

2Peter 2:14-17 "Avoid Balaam's Way"

As we continue with Peter's description of the false teachers he makes it very clear that the intentions of their hearts are not in accord with being one heart with God and His word. And though Peter has the advantage of being inspired of the Holy Spirit, and therefore getting God's knowledge on the hearts of these people, he shows us that those who would undermine God's work ultimately will reveal the fruit of their sin.

And as we saw last week in verse 13 they will not escape God's judgment of leading His sheep astray. And that's really what this whole issue is about. In a sense Peter is laying out the charges against the hearts of these deceivers whereby God will judge them.

It may not be for us to condemn, but it is for us to recognize and expose the fruit and be willing to warn such people of what God has in store for them if they're not willing to repent of being those stains and blemishes who will suffer wrong as the wages of doing wrong. Peter continues his description in verse 14.

2PE 2:14-16 "With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed - an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey - a beast without speech - who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness."

Again, we are given a window to the heart of these false teachers by God Himself. Our Lord reveals them for who they are. They are a sensual people who only have their interests in mind, not the interests of God's people.

Notice the imagery at the beginning of verse 14.... "With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning..." This is in connection to them reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with weaker members of the body who have been deceived, as we see at the end of verse 13.

But adultery would certainly not be limited to only the physical kind. Keep in mind that these false teachers have aligned themselves with Christ's Church and yet have denied the Master. That is a spiritual adultery where they leave the one husband, who can give eternal life, to whore after other gods and other desires. This is the way God describes Israel in the book of Jeremiah.

JER 3:8-9 "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. 9 Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood."

They left the God who loved them. They proved themselves deceivers and unfaithful to the God who brought them up out of the slavery of Egypt and God gives them a certificate of divorce. He has cut them off as His bride.

But what's interesting about the beginning of verse 14 of our text is that it shows the continual passion to lead others astray. The expression "With eyes full of adultery" is really not the best translation. In fact, it doesn't come over well in the English because a more literal translation would be "eyes full of an adulteress".

The idea is that "they are always looking for a woman with whom to commit adultery" (Kistemaker). They only see people as potential trophies for their wicked ways. They view everyone as followers of them instead of leading them into the presence of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

And though there may be an aspect of physical adultery here in our text, the spiritual adultery they commit by leading people away from Christ is even greater. And as our text suggests they do it continually. It's always on their mind to snatch people into the fire with themselves.

But notice who they are trying to snatch. ".....they seduce the unstable..." (verse 14). They know that those who are grounded in the truth are less likely to succumb to falsehood. These people are predators of the weak, like those unreasoning animals who hunt down the young and the crippled to devour them.

The imagery here is of someone dangling something in front of you to ensnare you. And what Peter brings out here is that they do this in a calculated way. The word seduce here in our text is the Greek word *deleazo* which means to catch by bait. This is a fishing term which Peter would have been very familiar with.

He knew what types of bait would draw certain types of fish. In like manner, these false teachers know that with young believers,

who are not that far removed from the world, they are more likely to be drawn in with a more sensual approach to their faith. And by sensual I mean to include a more touchy feely experience motivated approach.

It shouldn't surprise any of us that this is the way it's still done today. Many of the more prominent tele-"evangelists" are using these very same methods. Send in "X" amount of dollars and get your prayer cloth which has been prayed over and will deliver the answer to your prayers.

What is sensual about that? It appeals to a quick fix approach to life. It takes away any responsibility to have to walk through a situation trusting God. The trust is placed in a piece of cloth and in the one who prayed over it. In many cases these tactics are employed with no regard for your welfare, but for the welfare of the pockets who are being lined with the hard earned money of the weak in faith who can least afford it.

And yet what are they told? 'You demonstrate a great deal of faith by believing that God will deliver you through the means we provide.' They turn everything on its head. They twist the truth to their own devices.

One of the latest movements spreading like wildfire across the country is the "Brownsville Revival" in Pensacola Florida which is actually being transported across the world. The whole thing is built on the premise that the Spirit is moving and showing Himself through strange phenomena like throwing people on the ground, causing many to bark like dogs, howl like wolves, fly like eagles and so on.

It's all very sensual in that it appeals to the experience, not on the truth of God's word. And those who would bait people with such nonsense, with the express purpose of advancing themselves, must take heed to the words found in Peter's letter.

"They are experts in greed" is what Peter says in this same verse before us. In other words, this is their motivation. Again, the Greek language is more descriptive in their pursuit of such greed. The word Peter uses is *gumnazo* which essentially means to exercise vigorously as in a school of athletics.

