

2nd PETER BIBLE STUDY

2 Peter 2:01 a&b

Lesson #3

Introduction

We've gotten to that portion of Peter's epistle that we call chapter 2. It's in this section of his letter that he gets to the real heart of the matter which he wishes to discuss with us in this, his final communication. In his first epistle he was able to speak more on matters of doctrine and Christian behaviors, but now he's forced by circumstances beyond his control, to deal with a matter that I'm sure he wished he could avoid. Everyone who preaches and teaches the word does so eagerly and joyfully as they present the divine truths and the great mercy and promises of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And I suspect that all of us who teach wish that, that was all we ever had to discuss. But sadly, that's not all we have to discuss, because along with all the marvelous promises of God, comes all His warnings of danger and treachery. And it's at this point in his letter that Peter feels the absolute necessity to address this subject.

This mindset was stated very succinctly by another writer named Jude, a half brother of Jesus, in his short little epistle where he stated:

3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints . 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:3-4 (NASB)

Therefore brothers, we are forced to acknowledge the absolute necessity to confront this situation, as unpleasant as it might be. And as I was preparing for this lesson, it became plain to me that it's not by any means a simple problem. In fact, if you'll permit me to make an analogy, it would be very much like taking me into the middle of a diamond exchange and rolling out a wheelbarrow filled to the top with beautiful stones, and telling me that someone had mixed counterfeits in with the real ones, and now I've been asked to separate them, to put all of the good ones in one pile and all that fake ones in another. But now here's the problem, I don't know anything about diamonds. To me they all look exactly the same, and if I had a whole barrel full of them, I couldn't separate one bad one from one good one, because I lack the training to distinguish between them. It's not like the real ones are beautiful and the fakes are ugly, they all look beautiful to the untrained eye. And I think this analogy pretty much explains the situation of false teachers in the churches. Therefore before we can even begin to deal with the false teachers themselves, we must be educated in the proper methods whereby we can make these distinctions. How do we know truth from error? Until we can distinguish between truth and error itself, it is utterly impossible to deal with those who are dispensing it.

I was recently asked by a young man considering the pursuit of a teaching ministry, a question that I suppose we have all asked ourselves at one time or another in our life. He asked me why, if the Scriptures teach us that the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth, why are there so many different interpretations of theology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and so many other issues among apparently born again Christian believers? If the Holy Spirit is the guide, shouldn't we all get the same answers to the same questions? How do we explain the diversity? I would suspect that anyone who seriously teaches the scriptures has had to deal with this question at some point in their ministry.

The short answer to this question is that the Holy Spirit does in fact lead us all to exactly the same truth concerning those things that we call the core doctrines, the true undefiled gospel. On these issues the Holy Spirit permits no deviation in our understanding or interpretation whatsoever. He does, in fact, lead us all into the very same precise truth. It is our failure to always recognize the line of demarcation between the essential and the optional that causes us to ask these questions.

The Lord has, by His divine decree in creation, that means His full intent and purpose, established both the essential and the optional. There are absolutes defined by God, and, there is a whole world of options afforded to mankind by the divinely decreed grace of God. We are free to exercise these myriad of options, as long as they remain within the broader framework of His absolutes. This is the freedom that we enjoy in Christ, afforded by His grace.

For instance, God established both male and female, and He defined the proper relationship between them, but then specifically told us that we may marry whomever we please, so long as it's kept within the defined parameters of that relationship. But, because we're afforded so much freedom within these defined boundaries, we inevitably get the impression that we can also traverse the boundaries themselves, or at least push them a little bit to suit our own desires. But God does not move the boundary lines, as the inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah found out, when they took in on themselves to redefine the divinely established rules of sexuality and marriage, and reaped the horrific consequences of an angry God, as an example, and warning to any others in the future, who might be foolish enough to even consider such reckless and arrogant disregard for God's authority.

