

2 Peter 2:1-3 (Heresy and Immorality are Linked)

Introduction:

So how does everyone feel about the broken oil pipe in the middle of the gulf of Mexico? On CNN's website there is a live camera so you can actually just watch the clouds of oil billow out into the ocean at the rate of about 20,000 barrels a day. It kind of just makes you sick. I was curious how this compared to the Valdez oil spill and apparently we have already surpassed that catastrophe in terms of amount of oil spilled and so this spill has officially received the title, "Worst oil spill in history." Sweet.

Now prior to the Valdez oil spill or prior to the BP oil spill how much did you appreciate the environmental treasure of the Alaskan coastline? **Prior to the BP oil spill the coral reefs in the gulf of Mexico were probably not high on the list of things you care about.** **But as soon as these things are threatened the level of concern and the amount of treasuring increases.** If you knew that BP had been cutting corners which would result in an accident and then the loss of that treasure, you would do everything in your power to fight and protect that treasure.

Well the last couple of weeks we have been studying the treasure we have in the Word of God. And hopefully after our four week study which included manuscript evidence, archaeology, translation, etc we have a more complete thankfulness and appreciation for the what has gone into preserving and translating our.

Well today we move into chapter 2 and chapter 2 is all about false teachers and false teaching. And false teaching in the church is just like a gushing oil pipe in the pristine waters of good theology. False teaching wrecks and poisons and pollutes and destroys the church. And so hopefully after studying what a **pristine, unspoiled, *spotless*** resource we have in God's Word and then after studying the **potential spiritual devastation** and pollution and the *toxic* waste **contamination** that happens when false teachers come into the church, hopefully we will be very vigilant against these kinds of dangers.

Context:

Now here is the big picture of what is going on in the text. Peter just gets done in the last part of chapter one talking about the true prophets of God and the Scripture they wrote. No prophesy of Scripture he says, is a matter of one's own interpretation, but men spoke from God as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit. **In other words, they wrote down on paper (or parchment) the actual words of God.** That is very special. **Now in chapter 2 he contrasts the true prophets of God with the false prophets of God and their destructive teachings.** So the structure here is very clean. **Chapter one gives us the true prophets and the wonderful fruit that is associated with memorizing and remembering and treasuring God's true and holy Word (Beautiful beech front paradise).** Chapter two is all about false prophets and the destructive fruit of listening to and applying their twisted, wicked teaching (BP oil spill). **And as we are going to see very shortly, God through Peter is going to use some seriously strong language of condemnation to describe these wicked men who distort and destroy His truth. There are no commands, no admonitions, no imperatives in chapter 2; just pure, terrifying description of what will happen to those who fall prey to the false teachers in the church.**

Definition of False Teaching:

So that is the big picture. Now since the entirety of chapter two is going to be focused on false teaching and since we are going to use this term a lot in the next 3-4 weeks it may be appropriate to spend a few minutes trying to define what we are talking about when we use that term. In fact today we are only focusing on the first three verses because this message is largely an introduction to how to think about the false teachers Peter is going to identify in these passages. We want to define them carefully.

And it's important to define, CAREFULLY, because whoever these people are and whatever false teaching is, we know for certain that God hates it. **False teaching is absolutely without question the most dangerous poison in the world.** *There is nothing more personally destructive, polluting, more hideous, more arrogant, more wicked, more defiling than buying into the lies of Satan that are masked in false teaching.* **This is why the Bible uses such strong language to condemn those who are**

spreading it. In our day and age it is not very correct to condemn an idea or a person for teaching certain ideas. But listen to some of the language that is used to describe false teachers in just 10 verses of chapter 2 verses 12-22.

Look at some of the verbage used to describe these teachers:

- Irrational animals
- Creatures of instinct
- Born to be caught and destroyed
- Blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant
- Destroyed in their destruction
- Count it pleasure to revel in the daytime
- Blots and blemishes in the church
- Reveling in their deception
- Eyes that lust for sin and adultery
- Entice unsteady souls
- Hearts trained in greed
- Gone astray
- Waterless springs and mists driven by storms
- Gloom of utter darkness reserved for them
- Enticed by sensual passions of the flesh
- Slaves of corruption
- Better for them to have never known truth

That is a serious list of reviling terms. That's hard for me to think that anyone would deserve that kind of language. But its not just here. It's everywhere in the Bible. Even Jesus himself pronounced 7 woes upon the religious hypocritical leaders of his day. Do you remember these woe's of Jesus. For the sake of time I'll just read the first 2 verses of his 7 woes.