This is where we get our English word gymnasium or gymnastics. Coming up in a couple of years is the summer Olympic games. One of the main events is the gymnastic competitions. We all

know the training and devotion it takes to be an effective competitor in such games. This is what Peter is conveying here. This is why the NAS uses the phrase "having a heart trained in greed."

Just as one trains for the games these false teachers devote themselves to train in a way which consumes them and the agenda they want to promote. Is it any wonder they will be judged by God for leading His people astray? They don't do this by accident, they plan it this way, which makes them different from the unlearned or misguided teacher who may teach something false.

And this is why Peter adds at the end of this verse, they are "an accursed brood!", or "accursed children." Another way to put it is that they are children of a curse. This is similar to what Paul conveys in writing to the Ephesian church.

When speaking of the way in which we all used to walk in this world outside of Christ Paul says, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging in the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." (NASB Eph.2:3)

To be a child of wrath or a child of the curse is clearly telling us what kind of relationship or lack thereof someone has with God. On the other hand we are also told how that relationship can be dramatically changed by embracing the Son of God by faith who came to take away the sin of the world for all who believe.

After humbling ourselves before Christ in faith we are then called children of light and children of obedience. The picture is plain. Outside of Christ there is no relationship whereby we can be called God's children. In Christ we are not only called children of light, but we call our God Abba, Father. The relationship changes, but it only changes through the shed blood of Christ as we embrace Him by faith.

These false teachers are not only children of a curse, but they are leading others after them and keeping these babes in Christ blinded. This was the warning Jesus gave to Israel as her leaders were leading His people, His children, astray. He used actual children to make His point.

MAT 18:6-7 "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of

the sea. 7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"

Peter simply affirms that woe here in our text. He is not the one giving the curse but leaves that to God. But now Peter gives us an example of a real person in history who fits this description he has been giving about false teachers by drawing our attention to a false prophet.

2PE 2:15-16 "They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey - a beast without speech - who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness."

Who is Balaam son of Beor and what did he do to deserve to be placed in the company of these false teachers who are sons of a curse? We find him in the book of Numbers chapter 22.

To make a long story short Balaam was a man whom God spoke to. Moses led Israel near the land of the Moabites. This was before Israel entered the Promised Land.

NUM 22:1-5 "Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. 2 Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, 3 and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. 4 The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5 sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, ..."

Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel and get them out of the land. But God showed Balaam that they were a blessed people and not to pray for such a curse. It turns out that Balaam decided to go his own way instead of following the command of God and in the process the Lord put a halt to his advance.

As he was riding his donkey an angel of the Lord stood in his path but Balaam didn't have eyes to see, but his donkey did. Balaam was furious with his donkey and began to beat her. But she wouldn't budge and instead laid down under Balaam which made him ever more upset and once again he beat this poor animal with his staff.

NUM 22:28-31 "Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" 29 Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." 30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. 31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

The angel of the Lord went on to reveal how he was on a road to destruction as the angel was about to take his life, which is when Balaam admitted his sin. If the story ended there we would conclude that Balaam had a heart after God and wasn't greedy for Balak's gold by cursing Israel.

But we find that Balaam was greedy for the money. And like Balaam, the false teachers of today who have the same appetite for such greed will exploit God's people with stories they make up. It isn't until you get to the 31st chapter of Numbers that we find Balaam still scheming to get his way.

As John Stott points out, "having failed by direct means, he tried indirect ones; and since he could not alter God's view of Israel, he tried to change Israel's view of God. He tempted many of the people down a path of moral and theological compromise, and that did indeed incur God's curse on them." The result of that curse from God is found in Numbers 25.

NUM 25:1-3 "While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, 2 who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. 3 So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD'S anger burned against them."

We're told later that because of their disobedience to God 24,000 people in Israel died of a plague brought on by God. Balaam was the one who prompted the Moabite women to entice the men of Israel into sin.

Later Israel fought against the Midianites and won but spared the women. Moses was incensed that they were spared.

NUM 31:14-16 Moses was angry with the officers of the army - the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds - who returned from the battle. 15 "Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked them. 16 "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD'S people.

What was the final outcome of Balaam?

NUM 31:7-8 "They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every man. 8 Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba - the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword."

Balaam was very subtle in his approach of bringing down Israel while gaining favor and money from Balak. Instead of a direct approach he took the indirect approach. But God judged him for enticing Israel and what Peter wants us to see is that no matter how slick and crafty these false teachers may appear to be God sees it all.

