

2nd PETER BIBLE STUDY

2 Peter 2:03-22

Lesson #6

Introduction

This is lesson six in our second Peter Bible study, but it's the fourth lesson in our specific study of false teachers. In the previous lessons we've tried to put a clear definition on the term "false teacher." Because, as we said, there really doesn't seem to be a consistent understanding of the term. We acknowledged that any teaching that is less than 100% accurate is, by definition a false teaching, and anyone doing a false teaching is, by definition a false teacher, according to the strictest definition of the term. But we went on to discuss that when the Bible warns us of these false teachers, it's describing a very specific type of person and type of teaching. Here in these verses, Peter says these false teachings are "destructive heresies." In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul said that these false teachings were "another gospel." The nature of these teachings are blasphemous and destructive. They dishonor the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they contradict His Commandments and His precepts, and Paul said, and then repeated, "let them be accursed."

Now you might have the same question I have. What about someone whose teachings are consistently contrary to Scriptures, but whose attitude and demeanor seem to indicate that they are doing this without malicious intent? For instance, many of those who are in various neo-Christian religious cults, like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even Catholics. How do we classify someone who spent their entire life in these false religions, teaching doctrines that are contrary to Scripture and dishonoring Jesus Christ and God the Father? Clearly their teaching is false. Clearly their teaching is blasphemous and heretical, but yet we're often tempted to embrace them as genuine brothers, because they share our terminology, and accept a few common elements of lesser importance, and seem to be sincere in their beliefs.

What we often don't ask is whether or not they mean the same thing by their terminology. As we studied in Chapter 1, verse one, Peter said his epistle was to those who share a faith which is the same kind as ours, which means among other things, that we have the same definitions of terms. Many speak of Jesus, and of God, but the God, and the Jesus of which they speak, is altogether different from the Father and the Son whom we know and love. It's not sufficient to simply use the same terms, unless you use the same definitions of those terms. False teachers use the terms of the Bible, they speak of God and they speak of Jesus, but they don't mean what we mean when they use these descriptions. Whether their intent appears to be malicious or not, the effects are exactly the same. Therefore, any false teaching must be immediately confronted by the application of scriptural truth, and those whose heart's are pure, and whose mind's are being renewed by the Holy Spirit, will accept correction and repent, as our examples of Apollos, and Peter, in our previous study. Since we can't read mind's, our only means of determination is by observance of long term behaviors.

The long-term embracing and teaching of destructive heresy, by its very self, is a strong evidence that such a teacher is not a born-again, that is, a regenerated Christian. And such is the case with those who spend their entire lives in these false and destructive neo-Christian religious cults. They use all the familiar Christian terminology, but they have an entirely different dictionary by which they define it, and in so doing they secretly introduce their destructive heresies. Their clever scheme is that they never openly deny the Scriptural teachings, instead, they just redefined them with their own perverted meanings. And this is why Peter says that they are so effective at deluding the young, and the unlearned, and the carnal minded Christians, who are ill-equipped to recognize their clever deceptions.

Christianity is much too perilous a venture to ever be taken lightly. There are malevolent forces at work against every genuine Christian, and failure to recognize and accept this, and adequately arm oneself with a proper knowledge of scripture, will most certainly result in harm and damage to those who fail to prepare themselves. Whether you like it or not, whether you believe it or not, you are in the midst of a raging war, with both your residual flesh nature, and the prompting of satanic powers, who want you to deny your faith in Christ by accepting destructive heresies that dishonor Him, damage your witness, and pervert acceptable worship. If you're not cognizant of the fact that sin is ever crouching at your own door, and its desire is for you, then you are dead asleep in the midst of the battle, and utterly ignorant of the peril that surrounds you. And it's such as these that the false teachers find to be easy prey for their subtle deceptions. Don't be deceived, ignorance will harm you, and denial just doesn't work for very long in the face of danger.

Therefore, whether we like it, or whether we don't, it is our obligation and our mandate, to pay heed to the warnings of scripture regarding false teachers and their destructive heresies. And because they are skilled at the art of deception, we must be equally skilled at the art of discernment, and that only comes through a thorough knowledge and understanding of holy Scriptures. So, let's continue our study, so that we can be properly prepared to rightly identify these dangerous traitors, who have crept into our midst to do harm to the body of Christ.