Matthew 23:13-15 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those

who would enter to go in. ¹⁴ ¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

That is some pretty strong language. How does God feel toward false teaching and particularly how and how does he feel toward those who teach it? He's not very happy. Now why do you think God and the writers of Scripture have such strong feelings toward false teaching? Because the stakes are so incredibly high. We are not playing a game here!

What would we think if the defense department of the US got together with the defense department in Canada and decided to deployed their troops against one another as though there was a real war and not tell them that in reality it was just a game. **During that game, sons and husbands and fathers get maimed and killed?** Children find out that their dad has died. What would we say about those leaders? We would call them heartless. What are you doing. WAR IS NOT A GAME. **How much more, then, should we regard a pastor or teacher or counselor as heartless, who does not help us to remember that eternal life and death are at stake in preaching and teaching and counseling.** It is heartless to give the impression that in our theology, that in areas of belief and faith, and obedience we are playing a game. **It is heartless to foster the impression that the most weighty concerns of our preaching and teaching and counseling are the alteration of psychological states and the modification of behavior.** This is not a game we are playing. There are eternal consequences to ideas.

Now that is why there is so much legitimate passion surrounding this topic. **Truth saves people from hell and false teaching sends people to hell.** We don't want truth changed or altered. We don't want it twisted. We don't want it polluted or diluted. Bottom line is that we care.

Okay so hopefully that was sufficient reminder that false teaching according to the Bible is really, really serious. **It makes the BP and Valdez oil spill combined look like a**

beautiful tropical resort by comparison. But what exactly is it? How do we put definition around it? This is important because if we define it too loosely or not carefully enough then false teaching may slip in under the radar unrecognized (which is the one error on the left side) and if we define it too narrowly and identify and label something as false teaching which in all reality isn't (which is the error on the right side) then we run the risk of living in doctrinal paranoia and calling people who should be trusted friends enemies of the gospel. **And just like most things in the Christian life, this issue is not as black and white as we'd perhaps like it to be.** And the reason it is not black and white is because there is a spectrum of error?

Slide: The Spectrum of False Teaching

Here is a chart that hopefully can illustrate this point. On the far left are clearly things we could identify as false teaching and actual heresy. On the far right are things that definitely could be defined as incorrect teaching, but we would most likely not use the word heresy to describe them. So how do we define what false teaching is according to the Bible?

Well we are going to use the text of Scripture today to try and determine what the Bible is talking about when it uses the word heresy and false teaching.

So if you have your Bibles open up to 2 Peter 2:1-3

2 Peter 2:1-3 But false prophets also arose among the people [what does the word "ALSO" refer to? It refers back to the prophets of God who wrote Scripture. So you had these genuine Scripture-writing prophets and ALSO you had these false prophets] , just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Identification of False Teachers and their Teaching:

1. They are unbelievers

Notice some of the adjectives and phrases the text uses to describe these false teachers. They have denied the master. **In so doing they bring upon themselves swift destruction.** Their condemnation from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. That is not talking about a Christian. **Now some have asked the very good question, “Well if these are unbelievers he is talking about why does he describe them as people who have “denied the savior who BOUGHT them.”** I think God’s wording selection here so informative of the mystery surrounding salvation. On the one hand their condemnation is mentioned as having been decreed from long ago. **That almost sounds like double predestination and a fateful entrance into damnation.** On the other hand the text says that in a very real sense, Christ bought them. **They were “bought” in the sense that Christ paid the redemptive price for their salvation, but they did not apply it to themselves and so were not saved.** Christ’s death is “sufficient” for all (1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2), but is “efficient” only for those who believe. **All of that is to make the point that clearly Peter is talking about unbelieving false teachers in this passage.** The false teachers condemned in this passage are NOT Christians.

And this is an important point to make. We need to start our discussion about false teachers with noticing that the Bible never uses this kind of scathing language to condemn justified believers. Consider how Paul dealt with Peter:

Galatians 2:11-14 ¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas

before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Here's the big idea. You treat Christians differently than unbelievers. **In totally God-honoring attempts at defending truth there have been some people who have used too strong of language to condemn brothers and sisters who are perhaps wrong in their approach but are genuinely saved.** These heresy hunter apologists find meaning in seeking out small pockets of error among their brothers and sisters in Christ and exposing them with the same degree of vehemence as they do unbelievers. This passage is not talking about differences in philosophy of ministry nor is it talking about differences in minor points of doctrine. **This passage is talking about unbelievers who take the doctrines of Satan and work them into the church. This passage is talking about those who preach a different Jesus and who teach immorality.**