No matter how they appear to be a part of the people of God the Lord will bring swift destruction on them for their deception. They give the appearance of being teachers and people who can feed the sheep and yet what they are is anything but that.

2PE 2:17-18 "These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error."

These false teachers come across as people with knowledge and wisdom and love for the church. I mean, look at how they work today in the Church. How many of them come across as monsters and devils and perpetrators of falsehood?

That's not the way to entice people. That's not the way to become part of the love feasts and the fellowship of the church. You need to be deceptive and once you have gained the trust you take that indirect approach as did Balaam and you undermine the truth, all the while making it look like the truth.

One of the tactics found in this "Laughing revival" movement is to lure people into an altered state of consciousness where you leave

your senses and enter into what some have described as nothing short of a hypnotic trance. When many of the people come forward to get this "blessing" they are specifically told not to pray. The idea being that your words and thoughts could get in the way of what the Spirit wants to do in your life.

What's wrong with that picture? To those being led astray they are baited and reeled in with good intentions along with an emotional high. They trust these leaders and therefore conclude that despite the fact that God's word never teaches that we should lay prayer aside and to empty our minds or not be sober minded, they follow these false teachers into experiences which can open them up to demonic activity.

What these people think to be springs of living water is nothing but emptiness. And that's exactly what Peter says in verse 17.. "These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm."

What is the imagery Peter gives us here? Imagine being trapped in the desert and longing for a cool drink to fill you and satisfy you. And off in the distance you see an oasis, knowing that where there is an oasis there is water. You expect it, you long for it, you can taste it already.

And as you hastily approach this oasis and run to the top of the ridge expecting to look down into a cool pool of refreshing water, the only thing you find is more sand. In delirious desperation you put your hands down into the sand and cup it as you throw it into your face hoping beyond hope that there will be some satisfaction.

But the more sand you throw into your face the more you realize that this spring is without water and therefore without life. For all of the wonderful things these false teachers may say and the promises they hold out the way God views them is waterless springs which only kill. They are a mere mirage.

Those with the truth are the true wells of satisfaction as Solomon points out in the proverbs.

PRO 10:11 "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, ..."

PRO 13:14 "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death."

It was our Lord Jesus who spoke of a true fountain found in Himself. This is the fountain every true teacher of God would lead people to.

JOH 7:37-38 "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Where you have water you have life. But to tease people with water and give them drought is wicked. To lure them to springs and not satisfy them with refreshment is cruel just as it is to see clouds on the horizon quickly being driven along only to find out they have no water. They are useless.

This is the picture Peter paints of these false teachers. God's people need to be satisfied with the living water found in Christ, but if we entertain anything but the truth of God's word we may fall captive to all sorts of deception that will be just as useless.

And yet the Church seems to have made a path to not only the teachers who bring these false teachings but the ministries they bring. And what many in the church have done is to embrace such ministries which are waterless and then call them satisfying.

They try to add these waterless clouds to the agenda and in many cases substituting them for the real thing found in the truth. Again, listen closely to what God says is in store for these false teachers. He says, "Blackest darkness is reserved for them."

If blackest darkness is reserved for them because they teach falsehood in the name of truth what should we think of the falsehoods they bring? What does God think of them? This is a tremendous warning not only of the false teachers but also of the poison they bring.

We must be a people of discernment, but that discernment is found only in the revealed truth of God's word. We must never take the attitude that we can play with such teaching and entertain such teachers, because once you let the nose of the camel in the tent it's not long before he's in your bed, and both are lying in the same.

Balaam was actually one whom God spoke to and yet he was a prophet who ultimately sought after his own sensuality. A man who can conspire to have the women of an entire region lead the men of Israel astray must have had a perverseness which can only be found in one who has eyes full of adultery.

But that perverseness went way beyond leading people astray. It ended up in the destruction of 24,000 people along with Balaam himself. Does sin pay? You bet it does, and its wages are death.

As we wrap this section up next week may we consider God's attitude toward the truth. We've seen it in its most negative approach but it should lead us to the other side of positively seeking Him in His word, not being ensnared in the trap that is set daily on radio, television and other means which we allow into our homes.

Is all of this stuff concerning false teachers indicative of the end times? Jesus speaks of this in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 24:10-13 "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

Let's not be found deceived, but those who stand firm to the end who teach the truth. Let's always keep our eyes open and be willing to learn from God's truth and find our discernment in Him.

ROM 16:17-20 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. 19 Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

The God of peace is the one who wars on our behalf. May we be found faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ to His glory and honor.