If something is an absolute, His scriptures will tell us so, and that absolute boundary stands, but where the scriptures do not define an absolute, then we are free to exercise our options, so long as those options do not violate the scriptures, and are in keeping with the principles of godliness. Freedom of choices, and even incomplete knowledge, are a marvelous part of God's divine plan for mankind, and our growth and maturity. We are designed by God to think, and feel, and function, as distinct individuals. We have particular and unique preferences, and opinions, and feelings, and desires, and it is this capacity to perceive ourselves as distinct entities that gives us identity, and makes our life valuable to us; and yet at the very same time, creates unavoidable diversities because of those individual preferences. We love this freedom, it makes our lives meaningful, but, by its very nature, it simultaneously forces us to deal with our family and friends and everyone else, that very often have significantly differing beliefs and preferences. We love our freedom of choice, but we hate dealing with the diversity that it inherently entails.

But imagine, if you will, a planet where every human thinks exactly alike. No differences of preference or opinion, just perfect uniformity of mind and will. Human history would be very different wouldn't it? Think about it. There would never be any disagreements, any arguments, any fights, or any wars. Just one ever growing family of perfect clones, all exactly the same as the others. This can't be what the Almighty God of creation wanted, because He took what seems like great pains to specifically design creatures that are anything but exactly like minded. We differ on almost everything imaginable, and that very characteristic of humanity is what makes everything happen as it does in the whole creation plan of God. It is the built-in means that drives the operations of all humanity and angelic creatures.

Therefore, we see many diverse practices, and even differing interpretations of Scripture on nonessential core doctrines, which are derived from the free exercise of those options afforded us in Christ. We don't have all the answers just yet, because the Lord hasn't chosen to give us all the answers just yet, and He has not forbidden us to ponder the possibilities, and even formulate our own opinions on these nonessential particulars. On many of the issues that we hotly debate, the Lord may tell us that He himself has no particular preference either way, and on other issues, some of us will be right, and some of us will be wrong, or maybe even all of us will be wrong while we reside here on this earth, but one day, when He's ready, we'll all learn the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and then speculations and diversity of opinions on issues of importance will be a thing of the past, as every creature bows their knee to the King of glory, who has all the right answers. So then, on that day will all diversity of preferences of every kind cease to exist, and will every creature think exactly alike? I don't know, but that's certainly not how He's designed it in this age. He's taken deliberate measures to create beings who are able to have distinct individual preferences, and it seems unlikely that He'll completely reverse that in eternity.

Therefore, on issues that are not core doctrinal matters, the Lord himself has provided the latitude of free choices among mankind, whereby he may exercise his faculties to the best of his abilities, and formulate his own personal beliefs as to the manner in which he may best serve and worship and honor the Lord. Paul acknowledges this, and explains it in some detail in Romans chapter 14. He says that some of us believe that one day should be esteemed above others, while some believe that every day is the same for Christians to worship. Some believe we should honor specific holidays, and others believe we should not. Some believe we should abstain from certain foods and drinks, and others believe we are free to eat and drink as we wish, as long as we do so within the established boundaries of godliness. We all hold our own beliefs on these nonessential options according to our own heart's desires to honor God and only do those things that are pleasing to Him.

But we are all too often guilty of confusing the God ordained boundaries established by His design, with the myriad of optional free choices that are intentionally afforded by His grace to mankind. The inability to see and understand this vital distinction has been the source of much affliction. To err in either direction is destructive. To think that God's boundaries are themselves within our realm of option is a disaster waiting to happen, as God's judgement will eventually fall upon such as these. But to think that the many free options that we have been freely granted are all meaningless, and there's only one viable preference on each and every matter of life, is to reduce our lives to unbearable human imposed legalism.

