

Standing in the True Knowledge of Christ

“The Way of Balaam”

The Corruption of False Teachers

2 Peter 2:10b-22

As we come to this next section of 2 Peter, Peter is still dealing with the same subject he introduced at the beginning of the chapter — false teachers among the people of God.

In verses 1–3, we saw: “False Teachers Among You — The Danger Within”

- Their presence — they are among you
- Their practice — they bring in destructive heresies
- Their influence — many follow them
- And their end — they bring destruction upon themselves

In verses 4-10a, Peter answered the question: “Will God deal with them?” The answer was clear: “The Lord Knoweth — The Distinction of the Righteous and the Wicked.”

- God judges the wicked
- God delivers the righteous
- God makes a clear distinction

The question then becomes: *How do we recognize them? What do false teachers actually look like?*

The danger is that they are often not immediately obvious.

In the verses before us in this study, Peter describes false teachers. He shows:

- Their attitudes

- Their behavior
- Their motives
- Their influence
- And ultimately, their end

This is one of the strongest descriptions in the New Testament of those considered false teachers. It's not meant just to be harsh, but to be clear because souls are at stake, the truth is at stake, and deception is dangerous.

The key theme to this text is that false teachers are not only wrong in what they teach — they are corrupt in who they are.

They are described in many ways, but one phrase stands out in verse 15: "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam..."

If we are going to stand in the true knowledge of Christ, as Peter has been calling us to do, then we must not only know the truth, we must also be able to recognize error when we see it.

I. THE DEFIANCE OF FALSE TEACHER — VV. 10B-12

Their rebellion against authority

A. Their contempt for authority (v. 10b)

1. Their boldness — "presumptuous" (τολμηταί) — daring, reckless, audacious. They speak and act without restraint.
2. Their will — "selfwilled" (αὐθάδεις) — one who is pleased with himself; stubborn; determined to have their own way. They are "self-directed."
3. Their speech — "not afraid to speak evil of dignities"

- a) "Dignities" (δόξα) — often translated as "glory" — this is likely speaking not only of governmental authority (if at all) but of spiritual authority.
 - b) "Speak evil" (βλασφημέω) — to blaspheme or slander — no reverence... no restraint... no fear
- False teachers reject authority because they ultimately reject God's authority (2:1).

B. Their contrast with angelic restraint (v. 11)

1. The power of angels — "greater in power and might" — angels are far superior in strength and rank.
2. The restraint of angels — even angels do not speak carelessly nor act presumptuously against "dignities" referenced in verse 10.

When Peter says that angels do not bring railing accusation against "them," there is some question as to who is being referred to. It could refer back to the false teachers themselves, but more likely it points back to the "dignities" mentioned in the previous verse — spiritual authorities.

The point is this: even angels — who are greater in power — do not speak carelessly or irreverently about such matters. But these false teachers do so boldly and without fear.

Jude 9

⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

C. Their corruption like brute beasts (v. 12)

1. Their nature — “natural brute beasts” — They operate on instinct, not truth — they function spiritually like animals: reacting, not discerning; desiring, not submitting.
 2. Their ignorance — “speak evil of the things that they understand not” — vocal, but ignorant — what’s dangerous about this is that bold ignorance influences others.
 3. Their end — “shall utterly perish in their own corruption” — self-produced destruction. What defines them ultimately destroys them.
- False teachers are marked by rebellion, characterized by arrogance, driven by instinct, and destined for destruction.

II. THE INDULGENCE OF FALSE TEACHERS — VV. 13-14

False teaching is never merely doctrinal — it always works itself out morally.

A. Their pleasure — their pursuit of pleasure (v. 13a)

They live for self-gratification

1. Their reward is certain — “reward of unrighteousness — what they pursue is what they will receive.

Galatians 6:7

⁷ Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

2. Their desire is corrupt — “count it pleasure — they delight in sin. They’re not struggling with it,

they're enjoying it.

3. Their sin is open — “to riot in the day time” — sin is no longer hidden; it is public and unashamed. “To riot” (τρυφή) is to live in pleasure, as used here.

B. Their presence — their corruption among God's people (v. 13b)

They defile the fellowship

1. Their presence is polluting — “spots... blemishes” — stains and defects. They corrupt what should be pure.

An interesting contrast is seen here between how God describes these false teachers and how He describes the church in Ephesians 5.

[Ephesians 5:27](#)

²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

2. Their setting is dangerous — “while they feast with you” — they are not outside, but they are in the fellowship; in their gatherings; among the people.

C. Their perception — eyes full of sin (v. 14a)

They are driven by lust

1. Their vision is corrupt — “eyes full of adultery” — they view everything through a lens of lust.
2. Their sin is uncontrolled — “cannot cease from

sin” — this speaks to an enslaved pattern. Sin is not something they “fall into”; it is something they live in.

D. Their prey — their influence of others

They prey on the unstable

1. Their method — “beguiling” (δελεάζοντες) — to lure, bait (this is a fishing/hunting term) — they attract to trap.
 2. Their target — “unstable souls” — weak, unestablished, undiscerning — this ties back to chapter 1 where we saw that those that are not growing are vulnerable.
- False teachers thrive where believers are not grounded.