False Teachers Within the Churches (4)

God's Judgement of False Teachers

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.

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; 7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

2 Peter 2:1-10 (NASB)

Last week's entire lesson was on the first half of verse three, in which Peter said "*and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.*" Now I'd like to continue with the second half of this verse, and then will proceed on from there.

Verse 3b:

their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Because we perceive ourselves as temporary beings, and because it is in our very nature to be impatient, we have a perspective on time that's obviously much different than God's. When we say something is going to happen soon, we usually mean a few hours, or a few days, because, from our perspective, that's what "soon" means. But when God speaks through the Scriptures, and uses the terms soon, and quickly, He is speaking from His own perspective, not man's. Those of us who rightly comprehend the sovereignty of God, and realize that He has planned and predetermined all things from before creation, understand that He has designed a sequence of events that progressively unfold over a predetermined amount of time. In his earthly incarnation Jesus repeatedly used the phrase "my time has not yet come." This is why the Pharisees couldn't harm Him, His hometown people could not throw him over the cliff when they tried, and Satan could do him no harm, because the predetermined timetable of God cannot be altered.

This verse says, concerning these false teachers, that their judgment is from long ago preplanned, and just because its time has not yet arrived, doesn't mean that God is idle, or asleep concerning His pronouncements. In due time, when it suits God's plan, their destruction will be implemented swiftly and thoroughly, with no effort whatsoever. These false teachers are lulled into complacency, as are their followers, because God doesn't immediately bring destruction upon them. They either think they're getting away with it, or, that God doesn't really mind, and that's why they appear to prosper and nothing appears to be happening to them. All through the Scriptures mankind has asked the question "why do the wicked appear to prosper?" The answer to that question is, because God has preplanned it this way to serve His own eternal purposes, just as Judas served his purpose in the eternal plan of God, and then met his swift destruction. To make this point clear, Peter cites three scriptural examples. Let's take a look at those:

First he cites the example of angels who sinned against God by not keeping their proper relationship to humanity, as described in Genesis chapter 6. God locked them away in a pit, where they have been held for several thousand years now, awaiting their final judgment at the end of the age. Their final dissolution is not asleep, it's just pending the appointed time set by God, even though its been several thousand years and still counting.

Second, he cites the example of Noah, who is called a preacher of righteousness, and who, along with seven members of his family, were the only survivors among all mankind of the great flood, who were spared from death by the direct will and action of God.

And thirdly, he cites the example of Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot was saved by the direct intervention of God from the destruction of those cities which had given themselves over wholly to sexual immorality in direct and flagrant disobedience to the commandments of God.

After citing these examples to make his point he goes on in verse nine where he declares *9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.* The point that Peter has made is that even though we don't know the precise timetable, and don't have all the facts, nevertheless we can be absolutely assured by these examples, as well as his eternal Word, that God knows **both** how to preserve His own from destructive temptations, as well as how to keep in reserve those who have been appointed unto eventual destruction when the appointed time has arrived.

To us, life often looks unfair, the wicked appear to prosper and the righteous suffer under their tyranny in everyday life. So how is it that God has promised favor on the righteous but destruction on the wicked, when everything we see around us seems to indicate just the opposite? Is God asleep, or has He reneged on His promises? No says Peter, no such thing. God has demonstrated in the past that while he is long-suffering on behalf of humanity, allowing much time for them to repent of their wickedness, nevertheless when all is said and done every promise of God will be fulfill. The righteous will prosper when they take their place with Christ, and the wicked will suffer the consequences of their righteousness when God's bill finally comes due. And this is by God's own design, it is not because men or Satan thwarts God's sovereign will or disrupts His eternal plans. The apostle Paul told us in Galatians chapter 6, to not grow weary in doing good, because in due season we will reap, if we don't lose heart.

And we won't lose heart, or grow weary in the pursuit of righteousness, regardless of temporary surrounding circumstances, as long as we have the full assurance that our God is not asleep concerning these things, and that He most certainly knows how to keep us from destructive temptation and rescue us from every deadly peril to our immortal souls, regardless of the situation regarding our temporal fleshly bodies, which we already know are destined to age and die as the inescapable consequence of sin having infiltrated our species.

