher forces you to make a choice between his doctrines and the doctrines of the true Christian faith.”

Peter warned that these false teachers would infiltrate the Church under the guise of ‘*good shepherds*’ and “**secretly bring in destructive heresies**”.

This has always baffled me a little because—Jesus warned that false prophets were coming—Paul told us they were coming—Peter warned us they were coming—Jude said they're here and that they “*crept into the church unnoticed*” (Jude 1:4)

How did these false teachers creep into the church unnoticed when Christians back then had been given so many clear warnings they were coming?

Because of gullible and undiscerning pastors and church leaders who were looking for what ‘works’ or what was ‘novel’ or simply who were taken in by the ‘cult of personality’ (they’re often charming, charismatic, cool) and were not discerning nor being vigilant.

Peter has in mind heresies that are damning (destructive) because they “**deny the Lord Who bought them**”.

“**Bought**” (*agorazō*) means “*to purchase,*” or “*to redeem out of the marketplace,*” and was used of purchasing slaves out of the slave-market.

Our Lord’s precious, shed blood was the ransom paid to redeem slaves of sin from that slavery.

“**Deny**” is a strong term meaning “*to refuse,*” “*to be unwilling,*” or “*to firmly say no.*”

What exactly does that mean?

It means to deny the Lord by rejecting His Person and work—to be unwilling to accept who He claimed to be and the power of what He did for us on Calvary’s cross.

We often think of those who deny the Lord as those who deny His divinity—and that’s true.

But the very first heresy in the Church was not against Jesus' *divinity*—it was against His *humanity*.

It was heresy that had its roots in *Gnosticism*.

The word 'Gnostic' comes from the Greek word 'gnōsis' which means 'knowledge' (mystical knowledge).

The Gnostics were always teaching people if they meditated a certain way or chanted the right way then—all the secret treasures of hidden spiritual wisdom and knowledge would be unlocked to them.

Part of the teachings of Gnosticism grew out of the philosophical question, "*Why is there evil in this world if creation was made by a holy God?*"

As these philosophers pondered that question, they came to the false conclusion that *matter* (the physical universe) was evil—and since matter was evil it couldn't have been the creation of a holy God.

So then where did the material universe come from?

A. T. Robertson explains:

"The Gnostic speculation concerned itself primarily with the origin of the universe and the existence of evil. They assumed that God is good and yet there is evil in existence. Their theory was that evil is inherent in matter. And yet the good God could not create evil matter. So they postulated a series of emanations, aeons, spirits, angels that came in between God and matter. The idea was that one aeon came from God, another aeon from this aeon, and so on till there was one far enough away from God for God not to be contaminated by the creation of evil matter and yet close enough to have power to do the work."

Now the real problem with the teaching that matter was evil, from a doctrinal standpoint, was—in the way they applied it to Jesus Christ.

You see the Gnostics reasoned that if matter was evil then Jesus couldn't have come in the flesh because then *He* would have been evil.

And so many Gnostics claimed He must have come as a spirit and not as a physical flesh and blood man (a denial of His humanity).

That's why the apostle John opened his first epistle with the words—

1 John 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life--

He said this because he was also trying to refute Gnostic teaching about Jesus not coming in a physical body.

Other Gnostics believed that since Jesus *was* a physical man and that since the physical was evil and God cannot be evil that—Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh (a denial of His humanity).

And that's why Paul said—

Colossians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

So Gnostic heresy denied the Lord's humanity and to a lesser degree, His divinity also but—the Arian heresy became the dominant heresy that denied Jesus' divinity.

One church historian explains—

“In the course of Christian history, few events loom larger than the Council of Nicea in 325, when the newly converted Roman Emperor Constantine called bishops from around the world to present-day Turkey. The church had reached a theological crossroads. Led by an Alexandrian

theologian named Arius—one school of thought argued that Jesus had undoubtedly been a remarkable leader, but he was not God in flesh. Arius proved an expert logician and master of extracting biblical proof texts that seemingly illustrated differences between Jesus and God, such as John 14:28: *"the Father is greater than I."* In essence, Arius argued that Jesus of Nazareth could not possibly share God the Father's unique divinity."

