

2Peter 2:18-22 "Freedom = Responsibility In Christ"

This morning we're going to wrap up chapter 2 and the lengthy description by Peter of these false teachers who deceive the body of Christ by promoting themselves without regard for the truth found in the word of God.

It seems today that words have a tendency to be used by individuals, not to mean what's really on their minds, but to confuse the issue by actually hiding their intent. Again, I go back to many of the politicians who are saying one thing, knowing that the words they use are meaningless and yet are using those words to lead people astray.

How many times have we heard countless these politicians say things like, we want the rich to pay their fair share when it comes to taxes. Evidently taking upwards of 50% or more of their earned income isn't fair according to these people.

But that's not what they mean. They mean they don't like the rich being wealthy and that we should take as much of their income as possible and promote a class envy so that the rest of us poor slobs will hate what they're doing to this country by exploiting the less fortunate.

By creating this environment we're supposed to join in with the litany of voices from Washington who promote this and join with them in their cause to where we will ultimately show our support with votes to keep them in office. As long as they keep giving us "stuff" we'll support them, and of course we're able to get this "stuff" from the rich who don't need it anyhow.

They appeal to the sensual side of man which always wants more. And supposedly, they're the ones to give it to us. But this is precisely the problem. Once we actually find out that it's costing us more in the products we buy and taxes we pay at the pump it's too late. When you overtax those at the top of the food chain they simply pass those costs to those down the line.

Now the point here this morning is not to teach a political science class. The point is that if you want to promote a lie, you couch it in words which appear to be true and yet deceive. And this is exactly what Peter has been talking about. These false teachers we've seen in chapter 2 of our text know what they're doing as they promote themselves at the expense of the truth of God's word.

2PE 2:18-19 "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. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity - for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

What we see here is that these false teachers are in to "enticing." And they entice those in the church to follow their ways for their benefit. Let's look at these verses.

"For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature..."

Empty, boastful words describes the content and the attitude of what they're saying. The content is that they are without any substance. They are empty and void of anything which is useful for the Christian to grow in his or her faith.

The words they use may appear to be useful, but when you examine them in light of Scripture they come up short. Many false teachers down through the years have done this very effectively by adding to the truth or deleting from the truth of God's word. And yet what has the apostle John said in regard to this?

REV 22:18-19 "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

God takes His word very seriously and to alter it in any way is something which He frowns upon especially as it relates to the way in which a person receives salvation. This was the problem with some of the Jews in and around the church in Galatia.

GAL 1:6-8 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"

And what was the gospel or good news which Paul preached? He makes it very clear in the letter he wrote to the Ephesians.

EPH 2:8 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

In the letter Peter has written he is saying the same thing and he's warning the church not to fall prey to those who would alter the one true gospel which, as Paul says, is no gospel at all.

But as we saw last week Peter shows us that the one's who usually fall prey to these false teachers are the ones who have just come to faith in Christ.

Verse 18b "...they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error."

The ones who have just escaped from those who live in error are the ones who were just recently living in error, which is to live outside of a relationship with Christ by faith alone. But notice what these ones are promised by these false teachers.

2PE 2:19 "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity - for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

These false teachers promise freedom, and who doesn't want freedom? The question is, what kind of freedom and freedom from what? Now for most of us when we think of freedom in this country we associate it with freedom from the kind of slavery which was prevalent in the communist block countries and which still exists in many parts of the world.

And that's certainly part of what freedom offers. We can conceivably pursue whatever career we choose, or choose whatever school we want to attend. And technically we can speak without fear of reprisal. Now there are many today in this country who would contend that a variety of these freedoms are being attacked and undermined. And they have a point.

But many would agree that compared to most other countries in this world the United States still enjoys a great deal of freedom.

But there is a problem with freedom. The problem is that with freedom comes a great deal of responsibility. There are those who think freedom gives us the right to do whatever we want to do.

I'm free to infringe upon the rights of others. I'm free to be deceptive in my business dealings. I'm free to yell fire in a crowded theater.

No, freedom is always in the context of law and morality. We are free to live in a society which has established laws which are for the benefit of everyone. At least that's the ideal. And the founding fathers were very idealistic in this regard and yet fully understood the sinful condition of man which is why they established laws and the division of power in government.