In verse 10, concerning the unrighteous, Peter goes on to say *"and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority."* It's most often through making appeals to the flesh nature of mankind that these false teachers find for themselves a following. And they show no fear in doing so, as Peter explains in the remaining portion of verse 10 and following, where he further declares:

Verses 10-16:

.... Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, 11 whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, 13 suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; 15 forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.

2 Peter 2:10-16 (NASB)

Peter describes these false teachers as daring and self-willed, because they don't tremble when they revile angelic majesties. Peter doesn't choose to give us any specifics concerning exactly what he's talking about, especially in verse 11, but that doesn't prevent us from understanding what he's telling us. The point being conveyed is that these false teachers are not afraid of God, and goes to explain the reason for it. He describes them as unreasoning animals, rather than rational men, functioning on pure instinct, and perfectly willing to revile heavenly things concerning which they have no knowledge whatsoever. And just as certain animals were designed to be captured and killed, likewise these unreasoning brutes will suffer the same fate as those animals that they mimic. Peter says they will suffer wrong as the wages of doing wrong. As the apostle Paul said in Galatians 6, we will eventually all reap according to what we sow.

Furthermore they counted it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. It's most reasonable to infer that Peter is saying that most men do their reveling in at night time, in bars and brothels, but these false teachers do their reveling during the daytime, amidst the churches. They get their pleasure from working their deceptions, and reaping the rewards that it brings them. They are described as stains and blemishes as they carouse among the genuine believers. Just as certain foods and beverages cause destructive and ruinous stains when spilled on fine clothing, so these false teachers leave their permanent stains, and marks of damage and ruin on the saints and on their churches.

They are described as having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. And what is an unstable soul? Within the context of this warning it means genuine Christians who are untrained in the scriptures and the knowledge of God. Saints that can be led away from the truth by appeals to their fleshly nature and worldly desires. These false teachers are said to have eyes full of adultery, and this can be readily inferred as both sexual, and spiritual adultery. One of the most common traits of false teachers is the perpetual scandals of sexual misconduct. And this is simply an extension of their spiritual heart of adultery, whereby they substitute power, wealth, recognition, fame, and self, as the gods whom they truly worship. They are said to have hearts that are trained in greed (V.14) and they knowingly forsake the right way, which they know, in favor of the way of unrighteousness, because they love the wages thereof. Their greed overpowers their own common sense and fear of God. Hence, they're described as unreasoning animals, destined for destruction. These are exceedingly strong words, because they apply to exceedingly vile perpetrators, who wreak havoc in our churches, and desecrate that which is holy for personal gain. They have nothing whatsoever useful to offer a true Christian, or even a non-Christian who is seeking the truth. Verses 17 and following give us a good description of their worth:

Verses 17-22:

17 These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. 18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, 19 promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. 20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire." 2 Peter 2:17-22

Peter says that these false teachers are springs without water. In other words, they give the appearance of being able to offer a refreshing drink of water to the thirsty, but in fact they have nothing useful to offer. There are dry wells. What makes them so evil is that they hold out hopes to others that they know they cannot provide. Where there is no well, there is no expectation of refreshment, so no deception exists, but when one advertises a well that he knows is dry this one is guilty of deception. And for this reason the black darkness of hell has been reserved in their name from before creation. Because like the dry well, they speak out arrogant words of vanity by which they entice, by fleshly desires and by sensuality, those genuine believers who are so ignorant, or carnal, that they barely escape from the ones who live in error. These are the ones who are described in first Corinthians as being saved, but yet as though through fire. Their lives were a waste, and all their works burned up like straw when tested at the judgement seat of Christ. Because of this they suffered the loss of many great rewards that could have been theirs for all eternity.

They use fleshly desires and sensuality to entice the ignorant. And they offer them promises of prosperity, and wealth, and health, and self-esteem, and tell them they are free from all the legalistic observances of orthodox Christianity. And all the while these teachers are promising them a freedom from that to which they themselves are enslaved. How in the world anyone might think that they can be set free from sin by the teachings of a teacher who is himself thoroughly enslaved to it, I really can't fathom. If the one you're listening to as a teacher is not themselves living a life that conforms to the scriptures, and is not faithfully obeying all the things that those scriptures teach, then do you really believe that they will teach you to do so? I don't think that's the case, I think the ones who follow these false teachers don't know what the scriptures really teach, if they're actually Christians. But the vast majority of those who follow these false teachers are not truly Christians, so they most certainly don't know what the Scriptures teach, and in many cases don't really care.