Now just one last comment before we get into our Scriptures. Peter is going to warn us about false prophets and false teachers. But as we've just discussed, there is a difference between a teacher who is possibly mistaken on a point of non-essential doctrine, and a false teacher as defined by Peter in his forthcoming Scriptures. A false teacher, as defined by Scripture, is not just false in his teaching, but is false in his (or her) motives, and in his (or her) character, and even in his (or her) profession of faith. Peter is warning us about people who claim to be born again Christians, and even leaders and teachers, but by their actions and their motives they deny any such faith. Concerning this very same issue, Paul told Titus:

16 They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. Titus 1:16 (NASB)

It is only through a thorough knowledge, and proper understanding, of these divine and holy scriptures that we may all become educated as to what issues of life are the God ordained boundaries, and what are the optional human freedoms. There need not be any confusion, Peter has told us that God's divine power has afforded us everything that we need concerning life and godliness. (2Pe 1:3) And it is through the use of these divinely inspired Scriptures that we can define boundaries, identify freedoms, and recognize imminent dangers. It is through the use of these Scriptures that we can also identify false doctrines and false teachers. But it still isn't always easy. Just a casual knowledge of Scriptures will not equip us to discern the subtleties of the more clever deceivers. In fact, the subtle ones will use this casual and incomplete knowledge of Scriptures as the very means to deceive those who don't know any better. And the television world is filled with charming and charismatic men and women who are practicing this very art, the art of clever deception of those who are ignorant of the truth. They hold up their bibles and make beautiful declarations, then proceed to preach secular humanistic, pop psychology, that's nowhere to be found within the pages of that bible that they were holding up when they made those declarations. But the ignorant don't know that, so they're caught up in the charm and charisma of the preacher. They think they're hearing the word of God.

Now, this prompts us to try to make a distinction. When one takes a panoramic view of the landscape of televangelists, one finds that they are as diverse as the trees of the field. They go from the apparently Orthodox, all the way to the blatantly absurd, and virtually everything in between. Where does one draw the line? Of course we know there are core doctrines that define Christianity, and I suspect we all pretty much agree that there can be absolutely no compromise on our understanding and interpretation of these core doctrines. But what makes it difficult is that even amongst those who say they agree on these core doctrines, there are nevertheless still very significant differences of interpretations. But that should not come as a mysterious surprise to us, now that we've discussed the divine construct of the human psyche. In fact, it is this innate diversity that drives polemics. Much of what we call the New Testament was initiated because of differences of interpretations and understandings in the new churches, and the apostles had to write detailed epistles of clarification on these matters. Had there been no disagreements, we wouldn't have many of these writings we cherish today. Diversity is one of the *means* that God has built into creation to *accomplish* the intended results. Please don't think for one second that I'm saying that the truth doesn't matter, it certainly does, what we're saying is that this desire to clear up differences of thinking is what drives the debates, and motivates the careful research necessary to confidently secure and protect that truth.

So, when we look around at the churches and see all the diverse practices and beliefs, we can understand that truth is a very precious commodity in the plan of God, and He's implemented the means into humanity that causes constant research and debate, generation after generation, to reaffirm and protect what is real and what is true. In the eternal kingdom we won't need this debate, as the One who has, and Who is, the answer to every question will be there with us,

but for now, truth must be attained by serious research and careful examination, by everyone who seeks it. Think of it as a buried treasure; you're going to have to do some searching and some digging, because you're not likely to just trip over it right on top of the ground. If you'll permit me to make reference back to my earlier analogy about diamonds, one could say that there are multitudes of people who buy beautiful diamond rings, but most likely very few of those who buy them really know how to tell if they're genuine or if they're counterfeit. And in like manner, there are multitudes who attend churches every week, and watch preachers on television, but it would seem that there are very few who really know how to distinguish the real, from the counterfeit. And this is understandable I suppose, but what's troubling about it is that it appears that by in large, they really don't care one way or the other; like the fake diamond, as long as it looks pretty to the eye, who cares whether it's really authentic? To these, it's just not worth the time and trouble that's necessary to make such a determination.