The point being: we need to fight unbelieving false teachers not one another. It really doesn't make sense spending your life criticizing the ministry of a **brother in Christ** who you disagree with. Imagine you've died and gone to heaven and there you are sitting around the table next some pastors and leaders of various U.S. ministries and out of all the millions of people you ALSO happen to have seated at your table King David, the apostle Paul and Martin Luther. And the conversation transitions from amazement that folding chairs are part of the furniture of heaven to defending the faith. **And the question is raised, "Who did you fight against to proclaim God's name while on earth."** David responds, "Well I fought against the Philistines and I fought tooth and nail to rid those unrepentant Satan worshipers out of the promise land." **Well what did you do Paul? I fought against the Jewish leaders and their legalistic demands for righteousness and their insistence that salvation was in keeping with the law of Moses, not Christ."** Well what did you do Luther? "Well, I fought against the Roman Catholic church and the wicked practice of indulgences and I fought to get the Bible printed in German so all men could finally read the Bible for themselves." Oh that's good. And then the spotlight turns to you who spent your entire life pointing out the mistakes in other people's

ministries and they ask you, “Well, what did you do?” And you say, I spent my entire life fighting this guy.

So we need to ask the question, “Am I talking to a believer or an unbeliever?” In both cases the evil is the same. Evil is evil. **All evil is from Satan and the unregenerate hearts of mankind.** **So the character of evil does not change just because it finds expression in the mouth of a genuine believer. And it needs to be talked about.** But the approach used to address that evil must change because the INTENT IS DIFFERENT. In the case of the believer the Spirit of God is at work and so the intent is to change their thinking. God uses loving words of correction to impact the heart of true believers and that evil is removed through the process of sanctification. **In the case of the false teacher the Spirit of God is not at work and the intent of the words is NOT TO RESTORE but to warn and guard others who might not be aware of the dangers.** When a horse rider says, “Whoa!” the intent of those words is to train and teach and correct. When people yell, “SHARK!” the intention of those words is to warn and not to change the nature of the shark. That is the difference.

Now it may be helpful to try and anticipate an objection here. **Some might say, yeah, I get your point, but isn't error slowly and subtly introduced and if we wait until its fully developed form it may be too late to stop it.** We need to head it off at the pass. **After all if someone believes in theistic evolution then he is going to soon abandon inerrancy and once you abandon inerrancy liberalism and form criticism and higher criticism will follow and soon we will be denying the deity of Christ and the existence of God.** And so the argument of many people for why they come out so strongly against brothers and sisters in Christ is because they don't want to go down the slippery slope of liberalism. Now this is a very important question to deal with for a moment.

Fallacy and Legitimacy of the slippery slope:

In informal logic there is something that is known as the fallacy of the slippery slope. A slippery slope argument states that a relatively small first step **inevitably** [key word] leads to a chain reaction of related events culminating in some significant catastrophe, much like an object given a small push over the edge of a slope sliding down an increasingly steep embankment toward a cliff, reaches the cliff and then falls all the way to the bottom. **Once that initial push is started there is no turning back.** There are times when appealing to this principle is valid and there are times when appealing to this principle is fallacious. What separates the two is the honest acknowledgement of the possibility of middle ground between A and B. Life is rarely binary. Here are some examples of fallacious implementations of the slippery slope:

- "We have to stop the tuition increase! The next thing you know, they'll be charging \$40,000 a semester!" [why is this a fallacious argument? Because it doesn't acknowledge the possibility of a middle ground].
- If you take it to the extreme it can be kind of funny, "We cannot allow anyone to buy a single can of coke in our store, because before you know it, they will buy every single item unable to stop themselves."
- Lisa and I were reading in Esther yesterday and I was laughing at the fallacy of the slippery slope there. Remember the story, Xerxes asks queen Vashti to come out and present her beauty to the people. She refused. And that sort of befuddles Xerxes so he asks his advisors what must be done. And they say banish her. Why? They use the fallacy of the slippery slope to defend their advice:

Esther 1:16-18 "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷ For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' ¹⁸ This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.