And it always comes down to issues of sin and disobedience. It's not simply abstract principles of theology that are affected by false teachers, it's the resultant effects upon the lifestyles of those who embrace this false theology. The false teaching is intended to produce false living, and that's exactly what it does. In verse 20 Peter says, concerning these teachers, *For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.* There are some parallel verses to these in Hebrews chapters 6 and 10 which say very much the same thing as Peter is telling us here.

Peter says that these teachers had been exposed to the word of God, and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they had experienced a reaction to that knowledge by which they had been temporarily brought to repentance from their sins, but like the parable of Jesus in Matthew chapter 13, the seed of the word had not fallen on good ground, meaning their hearts had not been renewed, and there was no regeneration of spirit, but only an emotional reaction. By all appearances they had been converted, and they rose to prominence in the church, even securing positions of leadership, because they understood the teachings, and by them had temporarily escaped the defilements of the world.

But eventually their innate sin nature, and the lack of sanctification and love of the truth becomes apparent as they fall back irreversibly into the former ways of the world. This condition is said to be worse than the one who had never experienced the benefits of Christ, because their culpability is greatly increased. Hebrews chapter 6 verses four through eight describe exactly this condition, where it declares:

4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. Heb 6:4-8 (NASB)

Many have difficulty with this verse because it says that these certain individuals had been "partakers" of the Holy Spirit, and they had "tasted" the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come. Some say this can't possibly happen unless you're actually regenerated; but that's the whole purpose of these verses, to show us that it can happen. To show us that one can get so close to the kingdom of God, through the hearing of the Word, that they can actually touch it with their hands, and taste it with their mouth, but that's as close as they ever get. They are said to be "partakers" as opposed to "recipients" of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures tell us that it's possible to partake of the joy and the benefits of the Word of God without actually ever taking hold of that word and yielding oneself wholly to it.

If you've been a Christian very long, then you've seen this happen, people who appeared to be very sincere for a while, nevertheless over time, slip completely away, even to the point of denying their faith and the existence of God. We know this happens because the word tells us it happens, and our experience shows us it happens, and therefore the scriptures explain to us just how and why this happens. This need not mystify us, but rather inform us for our edification. Expect false teachers in the churches; expect many to follow them to perdition; and then don't be one of them yourself. Many are called but few are chosen, and it is those who endure to the end who are saved. Be one of these.

Concerning false teachers, Peter says in verse 20, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they were again entangled in them and were overcome. This is a very important point, that they were overcome again by the defilements of the world. First he said they were entangled in them, and then he said they were overcome by them. I was extremely impressed by a point that John Calvin made in his commentaries as I studied these verses. The issue with these false teachers, and all Christians in general for that matter, is not that they are once again drawn into the old ways from time to time, or even somewhat entangled in them for some period, but that they were eventually overcome by them. "Overcome" is the operative word in this sentence.

We all know by our experience, and the scriptures affirm, that even genuine Christians struggle with sin, and are never able to entirely overcome it in this lifetime, but no Christian can be completely overcome by sin. As Calvin said, as long as there is a battle going on, you have not surrendered. As long as you are actively resisting sin, you have not been overcome by it. Yes, it will leave you bloodied, yes it will leave you scarred and bruised, but it will not leave you defeated if you're still fighting. No one who is still in active resistance can be said to have been overcome. Regardless of how beaten up you might look, if you're still wielding your sword of righteousness, to the best of your ability, and have not laid it down and surrendered in obedience to sin, then you have not been overcome dear brothers.