The false teachers of Peter's day, and many false teachers of today, promote a sort of freedom from responsibility. In the first century it was not uncommon for these false teachers to promote a licentious lifestyle, all the while saying that it doesn't make any difference to God.

This could not be further from the truth. And it is the truth which Peter is promoting here in contrast to the teachings of the false teachers. When you preach a gospel which promotes ungodliness then you've undermined what true freedom in Christ is all about and you're preaching a false gospel.

Now we might say, 'how can anyone teach such things?' Who in their right mind speaks of having a relationship with God while promoting sin in that relationship?' Well, Paul spoke about it when he wrote to the Romans. And notice the logic that he uses.

ROM 5:20-6:2 "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

What Paul is saying is that as bad as sin is God's grace is sufficient to forgive us of all sin. Where sin increases grace increases all the more. But then he goes on to the logical conclusion of what false teachers could promote.

Well, when sin increases then God's grace increases. Therefore, the more we sin the more grace we have access to. Paul says that's false logic when compared to the revealed word of God. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

You see how you can twist the truth. This is what Peter is addressing. He's saying that these false teachers are taking the truth concerning the freedom we have in Christ and turning it on its head to say something entirely different, all the while condoning their own sinful behavior and encouraging the same with these new babes in Christ.

Yes, we have freedom in Christ. We are free from the penalty and the power of sin. But as with any freedom it is in the context of responsibility to the one who gave us such freedom.

In Christ we are now free to please our God and serve and love Him. In Christ we are now free to represent Him as ambassadors in this world in the power of His Spirit, but we are not free to do our own thing any more than a soldier is free to do his own thing in service to his country. He's under orders and his desire is to please the ones who give those orders.

2TI 2:4 "No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer."

Who is our commanding officer? The Master who purchased us, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the one we want to please in all things. He is the one we want to obey. He said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (JOH 14:15)

Notice that the love comes before the obedience. And notice that obedience in and of itself is not the primary force that secures our salvation. It is the result of the salvation we have in Christ. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works.

This too is another false teaching which is prevalent in the world today. Just be good enough and that will put you in a right standing with God. Again, the question, how good is good enough?

Every religion in the world today, with the exception of Christianity as revealed in the word of God, bases their premise of righteousness on what you can do to earn favor with God as you do good works with the express purpose of attaining salvation through those good works.

ISA 64:6 "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

Is God saying that good works are useless? Of course not, but not as a means of attaining or securing our salvation. Rather, in response to our salvation as we show our love to Him by obeying His commands.

EPH 2:8-10 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The false teachers whom Peter is addressing in our text were promoting a false gospel which included living in a way that brought dishonor to Christ, all the while saying that it didn't make any difference as long as you believed.

Yes, we must believe, but our belief, our faith in Christ and His righteousness, frees us to live lives that glorify Him in all that we do and say and think.

We have no righteousness of our own that we can bring to God and say these good works are sufficient. Rather, we depend on the righteousness of Christ who is perfect and who put that righteousness to our account.

PHI 3:8-9 "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

That's what the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. And this was the problem with these false teachers. They robbed God of His truth while promoting their lies as freedom. But this supposed freedom only enslaved people to lives of eternal damnation.

There is no freedom apart from the truth. And the truth has been clearly revealed in God's word. This is why we are instructed to test all things. This is why we are to use discernment when we listen to teachers of every stripe coming into our homes through the media.

This is why we are to grow up in our faith in Christ and become mature. These false teachers know that the young and the naive

are easy prey. We don't want to be viewed as prey. And that's why Peter said in his first letter. "Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word that by it you may grow in respect to salvation."

Growth comes through the word of God. And as Paul tells us, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Rom.10:17) If you want to grow in your faith it must come through a better understanding of God's word as we submit to the Holy Spirit. And so, we want to be slaves of Christ, not slaves of corruption.

So, what is the outcome of these false teachers who deceive and promote such a false gospel? Peter holds no punches.

2PE 2:20-22 "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," (Prov. 26:11) and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

Who are these false teachers who seem to have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing Christ and yet can be called dogs who return to their vomit?

Were these true believers who simply went astray and subsequently lost their salvation? Not at all. And yet, they were certainly viewed as true believers in that they were part of the church. They shared in the blessings of the body of Christ, they were trusted as fellow believers, and they were viewed as mature believers who were put in positions of teaching the things of God.

