

2Peter 2:1b-3 "The Enemy Within The Camp"

It seems these days that the truth is something which depends on how you decide to define it. Some politicians would define truth as any statement that people will believe. And so, despite the fact that you have no intention of lowering taxes, as long as you tell everyone that you will, that is truth.

And of course truth is truth as long as it seems truthful at the time. And so, when you tell the country on national television that you never had an illicit affair with another woman, that is the ultimate truth, until of course you decide to reverse your story under oath when you're before the House ethics committee. And now that becomes the ultimate truth.

The irony is that people will still believe such a person and conclude that the truth doesn't make any difference as long as it doesn't affect their pocketbook, or because they happen to share the same ideological and philosophical position. And so, truth becomes relevant.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. False teachers can make up the truth as they go as long as they tell the people what they want to hear. And if it's shown that their truth was false, then they change the rules or alter things to accommodate themselves.

But as we saw last week false teachers have always been around and they will continue to be around to the end. But the point Peter is making is that the truth of God's word does make a difference. In fact, it makes an eternal difference, because the wrong message kills. And the false teachers are blind leaders, though they would try to persuade us they are in the light and see clearly.

These false teachers are setting themselves up in the Church and leading many astray. Again, notice what Peter says in the opening paragraph of this second chapter.

2PE 2:1-3 "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them -bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

Secretly introducing destructive heresies is an overt act of deception. It is not giving the truth, it is hiding it while putting in its place those things which would promote the false teacher.

When Peter talks about a destructive heresy he is saying that its outcome will destroy. That's what I meant when I said that the wrong message kills. The Greek word for destructive is *apoleia* and it means perishing, ruin, destruction, and carries the idea of the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell.

That is what wrong teaching does. It leads people to hell. There is no partial truth or altered truth concerning the Gospel which can safely bring people into a right relationship with God. All roads do not lead heaven. And this is exactly what our Lord Jesus warned the people of in His days on this earth.

MAT 7:13-16 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. 15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. ..."

This is part of the discourse of our Lord that we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Just before Jesus preached this sermon He had called Peter along with three others to follow Him. Peter was there to hear this sermon and it was one of the first teachings he received from Jesus. Peter undoubtedly was recalling our Lord's words when he is writing this letter warning of false prophets and teachers.

But notice how far these false teachers have gone in not only not giving the truth of the Gospel, but actually teaching those things which are clearly false and contrary to the truth. He says, "They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them -bringing swift destruction on themselves.

They have denied the Lord who bought them. This is how insidious falsehoods are. Do you suppose anyone in their right mind would actually jeopardize where they would spend eternity if they knew that a wrong teaching would send them to hell?

This is how deceptive falsehoods are. And yet, these false teachers chose to go down a path that would lead to destruction. They have no one to blame but themselves. As people who were in the body

of Christ they had access to the truth and yet for sordid gain they decided they would use the truth to their own advantage as they bent the truth.

Keep in mind that "they did not set themselves up as opponents of Christianity. They set themselves up as the finest fruits of Christian thinking; and so it was gradually and subtly that people were being lured away from God's truth to other men's private opinions, which is what heresy is." (William Barclay)

They were not spiritually minded, they were fleshly. They didn't accept the importance of the truth, otherwise they would never have rebelled against the God who gave it. But how can a believer ever really deny His Master and Lord who bought them?

This is a portion of God's word that has led to some confusion. In fact, this is a portion which some people use to verify that a true believer can actually lose his or her salvation. They say, after all, 'these people were bought with the blood of Jesus Christ and now they are going to suffer destruction as they lose the salvation purchased for them.'

But is this actually what is being taught by Peter in this text? Not at all. A couple of things are going on here. First, these false teachers were undoubtedly claiming that Christ purchased them. They were boasting that they did indeed belong to the Lord. How else are you going to gain the confidence of those in the church?

There are a few problems we run into if we assume that this passage is speaking in redemptive terms, which is to say, that these false prophets were purchased in a saving way with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Notice the actual words.

2 Peter 2:1 ^{NAU} But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, **even denying the Master who bought them**, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

A couple of questions need to be asked: 1) Who is the Master and 2) what did he buy?