And it's for this reason, and others, that false teachers will continue to abound, and they will grow worse and worse according to our Scriptural warnings. (2 Tim Ch's 3 & 4) One cannot afford to think that they are safe within their own church, because it is about false teachers rising up from right within the churches, that these verses warn us. A Christian cannot afford to be ignorant of the means to discern the truth of the gospel from error, nor so complacent and timid as to neglect their duty to earnestly contend for it at every point of attack, as Jude wrote in his epistle.

I realize this has been a very long introduction, and I'm about two thirds into the lesson time already, but it seemed of little value to me to proceed on with the teaching if we hadn't first discussed the essential tools that we need to make any meaningful use of it. So, this is what I've attempted to do in this introduction. To help us to recognize what is essential from what is optional, and to know what one is looking for when it comes to identifying those who are, by biblical definition, false teachers. It is just as important to avoid throwing away a genuine diamond, as it is to abstain from purchasing a counterfeit. Recognizing the difference, and agreeing that it matters, provides the only possible solution. And lastly, understanding that, even when we have the right tools, it isn't always going to be easy.

So now let's begin with our text material, and we'll get as far as time allows us, knowing that we can't possibly do this in one lesson, so we don't need to try to hurry, because as time goes by, and as false teachers continue to flourish, this becomes a topic of ever growing importance to all those who earnestly seek the truth, and believe that it's worth the effort and it really makes a vital difference. We must read the lead-in verses just preceding our study verses to put them in their proper context.

False Teachers Within the Churches

19 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. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 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 (NASB)

1 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. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NASB)

Verse 1a:

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you,

On reading this, our natural reaction might be "oh no, not within the churches themselves," but if not within the very midst of the churches, then where else? How would false teachers do anything from outside the churches? Of course there's many other religions, and they do teach their particular doctrines, but they aren't much threat to the Christian church, other than that of persecution perhaps, like Islam for instance.

But the teachings of these myriad of false religions poses no real threat to the beliefs and practices of Christians. We've had false religion since the time of Babylon, and it will continue right through the tribulation, up until the physical return of the Lord Jesus. So let's be very clear, we're discussing people who are right in our own midst, who are, by full intent and design, teaching false doctrines for personal motives. Does this shock you? Well it should, but then again it shouldn't. It should because we who are genuine Christians can't even imagine our own members, let alone our very leaders, having the audacity to do such a thing. Why aren't they terrified of the repercussions of such behavior? Paul quoted the Old Testament in his epistle to the Romans, where in chapter three, verse eighteen, he said "there is no fear of God before their eyes." On the other hand, we're repeatedly warned of these, so they shouldn't be a real surprise to those who are familiar with scripture.

Verse 1b:

who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

One can only do such things as perverting the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ for personal gain, if they don't fear the repercussions of their actions. Or, if they've somehow managed to deceive themselves, as the scriptures indicate is often the case, into believing their own destructive heresies, in which case they think they're liberating their followers from the excessive moral and ethical constraints of the Christian faith. But whether they believe their own heresies or they don't, either way they understand that they must secretly introduce the heretical content and practices that these false teachings produce.

I mean, how many false teachers stand up in their pulpits and tell their followers to listen very carefully today, because they're going to introduce a destructive heresy, and they want all the congregation to pay close attention so they don't miss anything? Of course they do this secretly, even when they openly declare the content of their false teachings, they are still secretly doing their work of leading the saints down a path of sensuality and worldly indulgence to gain a following for themselves. The secret isn't the teaching itself, it's the source and result of that teaching that must be kept a secret. Because on the surface, these false teachings seem harmless and desirable, like the fruit on the forbidden tree, but just like the fruit on that tree, the consequences of partaking are usually beyond our full comprehension. And this is no harmless, unintentional accident, it's fully intended to be that way. The false teacher, as described to us in scripture, has full and well considered malice aforethought. Just as Satan did for mankind, when he presented the marvelous benefits to Adam and Eve of disobeying God's commandment to abstain from eating from that tree.