But because of their deceptiveness their judgment is to be viewed in such a way as to warn the church of how serious God takes His word as the final standard by which all redemptive truth must be measured.

But in verse 20 it appears as though Peter is saying that these false teachers have in fact "escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..."

I mean that's what it says. But as we consider these last few verses of chapter 2 we will find that simply looking like a Christian does not make one a Christian.

In what way do these false teachers escape the corruption of the world? Well, it says by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, by associating themselves with Christ.

The Greek word here for knowing is *epignosis* which means a precise and correct knowledge. These false teachers knew who Christ was and the teachings He promoted. In knowing this they adhered to those teachings which those in the church would have agreed to. In the process of agreeing with these teachings they would have enjoyed the benefits of the body of Christ.

They would have enjoyed the truth being taught, they would have enjoyed the grace which true believers shared with them as they loved them and fellowshiped with these false teachers. These false teachers would have escaped the corruption of the world to the extent that they would have promoted themselves as ones who were going to heaven through their association with Christ's church.

And yet, what Peter shows here is that they may have been hearers of the word, but proved themselves not doers of the word. They made great claims of being children of Christ and placing themselves in positions of honor within the body of Christ, but with all of their knowledge of the truth they made the conscious choice to go their own way in deceiving others for their own benefit.

And to the degree that they have chosen to be entangled in the corruption of the world they would have been better off not ever knowing the truth about Jesus Christ, because with such knowledge they are that much more responsible to the living God to live in that truth by faith.

But they have no faith. They simply have knowledge. This is what we touched on last week. Lots of people believe in Jesus Christ but not all of them embrace Him by faith and walk in His ways as they follow Him by faith. Isn't that what James tells us in his letter?

JAM 2:18-19 "But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my

faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."

Demons cannot be saved and yet they believe there is one God. They have the facts. They know the truth even as these false teachers who choose to follow their lustful desires and lead others down a road to destruction.

Verse 20-21 "... they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them."

The point is not that God takes away the salvation that He promises to those who embrace Him as Lord and Savior. He is emphasizing that those who would do such a despicable thing as to twist the truth by promoting a false gospel will certainly be judged and their judgment will be severe.

But this is not simply a warning to these false teachers. It is a warning to true believers not to follow such people. It is a warning to know the difference between true teaching from the word of God and the false teaching which is sprinkled with the word of God as men add to it and delete from it.

If you have truly placed your faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross you cannot lose your salvation. This was the point the apostle John made when recording the very words of Jesus.

JOH 6:39-40 "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

But our assurance doesn't come from our ability to hold on to this salvation by doing something good enough to hold on to it. It comes from God's ability to hold on to us as we trust Him and walk in His ways in the power of the Spirit as we please Him with lives of love and obedience.

ROM 6:6-12 "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe

that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

This is the hope we have. This is the good news we promote. But this is the good news these false teachers have corrupted and continue to corrupt today. They prove themselves enemies of the cross. Paul also brings this out when writing to the Philippians.

PHI 3:18-21 "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

And of course this has to do with Christ's second coming and believers receiving their glorified bodies. But note the fate of these false teachers as they prove themselves what they truly are.

2PE 2:22 "Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

You can make a costume for an animal and try and pass that animal off as something other than what it is. But you know what, it will always prove itself what it truly is.

If you stick floppy ears on it and paste a black nose on its bill it may not look like a duck. But if it quacks like a duck and swims like a duck you can bet it's a duck. False teachers may look like true believers but they will always revert back to what they truly are. Unbelievers who are wolves in sheep's clothing.

In this case they are dogs who return to their vomit. We had a dog named Tuffy when I was younger. And I'll never forget the few times I saw him do exactly what Peter talks about here. It was probably one of the most disgusting things I ever saw him do. But it didn't phase him in the least because that's what dogs do.

And this is Peter's point. In the eyes of God these false teachers are doing the disgusting things their natures prompt them to do. Their reward is in their rejection of the one true God and His salvation found in Christ alone. Their reward is in their vomit and their wallowing in the mud of this world.

What a contrast to the truth of what we have and are in Christ. Peter brings this out in his first letter. And we'll close here today.

1PE 2:9-11 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

The war is on. But we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus.

ROM 8:37-39 "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."