The word for Master in the Greek is *despotes* and it usually means either Lord or master in the sense that we are speaking of God in general or Jesus Christ in particular. But the second question is

more important in the sense that a purchase has definitely been made which must assume ownership.

You'll notice here that it does not say that the master purchased salvation for these false prophets but that He purchased the false prophets, thus the phrase, "master who bought them." It would have to be read back into the text for salvation to be the subject of the purchase. The text is clear that the prophets themselves have been purchased.

And so, God is the One who owns someone, not potentially, but actually. But in what sense are these people owned by God? If we answer that question by saying that He owns them redemptively then we run into a problem that one who is purchased by the blood of Christ can subsequently be unpurchased or lost regarding their salvation.

Consider the very words of Jesus Christ.

John 6:37-40 ³⁷ "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

There is no equivocation here on the part of Christ. All that the Father gives to Him WILL COME to Him. And of all those who come to Him, "I LOSE NOTHING", and THEY WILL BE RAISED UP on the last day.

To suggest that anyone or anything could separate true believers from the love of Christ is simply not to understand the whole counsel of the word of God.

Romans 8:38-39 ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, if these false teachers have been bought in a redemptive sense by the Master Jesus Christ, our Lord's own words would betray Him as they are not raised up on the last day unto eternal life, but instead are destroyed according to our text.

So, this raises the question, if they are not purchased redemptively in what other sense could these false prophets be bought by the Master?

Well, we need to go back to the context of this passage. What in fact is Peter addressing? Is he addressing the atonement of Jesus Christ? Is he addressing the cross of Jesus Christ? Is he addressing salvation in any way?

In an article by Simon Escobedo III entitled “2Peter 2:1 and Universal Redemption,” posted on Alpha and Omega Ministries website, he makes this observation:

Looking again at our text we read: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.”

Similar to Paul’s final exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-38, Peter exhorts and warns the people of God of the presence of false teaching. The parallels are striking. Paul was uncertain of what lay ahead for him in Jerusalem:

“And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.” (Acts 20:22-23)

Peter sensing that his death was imminent writes: “Knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.” (2 Peter 1:14-15)

Paul therefore provides this sobering warning: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30)

Peter offers the same warning: “Just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” (2 Peter 2:1)

Please notice that both Paul and Peter in the midst of such warning provide the believer with a refuge, the only refuge and source of truth against all enemies of the faith. Paul writes: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:27, 32)

Peter reminds his audience of the same: "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Hence we have an established context. Peter, like Paul, is exhorting and warning the people of God what the church has come to know so well since that day: that in the sanctification of His people God has ordained the presence of false teaching and false teachers as an ever present enemy with which the church must struggle. Christians are to be alert and diligent in the defense of the truth. This is the context in which Peter is writing.

So, the question is this: if the context is about warning the church about false teachers in their midst where else in the word of God do we see a similar warning to God's people that deals with God purchasing the people being warned against, but not in a redemptive sense?

Let's consider the song of Moses found in Deuteronomy regarding the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 ⁵ "They have acted corruptly toward Him, *They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation.* ⁶ "Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you.

Again Escobedo makes this observation regarding this particular text...

It is my contention that Peter is not addressing the extent of the atonement but is providing an OT example (similar to Deut. 32:5-6) of a sovereign master (despot) who had purchased slaves and hence commanded their allegiance.

The Greek term used to translate the Hebrew word hnq' (qanah) is (ktaomai) and is interchangeable with our term agorazo. It means to "obtain" or "acquire." The basis then for which this ownership is set forth is the fact that God "bought" them from Egypt, "made" them, and "established" them. They had been afforded external blessings as a nation through their deliverance from Egypt, and the provision and protection of God to them as His national people. This mercy of special blessing ought to have compelled them to faithfulness and obedience (Romans 2:4-5), but instead they became "perverse" and "crooked" (v.5), they "corrupted themselves" (Deut. 32:5), became "foolish and unwise" (v.6), forgot that God was their Sovereign Owner and Master (v.6), turned to idolatry (v.16-21) and brought judgment upon themselves (22-43).