Being overcome means you have surrendered to the enemy. It means you have ceased in your struggle against sin and submissively accepted its dominance in your life. You have become a prisoner and submissive servant because you aren't willing to continue the fight. You had a brief taste of righteousness, and partook of its benefits of conscience, but the enticement of sin still rules your heart, you have not been set free from its bondage, (Rom 6:17-18) so you can't resist its temptations, because sin is still what you really love in your heart. This is being overcome, and this is what will never happen to a genuine Christian, because we are kept by the power of God, through faith, for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pet 1:5) Will the temptations of sin knock us down, and beat us up, and leave us bruised and bloody, you bet it will, but will it defeat us, not a chance, will it overcome us to the point of willing submission, never, will we ever surrender that truth that we hold dear, and for which Christ paid so high a price, and go back forever to the lustful ways of the world, that's not going to happen to any who have the indwelling Spirit of God, even though it happens to countless multitudes of unregenerate church members. Paul put it most succinctly when he wrote:

8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
2 Cor 4:8-11 (NASB)

In a word, the genuine believers will persevere to the end, the false will not. And though it may take a long time, by our human standards, for the difference to become manifest, nevertheless we have the sure word of God that says that every one of us will eventually reap according to what we sow. And every thought and intention of the heart will ultimately be revealed. In his epistle to Timothy, (5:24-25) Paul told him, regarding elders, meaning the leaders, that some men's sins are found out before they get to the judgement, but others remain a secret until then, and likewise the good deeds of some are known before they pass away, but if not, they will also be remembered in the final day of accounting. So it's possible that some of these false teachers may escape earthly judgement, but they will not escape the final judgement of Jesus Christ at His Great White Throne, of that we are given absolute assurance. So, we bow our knee to the sovereign timetable of God, knowing that His plan is perfect and immutable.

Therefore, just to quickly summarize this point, we will see many people who either come into our churches by profession of faith, or even who grew up from childhood in our churches, and rise to positions of leadership. They will look and sound like authentic Christians. They will volunteer for positions of authority, and willingly assume these duties, but their hearts aren't right with God. Their motives are self-serving, and they are devoid of the Spirit. They may well think themselves to be authentic for awhile, but will eventually become disenchanted when they realize that they haven't been changed inside, and everything that the scriptures teach about being freed from sin isn't real, it's just so much rhetoric. At this point they will conclude that Christianity isn't real, but just a cruel myth, because they felt like they were genuine, but nothing ever really happened to them inside. So their conclusion will be that the problem is with Christianity, not with themselves, and everyone else is equally deluded, and will eventually come to the same conclusion, given enough time.

Their conclusion will be that everyone in the church is under the same delusion that they were under, but some just haven't come to realize it yet; at which point they will become bitter and disenchanted with Christianity, and with the scriptures, and with a God whom they've concluded doesn't even really exist. If you've been in the church for any amount of time you've met some of these, and you just didn't know what to do with them; they looked so good, they said all the right things, and were counted amongst the most devout members of the church; so how is it possible for them to become so thoroughly apostate? Doesn't the Bible assure us of eternal salvation? How do we explain occurrences like this?

The answer is, the scriptures explain this situation for us. And the verses that we're studying, and the verses we quoted from Hebrews speak precisely to this situation. Our discussion is primarily concerning false teachers, but this principle isn't limited to the leaders and the teachers, it cuts across the entire church membership. It is endurance to the end that characterizes and authenticates true regeneration. Do not be dazzled by a flash in the pan celebrity who bursts on the Christian scene espousing great words and proclaiming grand promises. Instead let that person prove themselves for a time by a humble and contrite spirit, by a thorough and accurate knowledge of scriptures, and by a sanctified lifestyle of proven character and integrity. No genuine leader, or teacher, will object to this testing, in fact they will endorse it themselves. Many are those who come close, who get a brief foretaste of the fruits of the spirit, and look very promising, but not every seed falls on good ground, so vast multitudes fall away over time, because authentic regeneration of heart and spirit never took place. They were never authentic Christians to begin with, and their apostasy is the irrefutable evidence. They went out because they were never really in to begin with, as John wrote in his epistle.

And this now brings us to the next part of our verse where Peter says that the last state of that person is worse than the first. Why is this, wasn't it better to have at least tried it, than to have rejected it out of hand? This kind of thinking may be fine regarding foods or entertainment activities, but the church, which is Christianity, is not a "try it and see if you like it" kind of activity, though I've heard that concept preached within the seeker friendly movement. But the simple truth is, that no one can simply decide to try being a regenerated Christian and see if they like it. This is often called "decisional regeneration," where one thinks it's merely an open choice that's up to them. Like an hors d'oeuvre on a platter, you can choose to try it or you can choose to leave it. If you like it, you can chew it up and swallow it, but if you don't, you can discreetly spit it out into your napkin. Please excuse my rather crude example, but don't try to tell me you've never done that.