Another historian continues—

"Most of the bishops were repelled by the idea that Jesus Christ could be thought of as what to them amounted to a *created* being. When they worshiped Christ, they did not worship a creature — they worshiped God. They were saved not by a *created* being, but by God. The bishops proceeded to craft a creedal statement of faith concerning what they believed about the Son of God... The bishops wrote in their statements that Jesus Christ was *"God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father."* A key phrase was *"of one substance,"* which translates the Greek *homoousios*. This means that what God is in his essence, Jesus Christ the Son of God is also. Eventually all the bishops except for two signed the creedal statement, believing that it contained the ancient faith of the apostolic church and that it was an accurate reflection of the truth of God's nature to which the New Testament points."

The Arian heresy, that Jesus was a created being and not God from all eternity, remained 'buried' in the Church among apostate Christians down thru the centuries and was eventually 'resurrected' to become the foundational doctrine of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, also known as Jehovah's Witnesses who definitely 'deny the Lord who bought them'—but they're not alone.

Author and commentator William MacDonald asks—

"Where are these false teachers found? To mention perhaps the most obvious places, they are found in:

Liberal and Neo-Orthodox Protestantism

Liberal Roman Catholicism

Unitarianism and Universalism

Russellism (Jehovah's Witnesses)

Mormonism

Christian Science

Unity School of Christianity

Christadelphianism

Armstrongism (The "Radio Church of God")

While professing to be ministers of righteousness, they **secretly bring in** soul-destroying **heresies** alongside true Bible doctrine. It is a deliberately deceptive mixture of the false and the true. Primarily, they peddle a system of denials. Here are some of the denials which can be found among certain of the groups listed above:

They deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and His death as a Substitute for sinners.

They are especially vehement in their denial of the value of His shed blood.

They deny His bodily resurrection, eternal punishment, salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the reality of miracles in the Bible.

Other false teachings common today are:

The Kenosis theory—the heresy that Christ emptied Himself of the attributes of deity. This means that He could sin, make mistakes, etc.

The “God is dead” fantasy, evolution, universal salvation, purgatory, prayers for the dead, etc.

The ultimate sin of false teachers is that they even deny the Master **who bought them**. While they may say nice things about Jesus, refer to His “divinity,” His lofty ethics, His superb example, they fail to confess Him as God and as unique Savior.”

Of course, inherent in the idea of ‘**denying**’ the Lord Himself would include ‘*denying what He did on the cross*’—something Peter has in mind when he said that these false prophets “**deny the Lord who bought them**.”

Throughout the history of the Church, there have always been heretics who have taught that Jesus’ blood shed on Calvary’s cross didn’t atone for our sins (or only partially atoned for them and now we have to *finish* the work of atonement in our lives thru our works).

God’s Word is very clear on this point—

Hebrews 9:22 (NKJV)

²² ...without shedding of **blood** there is no remission (of sin).

1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Ephesians 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the **blood** of Christ.

The penal substitutionary death of Christ i.e. that He suffered in our place that we might receive redemption and forgiveness for our sins is the very foundation upon which the gospel is built—and yet many today are ashamed of the gospel.

They are embarrassed by the notion that we are saved by the blood of Christ because in their mind it sounds barbaric, uncouth and repulsive—so, they deny the ‘penal substitutionary’ death of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:*

Author Steve Chalke (and he is by no means alone) rejects the idea of ‘penal substitution’ in his book *The Lost Message of Jesus* claiming that such a doctrine turns God the Father in a ‘cosmic child abuser.’ (Explain)

This shouldn’t shock us—it’s actually a fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

2 Timothy 3:1-2, 5 (NKJV)

¹ But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers...⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power (*Rom. 1:16*). And from such people turn away!

Many today are rejecting the biblical gospel in favor of a ‘kinder, gentler gospel’—essentially a ‘cross-less’ gospel which is not the true gospel at all.

Galatians 1:6-8 (NKJV)

⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Penal substitution is found from Genesis thru Revelation—one example would be:

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who **bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.**

Swift (*tachinos*) means “*quick,*” or “*imminent,*” and **destruction** (*apōleia*) refers to *perdition* as in *eternal damnation in hell* (cf. Matt. 7:13; John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3).

This horrible fate, coming either at death or at Christ’s return (John 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:7–10) awaits false teachers and all who follow their heretical path.

Something else before we move on—this last statement of Peter tells us that the false prophets he is referring to were *unbelievers*.

Those whose teachings would not only damn to hell those who listen to and embrace their heresies—but will damn the teachers themselves to hell as well.

The interesting thing that Peter mentions about these false unsaved prophets is that—the Lord ‘**bought them**’ (with His blood on Calvary’s cross).