Referring to Deuteronomy 32:6 Wayne Grudem writes:

'Is not he your Father who has bought you?' ...Peter is drawing an analogy between the past false prophets who arose among the Jews and those who will be false teachers within the churches to which he writes...From the time of the exodus onward, any Jewish person would have considered himself or herself one who was 'bought' by God in the exodus and therefore a person of God's own possession. ...So the text means not that Christ had redeemed these false prophets, but simply that they were rebellious Jewish people (or church attenders in the same position as rebellious Jews) who were rightly owned by God because they had been bought out of the land of Egypt (or their forefathers had), but they were ungrateful to him.'

To be consistent with the entire word of God regarding the way in which Christ redeems actually, not just potentially, (that is, all who are given to Him will come to Him and will be raised by Christ and none will be lost), we must look at our text in 2Peter with eyes that do not contradict clear redemptive teaching.

This passage dealing with false teachers does not teach that they are redeemed by the blood of the lamb, but simply have been

purchased by their Master and Creator in the sense that they were identified with Israel that was purchased out of Egypt, as in Moses' case, and now are identified with God's people, the true Church, but are not part of it in a saving way.

Paul points this truth out clearly when writing to the church at Rome.

Romans 9:6-8 ⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

The bottom line, according to Peter in our text is to be discerning regarding false teachers and expose them and flee from them and their teachings as we His people are built up on the word of God.

Simply because false teachers appear to be sheep does not mean they are. Those supposed sheep who have no intention of following after Christ, but only want others to think they are Christians, for ambitious reasons, are in fact wolves. What do wolves do among sheep? They eat them.

When was the last time you ever heard of a shepherd going out to shoot his sheep? You shoot wolves who want to eat your sheep. The problem with wolves in the church is that sometimes they are hard to find, because they have clothed themselves with the trappings of life in Christ, but like the Pharisees they are full of dead men's bones.

Now we don't shoot wolves in the church, but we certainly warn the sheep to steer clear of them. And one of the ways to steer clear of them is to recognize them for what they are. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "By their fruit you will recognize them. ..."

Their fruit is not only the way in which they behave, but also their actual teachings. Whatever comes from them is their fruit. And so, we don't need to wait for them to begin acting like pagans or wolves before we expose them as wolves.

If they teach that Jesus Christ is not God, or that He was not born of a virgin, or that His death on the cross was not sufficient to pay our debt these would be obvious clues you've got a wolf in your

midst, even if they appear to be a "godly" person. But notice the effect they have on the church.

2PE 2:2 "Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute."

Who are the "many" here in our text? Quite possibly true believers. Well, how can a true believer follow false teaching and the teachers who bring it? Well, why in the world would Jesus Christ Himself warn of such people if the possibility didn't exist?

I've known true believers over the years who have followed after false teachers and their teachings. I've known many of these same people whose lives were turned upside down because of it. Bad teaching produces bad lives. How many times have you heard me say that?

The fact is it's true. Even Paul had to deal with this in his ministry when he wrote to the church in Galatia.

GAL 1:6-7 "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."

Did this mean that these particular people left the faith? Not necessarily. It simply means that they were going after false teaching which would not only affect their walk with Christ but would have affected their ability to bring the truth of the gospel to their communities. And isn't that what Satan wants?

The fact that Paul is writing to them is testimony that our Lord doesn't leave us without the truth and does what He needs to do to bring us back to the truth. If we are true believers in Christ, false teachings will never lead us out of the kingdom of God, but they will certainly affect our ability to faithfully represent our God and Savior in this world.

That's why Peter says that those who follow after them will bring the truth into disrepute. It's interesting to note that the word "follow" in the Greek here is *exakoloutheo*, and it means to follow out or up, to tread in one's steps.

The picture here is placing your feet in the footprints of the one you're following. The only way you can tread in one's steps is if

you've got your head down looking at the ground. Where are our eyes to be? On Christ, seeking those things above, not on the footsteps of men if they are leading us astray.

But in the process of following after them these Christians are actually bringing the truth into disrepute or as the NASB puts it, "because of them the way of truth will be maligned." The actual Greek word here for disrepute or maligned is *blasphemeo*.

How do you suppose that transliterates over into the English? That's right. Blaspheme. To blaspheme it to speak evil of.

What is Peter saying? He is saying that as Christians follow after these false teachers and their teachings they actually cause the world to blaspheme Christ, to speak evil of our Lord. This is the objective of Satan. Nothing would delight him more than to have the world look upon the Savior as a misguided zealot who turned into a martyr, but no one you would seriously follow as God the Messiah who saves you from your sins.