E. Their passion — their heart condition (v. 14c)

They are governed by greed

1. Their heart is trained — “exercised” (γεγυμνασμένην) — trained like an athlete — they have practiced sin until it is second nature.
2. Their sin is covetousness — driven by gain and a desire for more money, influence, and control.
3. Their condition is condemned — “cursed children” — they are not merely mistaken; they are under judgment.

III. THE WAY OF FALSE TEACHERS (VV. 15-16)

A. Their departure from the right way (v. 15a)

1. The right way defined — “the right way” — the

path of truth, righteousness, and submission to God.

2. The departure described

a) "Forsaken" (καταλείπω) — deliberately abandoned or left behind

b) "Gone astray" (πλανάω) — wandered off course

- This is not ignorance — it is intentional departure. False teachers are not people who never knew the way — they are people who left the way they knew.

B. Their direction in the wrong way (vs. 15b)

1. The meaning of "the way of Balaam" — he became a type or pattern of false teachers (Num. 22-24; 31:16).

Numbers 31:16

¹⁶ Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

2. What characterized Balaam — "who loved the wages of unrighteousness"
3. The core issue — greed — Balaam knew the truth (he spoke truth at times) but he loved gain more than God. He was willing to use spiritual things for personal profit.

Jude 11

¹¹ Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Revelation 2:14

¹⁴ But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

C. Their rebuke for their wrong way (v. 16)

They are exposed by God

1. The certainty of the rebuke — “rebuked” — exposed, corrected, confronted — God does not leave such sin unchallenged.
 2. The unusual instrument of the rebuke — “the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice”
 3. The purpose of the rebuke — “forbad the madness of the prophet” — the irrational, senseless behavior — greed had driven Balaam into spiritual insanity.
- Any ministry that is driven by gain rather than truth is walking in the way of Balaam — no matter how religious it may appear.

IV. THE DECEPTION OF FALSE TEACHERS — VV. 17-19

A. Their emptiness (v. 17)

They have nothing to offer

1. The image of a dry well — “wells without water” — a promise of refreshment, but nothing there
2. The image of driven clouds — “clouds...carried with a tempest” — appear to bring rain, but blown away before delivering. They are unstable,

unreliable, and empty.

3. The reality of their end — “to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever” — reserved for judgment

B. Their words (v. 18)

They appeal to the flesh

1. Their speech is impressive — “great swelling words” — lofty, persuasive language
2. Their message is empty — “of vanity” — sounds deep, but lacks truth.
3. Their method is fleshly — “they allure through the lusts of the flesh...” — they do not appeal to truth and holiness, but to desire, appetite, and the flesh.
4. Their target is vulnerable — “those that were clean escaped from them who live in error” — those newly separated from error and were yet to be established.

C. Their promise (vs. 19a)

They offer freedom

1. They appeal to liberty — freedom from restriction, authority, and moral boundaries
2. The deception of liberty — this is not biblical liberty, but license to sin and self-indulgence.

Galatians 5:13

¹³ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but

| by love serve one another.

D. Their reality (v. 19b)

They produce bondage

1. Their condition — “servants of corruption” — they are enslaved while claiming freedom.
2. The principle stated — “for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” — what controls you, enslaves you.

V. THE END OF FALSE TEACHERS (VV. 20-22)

A. Their exposure to the truth (v. 20a)

They had knowledge

1. The reality of their exposure — “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” — “knowledge” (ἐπίγνωσις) here is full knowledge. This is not ignorance — this is choice.
2. Clarification needed — this does not mean genuine conversion here. It does mean, however, that they had real contact with truth, had an external reformation, and an association with the people of God.

It’s possible to be *near* the truth without being transformed *by* the truth.

B. Their entanglement again in sin (v. 20b)

1. The nature of their fall — this speaks of a return to bondage.

2. The direction of their life — they do not continue forward in the truth they have received; they turn back.

C. Their condition worse than before (vv. 20c-21)

They are more accountable now

1. The seriousness of their end — “worse... than the beginning — Why? Because greater light brings greater responsibility.
2. The reason explained (v. 21) — “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness...” — not better morally, but better in terms of judgment severity.

Luke 12:47-48

⁴⁷ And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁴⁸ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

3. The tragedy described — “... than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment...” — to “turn” is deliberate rejection. This is willful abandonment, not confusion of doctrine.

D. Their nature revealed (v. 22)

They were never changed to begin with

1. The first picture — the dog — returns to what it once rejected. In other words, their nature is unchanged.

2. The second picture — the sow — outwardly cleaned but inwardly unchanged.
- False teachers may appear reformed for a time, but without true transformation they return to sin, revealing their unchanged nature and facing greater judgment.

Conclusion:

Peter has shown the true nature of false teachers:

- Their defiance — rejecting authority
- Their indulgence — living in sin
- Their way — following Balaam for gain
- Their deception — offering emptiness and false liberty
- And their end — returning to corruption and facing greater judgment

And the message is clear: false teaching is not merely dangerous — it is destructive.

The issue is not, “Have I heard the truth?” The issue is “Have I been changed by the truth?”

As opposed to the false teachers and their teaching, true knowledge of Christ produces transformation.

So:

- Be sure that your faith is real
- Be careful what voices you follow
- And be steadfast in the true knowledge of Christ