This means that Jesus’ death on the cross paid for the sins of unbelievers and not just the elect—as John also stated—

1 John 2:1-2 (NLT2)

¹ My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

I bring this out because it refutes one of the 5-pillars of Calvinism—“*Limited Atonement*. (Explain)

2 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)

² And many will follow their destructive ways...

The NASB translates v.2—" *Many will follow their sensuality...* "; The NLT—" *Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality...* "

One of the main characteristics of false prophets (pastors, teachers, evangelists...) is carnality, sensuality—and in some cases, blatant immorality. (Comment)

2 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)

² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

The “**way of truth**” is referring to the *gospel*, and how these false teachers will *blaspheme* the gospel.

To ‘**blaspheme**’ means to speak evil of God Himself or His Word (His truth).

Peter is saying that these false prophets in the church will speak evil of the gospel—how?

By denying the true gospel, the way of the cross (narrow way), and in its place preach a false gospel—a tolerant, inclusive ‘broad way’ gospel of being a good person, helping others (social gospel), believing whatever you want as long as you’re sincere and doing other good works to please God and get into heaven.

One pastor and author said—

*“The Bible is clear that **many** more people follow the broad way that leads to destruction than adhere to the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13–14; cf. 24:10–12). In part, credit is due to false teachers for the popularity of the “wide road,” as they usher people onto the broad way and encourage them not to look back. Their message of independence, personal freedom, and self-exaltation is inherently appealing to fallen human hearts, who would rather serve themselves than submit to Christ.*

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matt. 7:21). Superficial, insincere claims to be followers of Christ are meaningless; only those who fully submit to His lordship and obey His will demonstrate that they truly belong to Him (cf. John 15:14–16; James 1:22–25; 1 John 2:3–6; 5:1–5).”

2 Peter 2:3a (NKJV)

³ By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words...

“**To exploit**” means “*to traffic in*”.

“**To covet**” means to “*strongly desire something*” or to “*lust after something or someone.*”

Coveting what or who belongs to another is the root of many sins—so much so that it made God’s ‘top-ten’ list of prohibitions:

Exodus 20:17 (NLT2)

¹⁷ “You must not covet your neighbor’s house. You must not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”

False teachers are interested in one thing—making money!

Peter says that they’re very good communicators who exploit (“make merchandise of”) ignorant, gullible people with well crafted ‘**deceptive**’ words.

Interestingly, the word ‘**deceptive**’ is *plastos* in the Greek—from which the English word *plastic* is derived.

Plastic is something that can be molded into any shape—just as false teachers ‘mold’ God’s Word into any shape (doctrine) that will deceive so as to make money off of God’s people.

One pastor said—

“In keeping with its etymological roots, plastic originally had the connotation of something not completely authentic. After all, plastic items often look as if they are manufactured from another substance, such as wood, metal, china, and so forth. Thus plastic at first glance “deceives” consumers. In a similar way, false teachers deal in phony doctrine. Their theology is not really based on biblical truth, but only molded by false reasoning to appear genuine (cf. Col. 2:8, 20–23; 2 Tim. 2:14–18).”

Consequently, false prophets are often wealthy while Jesus and His Apostles were poor—who put the needs of others above their own needs.

The godly prophet Micah described these false prophets in his day: *“Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money”* (Micah 3:11, NASB).

One Church historian said—

“In the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was notorious for its merchandising of the gospel. Its crude efforts to raise vast sums of money by selling indulgences helped spur the Reformation. The popes shamelessly sold to the highest bidder the office of bishop or cardinal. Those who bought the bishops’ miters and the cardinals’ hats willingly paid extortionate prices for them because they could use these positions to line their own pockets. Father Chiniquy tells of priests who extorted money from impoverished widows, refusing to say masses to help their departed loved ones through the purgatorial fires without the required payment.”

The history of mainline Protestantism hasn’t been much better.

2 Peter 2:3 (NKJV)

³ By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; **for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.**

Even though false teachers won’t face judgment until they die—their punishment was decreed by God from long ago (Genesis 3:13-15).

“Their judgment has not been idle”—simply means that, even though they haven’t experienced the judgment of God yet—it hasn’t been *“abolished or ceased from coming.”*

“And their destruction is not asleep”

“In saying this”, one author said, “Peter personifies eternal damnation as if it were an executioner, who remains fully awake, ready to administer God’s just sentence of condemnation on those who falsify His Word.”

And then, starting in verse 4, Peter goes on to give examples of this very thing starting with the angels who sinned...

We will look at that next time.