Has this ever happened in the church? You bet it has. There were people in the first century, especially the Jews, who denied and taught that Jesus never really rose bodily from the dead. What would that do for our salvation? I'll let Paul answer that.

1CO 15:12-15,17,19-20 "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

False teaching kills. And those Christians who follow after false teaching for a season potentially place themselves in a position of maligning and bringing into disrepute the truth of who Christ is and the salvation He brings, together with our ability to grow in Him. And instead of creating an atmosphere of unity the body begins to devour and divide each other at major points of doctrine concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

Does this happen today? Unfortunately it does. Just look at many of the major denominations. There are churches that deny the clear teachings of God's word. Some promote such teachings that would allow homosexuals as pastors. Others question that God actually created man, but only started the process of evolution by creating inanimate matter.

The epitome of how the truth is brought into disrepute is how the gospel is changed by bringing good works into the equation to be a part of the redeeming process. We are certainly saved unto good works, but not by good works and yet there are churches, for example, who tell you that you are not saved unless you are water baptized.

Does this mean water baptism is unimportant? Absolutely not. But to suggest that water baptism is essential to securing one's salvation is heretical. It is false teaching. What about adding the sacraments, which Rome teaches, into the equation as a necessity for salvation?

They clearly teach that without practicing these sacraments, especially the mass, you have no place in the kingdom of God. That is false teaching which kills. That is not the gospel.

Does it make a difference what we teach? You bet it does. Notice what else these false teachers do.

2PE 2:3 "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

Here Peter makes it quite clear that these false teachers are not, nor were ever, true believers. He begins by showing some of their fruit. "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up."

What is greed? It's a desire to always have more. It's never being satisfied, and it stems from a love of money and a love of the world. This is what motivates many a false teacher. They want something from you and it's not your allegiance to Christ.

They're in it for only one thing: themselves; and they will use people to achieve this. This is what the word exploit in our text suggests. It's a Greek word which is sometimes used to describe how one might trade for something in a business sense. Like

people trafficking in illegal drugs as they wheel and deal, these false teachers use people as though they were merchandise.

This is exactly why the KJV uses the phrase here in our text: "they ... make merchandise of you..."

Now, up to this point, Peter has been doing something which most of us would consider unthinkable. I mean, 'how can we judge the hearts of people like this? 'How can we know that this is their motivation?' 'How dare we arrive at the conclusion that we know that an individual is doing such a dastardly thing.'

Peter is certainly speaking of judging the heart of a person, but he is doing it in general terms. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who is inspiring this portion of Scripture. It is, therefore, the Holy Spirit who is giving us this insight in a general sense.

We may know of false teachers who don't appear to be exploiting anyone. We may know of false teachers who really "seem" to love the sheep and aren't interested in a greedy way. Every situation may be different, but the Holy Spirit is teaching that though we may not ultimately condemn such people, He will, because He does know the heart.

This section of 2Peter is meant to instruct us to be aware of what these false teachers do and why they do it, so that we will be discerning not to fall under such deception. But only God ultimately knows the heart and motivation. We must inspect the fruit, but only God can burn the tree which will not yield the fruit of the tree they claim to be, but aren't.

Does this mean we don't take any action in such cases? No. It simply means we follow the commands of our Lord to love our enemies, but not to continue to walk in their ways or allow the rest of the sheep to be seduced when it is shown that they are promoting such falsehoods.

Paul and Peter on different occasions urged the body to put these people out if they would not repent.

But our text here is describing someone who has no intention of repenting and will therefore come under a sure judgment of God. Peter says at the end of verse 3, "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

This is language of God knowing their hearts and giving them their reward. This is really what we all deserve outside of Christ. Whether an unbeliever is a false teacher or not, all people deserve this judgment from God which will lead to destruction.

This is why we praise God that our judgment fell on His Son and this is why we share with the world that, though there is real and present danger of condemnation by rejecting the Son, there is also the hope that we can be brought back to a God who desires our eternal fellowship. And that comes through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

And at that point we can say with Paul, "there is therefore now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." (ROM 8:1)

Praise God!