

Peter's Farewell Testament #6 How Can We Avoid Being Led Astray? #4

Intro: We might call 2 Peter Peter's Farewell Testament. Peter knows by revelation that his time on earth is drawing near; so he writes out of concern for the saints that he will soon leave behind. He wants the Lord's people to remain true to the faith that he has had a part in revealing to them. He wants them to be sure about their faith. So he answers some of the fundamental questions Christians need to ask:

**How can we know that we will enter the eternal kingdom?
How can we know that the gospel is true?**

But now after giving these assurances, he warns them of the danger of false teachers who might lead them astray from the truth. Disciples needed to be prepared for them. Thus Peter answers another important question, "How can we avoid being led astray?"

Peter begins the discussion by warning of the rise of false teachers and describing them in unmistakable terms. They will be factious, apostate, self-condemned, popular, destructive, covetous, and doomed for destruction.

In that connection he shows that they will partake of that destruction that God has already demonstrated in the past in His judgment of angels, of the ancient world, and of Sodom and Gomorrah, while He at the same time delivering the righteous like Noah and Lot.

Now that it is clear that their judgment is certain, Peter continues his discussion of the false teachers by further describing their characteristics.

He focuses first on their attitude toward authority--they despise it; they are daring, self-willed, and fearless of the consequences of their disobedience.

then he focuses on their ethics--they act like animals; they revel in the daytime, they have eyes full of adultery, and are motivated by covetousness.

Now we come to the final paragraph in which Peter wraps up his description of the false teachers. Let's hear what Peter had to say about them:

These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. 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, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. 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. 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 delivered to them .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 Pet. 2:17–22)

As we read we can sense that there is a certain emptiness or vanity about false teaching; and it is this characteristic that binds together these final descriptions of the false teacher.

The vanity of the message they teach

Peter uses two powerful metaphors to describe the vanity of the false teacher's message.

They are springs without water.

Imagine being a place with a great thirst and seeing a sign that says, "Spring ahead." Only to realize when you get there that the spring is all dried up.

False teachers are like a spiritual mirage; they offer hope of quenched thirst but provide nothing.

They are mists driven by a storm

The second expression refers to the mists that are evaporated by the strong winds before they can settle upon and refresh the land.

In either case, both are metaphors for the vanity of the false teachers' message.

In Biblical imagery, sound teaching can be likened to "living water" that refreshes and keeps one alive; but the words of the false teachers provide nothing that is life-giving or refreshing to real faith.

Consequently these false teachers might be said to withhold from people what they desperately need to live. It would not be too harsh a judgment to say they are those...

For whom the black darkness has been reserved

This picture of eternal judgment is similar to those found in the gospel where hell is likened to a place of "outer darkness" and where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

They vanity of the methods they use

Certainly the false teachers will make every effort to win converts; and Peter takes up the ungodly methods they use to ensnare their victims.

They speak with impressive words

For speaking out arrogant words of vanity...

The idea here is that the false teacher may sound very impressive in his language; but in reality is offering nothing of substance. False doctrine can be packaged in wording that sounds good; but ends up being snake oil.

The false teacher subtly shifts the attention from the message to the orator. It's about him, not about the truth. The false teacher wants to hear, "What a speaker!" The true teacher wants to hear, "What a Savior!"

They lure their converts by sensual appeal

they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,

If the false teachers are denying that there will be a final coming of the Lord and final judgment, then there is permission given to their disciples to engage in all kinds of lascivious behavior without accountability. The power of lust draws in those who are morally weak. Those "who barely escape from the live in error" are easy prey for the false teacher.

They are not those "who live in error," the pagans.

But they are those who have not yet solidly left the sinful lifestyle of the pagan past; and the suggestion that they may continue to live as pagans turns them away from the truth to their former way of life.

Simply put, the false teachers are saying to the weak new converts, "You can live the way you used to without the need for real change." Does that sound familiar?

The irony of all this is that the false teachers themselves are enslaved by their own lusts while they offer a message of "freedom" to their victims. Thus, they are...

They are hypocrites

promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

The promise of "freedom" often has a special appeal to those who seek to be unstrained by the authority of God's moral order. Thus, those who are looking for a way out the strict moral life of true Christianity will be especially vulnerable to these false teachers.

Again, that the promise of "freedom" is a false one. In reality, to seek to break free from the moral restraints of God is to immediately become a slave to moral and eternal corruption. Some freedom that is!

The vanity of the condition they experience

Peter describes those who have known the truth and turned away from it. They have experienced gospel's deliverance from the defilement of the world, of sin; but now they are once more entangled in those defilements. It is an apostate condition.

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.

There can be no doubt that Peter affirms that those who have been saved can so sin so as to be lost. Gospel preachers have debated that

proposition against denominationalism for many years. The idea of "once saved, always saved" is clearly unbiblical.

Peter actually uses the very language here that he had used in chapter one to describe those who were saved.

But now they have once more been entangled and overcome by those defilements from which they had once been delivered. They are apostate.

Peter makes it clear that such an apostate condition places the person in a worse condition than where he would have been before obeying the gospel. Peter may be borrowing the very words of Jesus in Mt.

12:45 who using the analogy of a man with an unclean spirit who later becomes possessed by numerous more and said, "the last state will be worse than the first."

It is a more serious condition

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 delivered to them.

Peter drives home the point by elaborating on the condition of the apostate. He would better off to have never known the truth, than having known it to turn away from it.

There is not the slightest hint that God will be more lenient with wayward children than with the unregenerate world. In fact, it is the opposite. The knowledge of the truth raises God's expectations of us and our accountability to him.

It is a repulsive condition

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.""

These proverbial expressions one from Proverbs and another from a secular source both attest to the repulsive condition of those who return to their former way of life after becoming a Christian.

If you have ever seen either of these things happen, you'll not likely to forget it. It is one of the most repulsive things you will ever experience. Transfer that image to the person who leaves the faith!

Lessons for us

This final installment of Peter's message on false teachers certainly sobers us to the real danger of false teachers who not only reject the truth themselves, but influence others to return to the way of life from which they have been delivered.

As Christians, we need to reflect seriously upon how God sees those who, knowing the truth, renounce it and turn back to a sinful way of life.

Though the possibility of apostasy should linger in our minds, we also should find comfort in the assurances that God gives to the faithful. He is able to keep us from stumbling... and "the way into the eternal kingdom will be abundantly supplied."

Conclusion: Let us learn from Peter's description. Let us take seriously the spiritual danger of false teachers and their lying messages.

Let us purpose instead to stay committed to the truth that comes through the apostles of Jesus. Though they are no longer living, their word continues to provide salvation and spiritual refreshment and health to all who cherish it and obey it faithfully.