This is the fallacy of slippery slope. Once that rock of rebellion starts sliding, there is no stopping it. Pretty soon the whole country is going to be run amuck with rebellious

wives. It's fallacious because it does not acknowledge the possibility of middle ground. What is the other possibility here? **Perhaps if the king acknowledged that his wife was more than a sex object and instead valued her as a person and an individual who needs nourishing and caring, she would grow to respect him and willingly submit to whatever he says.**

Now the reason to bring that up is to make the point that while it is important to note trends toward liberalism and pay close attention to how those trends develop and may even surface in your own experience, we need to at the same time recognize that there is not an inevitability that every single person who holds to ammilennialism has started down a slippery slope that leads into apostasy and unbelief. There is a middle ground that is far less threatening. So point number one in identifying false teachers is that they are unbelievers. Point #2 is that their false teaching goes largely unnoticed.

2. Their false teaching is largely unnoticed.

Notice verse 1 says that false teachers SECRETLY bring in destructive heresies. **Now that word secretly is not referring to the fact that these teachers are, under the cloak of darkness, secretly introducing pamphlets into the Bibles and if only they knew where this guy was they would nail him.** *No the word secretly has the idea of not being easily detected.* **It literally means to bring in alongside. So the words of the teacher contain doctrine which sounds close to truth and are mixed in with truth but are not truth. And as many have pointed out, this is always how false doctrine starts.** Remember that there are times when the slippery slope argument is in fact valid. If a mormon came here today and wanted to preach or if a Muslim came in and wanted to teach on Jesus, this place would be vacant next week. You kill a church theologically the same way you boil a frog alive. By introducing a little bit of false teaching at a time. Wherever important truth is at stake, counterfeits will be offered and Satan tries to do it subtly in degrees.

One man said, "Heresy is best seen as a form of belief that, more by inattentiveness rather than design, ultimately ends up subverting, destabilizing, or even destroying the Christian faith." But even though it is subtle it is still extremely wicked.

Remember the harsh language Peter uses here for this type of person. Nothing is more wicked than for someone to claim to speak for God to the salvation of souls when in reality he speaks for Satan to the damnation of souls (cf. Deut. 13:1–18; 18:20; Jer. 23; Ezek. 13; Matt. 7:15; 23:1–36; 24:4,5; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 11:13,14; Gal. 3:1,2; 2 Tim. 4:3,4).

3. They Deny Christ and are Sensual and are Greedy.

They deny the master who bought them in verse 1 and in verse 2

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

We are going to lump all three together here. Denying Christ, Sensual and Greedy. Let's start with the first one. They Deny Christ. We learn that these false teachers have denied the Master who bought them. What does this mean? As with most heresies, Jesus Christ is in some way being diminished. Some aspect of his personhood or his work is being denied. But Peter never tells us what aspect. Church history is littered with the ugly heresies that have been fought over the nature of Christ.

But here is what is interesting. This does not seem to be a heresy over the nature of Christ as in denying the humanity of Christ or denying the deity of Christ. It seems to be a denial of the lordship of Christ and a refusal to submit to Christ. You get the impression from chapter 2 that the error of the false teachers was an error in morality, not doctrine. But the two are never really separate. How you live and how you esteem Christ always rise and fall together.

And this refusal to submit to the Lordship of Christ expresses itself sexually and is motivated by greed. And so what we see here very clearly is that the character of a man warrants the title false teacher as much if not more than his doctrine.

Identification in our Culture

Now this message has the potential to be very theoretical. There is a large danger that we walk away from today's message and think, "Well, if a false teacher ever comes into our church, then we are prepared. Sure glad we are ready." There is no if. False teachers are everywhere.

What group of unbelievers do you know who preach straight into the homes of virtually all Christians are largely unnoticed and unidentified as false teachers who are motivated by greed and are extremely sensual in their appetites and promote promiscuity and sexual appetite?

The danger at FCBC is not unbelieving false teachers standing up and preaching from this pulpit on Sunday morning. The danger at FCBC is all of us as families going home and opening up our minds in the state of relaxation and let the greedy, unbelieving, sensual false teachers of the world restructure your value system so that when you come to worship Sunday there is unbelief.

Every picture you look at every movie you watch every article you read contributes to your value structure, your sense of right and wrong, your moral framework. We are not conspiracy theorists here but to think that the media has a neutral agenda is to stick our heads in the sand. Even if there is not conscious agenda, the sin nature and the prince of the power of the air that is **NOW WORKING IN THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE** will ensure that what is produced is agenda-driven.

We must be so careful. So incredibly careful. As we move through this section on false teachers in the next several messages we are going to focus on this issue of the voices of the world as one of the primary forms of false teaching we battle today. The

church is not immune to false teachers. We must make every effort to keep ourselves rooted and grounded in the Word of God lest we lose our stability and be carried away in error (3:17).