Unlike a food that you can simply taste and decide if you like it or you don't, Christianity is a fundamental change of heart and mind; it is a rebirth unto a new life of soul and spirit that, by its very design, cannot be undone. If it's genuine, then it isn't something that you arbitrarily decided by an act of your own will. In fact, if that's how you became a Christian, and that is how the vast majority have come to consider themselves Christians, then you aren't really an authentic Christian at all, and you probably already realize that nothing substantial has ever really happened inside of you. At this point you have two options. One, you can confess your lack of authentic rebirth, and call out to God for His mercy and compassion to grace you with His gift of saving faith, because that's the only way it's obtained, by His grace. Or, you can become bitter and conclude that the problem isn't with you but with God and Christianity, and the whole thing is a fraud.

Everyone who tried to become a Christian simply by an act of their own, by "making a decision" as it's called, will eventually come to this crossroad, because you cannot just arbitrarily decide to be regenerated by the Spirit of God. Yes, I know that's the popular teaching of the day, but it's not even close to the gospel as its presented in the scriptures. There is a unilateral work of God that first facilitates and empowers that decision by the gift of faith, and any decision that's void of this gift of faith is simply a human decision, like choosing an hors d'oeuvre. It will not produce a life changing response in the one who tries to attain it in this manner, even if they think themselves to be sincere. It's one thing to sincerely desire to sample an hors d'oeuvre, it is an entirely different thing to sincerely grieve over your sins, and sincerely desire repentance of life and heart attitude at whatever the cost. One, you can readily decide with your own capabilities, the other requires something that's far beyond your personal capacity. Modern evangelism seems to make an attempt to either remove, or at least minimize, this vital distinction. But it is this very distinction that separates the wheat from the tares, the true Christian from the false professors of Christ.

Having made this clear, let's move on to our point about the last state of these false teachers being worse than the first. Why is it worse for having tried it? Because in actuality they haven't really tried it, they've only had a taste of it from the outside. They've tasted the benefits, and like our example of the hors d'oeuvre, they've spit it back out. It just wasn't to their liking, they still love the old ways of sin, and that's where their genuine affections remain. But their dilemma is, that having been so close, and having tasted of the benefits, they have decided that they prefer sin. So, what will we offer them now that will bring them to repentance and faith? If the gospel didn't produce fruits of righteousness, and the firsthand sampling of the sweet benefits was found bitter to their taste, what is there left that to offer them; the answer is, that there's absolutely nothing left that holds any hope of capturing their heart's and bringing them to repentance. If the gospel didn't do it, then nothing else in the created universe exists by which they might be saved. They are hopelessly bound to their sins, and only judgment and eternal hell remains.

If they have never heard, and never tasted of the benefits, then there is still the possibility that the gospel will be effectual on their heart's, so their situation isn't hopeless as long as the gospel has an opportunity. But when its been tried, and tasted, and rejected, then that person's situation is tragic indeed, because there's nothing left that offers salvation. This is speaking of those who actually did clean up their lives, albeit by the power of the flesh and not the Spirit, and experienced the sweetness of a good conscience, but ultimately found it unfulfilling, because their heart's still longed more for sin than for righteousness. Peter says these who are thusly overcome, and return permanently to their former ways, are like dogs that return to their own vomit, and like washed pigs that return to wallow in the mire. You might train a dog, and you might wash a pig, but you cannot change what they are. A washed pig is still a pig. Unless there is a fundamental change of nature on the inside, there will be no lasting change of behaviors on the outside.

Conclusion:

This finishes the verses in chapter two, and we've discussed them pretty well, but there's still a lot more that I feel hasn't been discussed, so I might, or might not, add one more lesson as a summarization, to tie up any loose ends and fill any gaps that I think I might have left in these preceding lessons. I hope very much that these studies have helped us to understand how to identify actual "false teachers" as opposed to simply differing interpretations. May the Lord bless His holy word, and through it, grant us a full and accurate knowledge of the truth. To Him alone be honor and glory and praise forevermore. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
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