

2 Peter 2 • Characteristics of False Prophets & Teachers

Introduction

Even the Apostle Paul's ministry was examined in depth by the wise ("Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." —Acts 17:11) So much more so are we to examine the teachings of all men—even the "great-sounding" ones—because we have been repeatedly warned that there will be false prophets and teachers in the church. By what biblical standard are you engaging spiritual discernment?

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

[Read v.1-3]

Q: Who are "the people" in verse 1, and who are the "false prophets" among the people? What is Peter's warning to his readers?

A: Peter's referring to Israel, and the historical fact that there has always been a problem with false teachers. God's Law is clear as to how to handle them. (Examples: Deuteronomy 13:1-18; Jeremiah 23; Matthew 23:1-36; 24:4,5; Galatians 3:1,2.) Peter's warning is false prophets and teachers are going to rise up among God's people no matter what.

Application: What are some modern-day examples of false prophets and false teachers?

Q: In verse one, what are two of the identifying characteristics of these false teachers?

A: You can know them by their "destructive heresies" and by their "denying the Master." This means that their teachings are ultimately destructive to a person in the end, and the teachings always diminish the person and work of Christ to the point of creating an alternate gospel.

Q: What are two other typical characteristics of false teachers in verse 2?

A: There is an expression of "sensuality" (usually, but not always, sexual impurity), and "the truth is maligned"; that is, the truth is "mal-aligned" or distorted.

Q: What are two other characteristics in verse 3?

A: Greed and exploitation. There is almost always greed involving money, ambition, or power over people.

Application: How do the following religions demonstrate these characteristics: Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Scientology, the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel?

[Read v.4-16]

Q: To what and to whom is Peter referring to in verses 4-5?

A: He is referring to the fallen angels before the flood. [See Genesis 6:1-4, 1 Peter 3:19-20, and Jude 6.]

Q: What are the two things God "knows how to" do in verses 4-10?

A: First, He knows how to judge the unrighteous; and second, He knows how to rescue the righteous.

Q: Who are the unrighteous in verses 9-10a?

A: The false prophets and false teachers.

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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.

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; ¹⁵forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶but 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.

¹⁷These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. ¹⁸For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, ¹⁹promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. ²⁰For 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. ²¹For 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. ²²It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A

Q: What is characteristic of righteous people when exposed to unrighteousness?

A: They are tormented.

Application: How are Christians “tormented” over such acts as abortion, homosexuality, or an environment that has no regard for God’s ways or Word?

Q: In verses 10b-16, what are 13 additional characteristics of false prophets and false teachers?

1. They are “**daring**” meaning that they are reckless (v. 10)
2. They are “**self-willed**” (NT equivalent of OT “iniquity”; v. 10)
3. “**...revile angelic majesties**” and seem to have no qualms about doing so (v. 10)
4. Do not exercise good reasoning (v. 12)
5. Do things without knowledge (v. 12)
6. Revel in the daytime and count it as pleasure (v. 13)
7. They are deceived (v. 13)
8. They carouse with believers (v. 13)
9. They commit adultery, either openly or with their eyes (v. 14)
10. They never cease from sin (v. 14)
11. They gravitate toward unstable people (v. 14)
12. They have hearts shaped by years and years of greed (v. 14)
13. They forsake the right way and follow the way of Balaam (v. 15)

Application: Why do you think false teachers and false prophets get as far as they do in the Christian community?

Q: In verse 15, Peter refers to “the way of Balaam.” What is the way of Balaam?

A: The way of Balaam is the use of one’s spiritual gifts for personal gain. In Balaam’s case, the personal gain was financial.

Application: What are others “personal gains” besides money?

[Read v.17-22]

Q: How many other characteristics can you find about false prophets and false teachers?

A: (Simply list them.)

Q: What is implied in verse 20 about the background of these false prophets and teachers?

A: That they either are Christians or have been an active part of the Christian community.

Q: What is the meaning of verse 21, and why is it true? How does this verse compare to Hebrews 6:6?

A: Because once a person has been exposed to the truth, has learned and accepted the truth, and then turns away from it, there’s no other way to be rescued.

“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.”

—Hebrews 6:6

DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”

Q: *What is the meaning of verse 21?*

A: One who leaves untruth for truth, and then turns from truth to lies and deception, is like a dog who returns to his own vomit.

Final application: *To what source does a Christian go to determine whether or not a teaching or prophet is teaching correctly, or is a false teacher or prophet?*