But make no mistake about it, false teachers will hurt you. If you're not a Christian, then their perverted gospel will never lead you to repentance and faith, in fact, just the opposite. It will fill your mind with worldly pursuits, and worldly indulgences, and lead you away from the truth that saves your soul. And if by chance you actually are a genuine Christian, then their false doctrines will stagnate your spiritual development, inhibit your sanctification, prevent your transformation to Christlikeness, and disqualify you from any acceptable worship to God. The idea that false teachings can't really hurt real Christians is absurd, it's for the very purpose of damaging true Christians that Satan introduces his false prophets into the churches. No, you can't lose your salvation, but God saved us for a purpose of His own that far and away transcends our insignificant escape from hell. The damage that false teachers do to Christians, is done by Satanic design, so that it accomplishes its real intention, that of depriving God of the acceptable worship and honor that He desires and rightly deserves from His chosen children.

If God's main purpose for mankind was to produce for Himself acceptable worshipers, as Jesus openly stated in John 4:23, then simply disqualify those worshipers, through their own sinful behaviors, and you've disrupted God's plan. But we're so self centered that the only thing we care about is our own escape from hell, once that's secured we're perfectly content, and whether God's getting His desires met seems to be the last thing on our minds.

This verse speaks of destructive heresies, and immediately we think of destructive to us, or to the unbelieving masses, but Satan's desire is to be destructive to God, mankind is insignificant to him, if they won't worship him as god then he could care less about them. Satan has absolutely no power of harm, or even annoyance to Almighty God directly, and he's fully aware of that, so his one and only avenue of harm to God is to harm God's children.

And that's the real point of all falsity of every kind. Satan is said to be the father of lies, and all lies are a part of his family heritage. False teachers are his prophets, doing his lying work from within the churches to annoy God by harming His children. And he certainly can harm us, God's children. He can't steal us away, he cannot snatch us from God's hand, but he can entice us to harm ourselves by appealing to our weaknesses, just as he did to Adam and Eve. They were cast out of the Garden, separated from God's regular presence, and eventually even died, along with all of their offspring, because they followed his enticement of disobedience; so don't kid yourself that Satan can't harm genuine believers, and thereby negatively affect God through the affection that He has for His children, and His desire for their sanctification and worship.

Destructive heresies are ultimately intended to harm God, by harming His children, and how successful that is we aren't really told, but every human being that has been regenerated by the Spirit of God, and afforded a new heart, will not be a party to any efforts to bring disappointment or heartache to the One who loves us, and has given the life of His only Son to redeem us from our sins, and adopt us into His eternal family. Whether Satan can actually cause God grief or not I really don't know, but either way, I'm certainly not going to knowingly aid him in that effort, by accepting false teachings or knowingly tolerating false teachers within the churches of Jesus Christ.

Verse 1(b) goes on to say that these destructive heresies go even so far as to deny the Master who has bought them. Now right away I want to address a question that comes up. If these ones being described are truly false teachers, one's who are described as having been designated beforehand for destruction, then why does Peter say that they had been bought by the Master. Peter uses this wording regarding the nature of the heresy, not as a description of the heretic himself. He's saying that even while claiming to be among the redeemed, these false teachers deny the deity, and/or, the work of the Savior himself. While standing in the pulpit of a Christian church, they brazenly deny the very essentials of what defines Christianity itself. Do you still remember our earlier discussion about what constitutes essentials versus options? Well, this is a crossing of the God ordained boundaries that constitutes damning heresy, and it isn't done harmlessly or by simple accident. The scriptures repeatedly make it absolutely clear that the denial of Christ is the denial of God. (Mat 10:33; Lk 12:9; Jn 14:6; 1Jn 2:22-23)

This is the ultimate heresy. The denial of Jesus Christ, in any of his vital aspects, is the height of heresy. We see this today in some of the Neo-Christian religions like Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses, just to name a couple, who redefine Christ in His essence and origin, and thereby deny Him in His reality. I was once an Arminian, and now I'm a Calvinist, and the debate is a hot one, and the issues are important, but amidst it all I have still been a Christian, because that issue doesn't traverse the God ordained boundary of heresy. It is issues of deity that usually form the basis of most heresies, but we can't say that all heresy is completely confined to issues of divinity. There are issues of faith and practice that can be heretical as well. But one must not throw this term around lightly as I sometimes see it done today.

Finally, in the last part of this first verse, Peter says that these false teachers bring swift destruction upon themselves. Well, one has to wonder how swift is swift? Swift from whose point of view I guess is the question. But it's not how quickly it happens, but that it comes upon these false teachers by their own doing. The verse says they bring it upon themselves. What it doesn't say, at least here in these verses, is that those who followed after them will also suffer a great loss of their own. They aren't being charged with the false teaching, but they are being held accountable for the actions that following that false teaching produced.

If for instance, someone deliberately gave you false directions to a very important meeting, and you followed those instructions and got lost, you yourself wouldn't be guilty of deception, but you certainly would still suffer the consequences of missing that important meeting. And, if that meeting that you missed were the gathering of the saints by the Lord to be with Himself, then the repercussions of being deceived would certainly be grand indeed, would they not?

But, on the other hand, let's say that you're actually a Christian, but you haven't been very diligent to pursue the truth, and you've followed a false teacher for most of your life, then there awaits for you a day of accounting, where you will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and give an accounting of your life's works in lieu of your redemption. Will you have gold and silver and precious stones of sanctification and transformation, and years of acceptable worship to offer

your Redeemer? Or, will you simply have a handful of straw that goes up in flames when tested by His fire? Yes, you will still be saved from eternal hell, but the scriptures say that your salvation will be as that of one who barely escapes death through a raging fire. (1Cor 3:10-15) I have a friend from a former church who laughingly says that this verse describes him, and that the smell of smoke will be on his coattail when he enters the kingdom of God. He doesn't mean anything sinister by this, but it does reveal that he has no concept of how this attitude reflects on the God who sent His beloved Son to brutally suffer on a cross to redeem us, not just from our past sins, but from the continued practice of the same. The Father witnessed the crucifixion of His Son to destroy the works of the Devil, by redeeming us From our sins, not just absolving us of their repercussions. (Mat 1:21; 1Jn 3:8)

Conclusion:

The end result of all false teaching is to direct us away from the truth of Christ that sanctifies our behaviors (1Pet 1:2) and transforms our minds (Rm 12:2) and qualifies us for acceptable worship of God. (Jn 4:23) Whether it casts aversions on the character and person of Christ, or denies the tenets of the gospel that He preached, or if it traverses the God ordained boundaries of beliefs and practices, then it's false, and it will result in damage to the saints of God. The degrees may vary, but the effects are always harmful, therefore we are over and over again exhorted, by writer after writer, to examine everything carefully, to hold on to that which is good and true, and to reject every devious form of evil (1Ths 5:21-22), and having done that, to be willing to earnestly contend for that faith that was once and for all given to the saints of Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4)

A faith that's been polluted, and defiled, and diluted, and selectively edited, may be easy on the ears to those who put little importance on truth, but for all who take their faith seriously, who actually believe the authenticity and verity of scriptures, as Peter hammered home in the verses immediately preceding these that we're examining; the warnings about false teachers will be taken very seriously, and dealt with accordingly, lest we fall into a meaningless liberal orthodoxy that's powerless to save the lost, and impotent to transform the lives of the children of God, so as to produce the family of worshipers that He desires for Himself. We cannot afford to just quickly breeze across these warnings, we must take them seriously. So, we'll continue with this chapter in our next lesson.

To Him be the Glory forever and ever.
Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
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