

Well today we continue our study of 2 Peter chapter 2. And if you remember from last time we were together, chapter 2 of 2 Peter is devoted to one subject entirely: **False Teachers**. God is serious about addressing false teaching because false teaching has serious implications. God shows us his serious hatred of false teaching by using extremely strong language to condemn them. **And so just like the BP oil spill which contaminates and ruins something very valuable and precious, in the same way, false teaching contaminates, and pollutes and defiles and corrupts the church and by extension our hearts.**

Now I don't know about you, but in my mind when I hear the word false teacher or false teaching, I get the mental image in my head of a wicked, twisted, greed-motivated, teacher who is intentionally trying to twist the doctrine of the church and is planted by Satan himself. **Now those people do exist, but it is important to remember that at the highest level anything not true is false teaching.** And when you back out and look at the world from this level you realize that false teaching is everywhere.

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1 | Page

We must be fully aware that what is going on all around us on every front, at every level of education at every turn on every TV show in every article ever written is an all out war between truth and lies. **One way you can look at the universe is that there is a cosmic tug-o-war going on.** Darkness is battling light in a winner take all moral conflict. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent are not friendly toward one another. There is enmity. There is a battle over the believability of ideas. **There is an undertow that is fighting to pull you in. There is violent clashing of worldviews like massive tectonic plates colliding.** And you want to know where the faultline of this moral earthquake lies? The very epicenter of the hostilities runs right through our own hearts. Are we going to believe the lies of the world propagated by false teachers as products of Satan and a function of his domain or are we going to believe the Word of God and the truth? EVERYTHING is a battle over beliefs.

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2 | Page

The battle for purity is not a battle over certain forbidden acts such as lust, adultery or pornography. That is NOT the battle. The battle is over belief in an idea. The battle is over belief that God is not to be trusted and that his plan for sex will bring me less joy. There is an all out war going on.

Now it might be discouraging to think through this war and to realize that false teaching and lies are everywhere. But our passage today is going to remind us of something that is very helpful. And that helpful reminder is going to be the only point of the message this morning. Here is that reminder: **God is sovereign over the wickedness of false teachers and their teaching.** There is a war, but there is a winner of that war- an undisputed winner.

Now the outline today comes in the form of bolding words in that phrase:

1. God is **sovereign** over the wickedness of false teachers and their teaching.

Let's focus on this concept of sovereignty over false teaching. Peter has just finished warning Christians in verses 1-3 that false teachers will arise and try to deceive the church. But Peter does not want this reality to paralyze Christians and cause them to be overly fearful or distressed. So to help them, he reminds them of God's sovereignty over evil, even evil in the form of false teaching. And he doesn't just tell them, God is sovereign over false teaching. **A statement of fact like this does little to comfort a Christian who is struggling with faith like a butterfly who is struggling to escape his prison of water.** If he believed the statement of fact, he wouldn't be struggling. He needs to be convinced. But what we are going to discover is that God's choice of confirming the faith of a struggling Christian is not to explain the details of **HOW** he will judge evil. **Rather, God's choice of confirming the faith of a struggling Christian is remind them from examples that he CAN judge evil.** So Peter builds an argument. When I read the argument in the text for the first time, it seemed very odd and confusing but after I read it a few times I realized that it is very simple. **And the key is to just listen for the structure.** The first 6.5 verses is a lengthy one sentence argument in the form

of an **if/then** clause. We use this kind of structure all the time, I might argue like this: “**if** Usane Bolt won gold in the Olympics for the 100 meter dash and **if** Usane Bolt is in better physical condition now than he was then and **if** he is injury free and well rested, **then** it is reasonable to assume that he can probably beat me in this race.” That is a series of if clauses that are building the case for the then clause. That is the structure of the section we are going to read first.

Peter after reminding believers that false teachers will arise and will deceive and corrupt says this.

2 Peter 2:4-16 For **if** God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

Now what is he referring to here? I'll explain the view that I think is most likely and the view that I hold with one slender fiber of my being. When you read verse

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5 | Page

4 do you have any questions that arise? My first question is, “I didn't realize demons were in hell. How can they be in hell and in chains of gloomy darkness and also posses people and presumably tempt people and carry out the works of darkness.”

Well, the only explanation to this is to say that some fallen angels are in pits of darkness while other fallen angels are permitted to assist Satan until the day of judgment. Does the Bible give us any hint as to what may have caused this distinction. Genesis 6 opens with a glimpse into life just prior to the floods.

**Genesis 6:1-4** When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. <sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." <sup>4</sup> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when

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6 | Page

the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

Now some have interpreted the phrase “sons of God” to mean fallen angels. There are other examples in the Bible where sons of God refers to angels. So with that interpretation the text teaches that fallen angels cohabitated with human women and had offspring.

Jude 1 sheds additional light on how God judged this act.

**Jude 1:6-7** And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day- <sup>7</sup> [now what angels is he referring to here? He is going to give us more information to help us understand what

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7 | Page

angels he is talking about. And here are the key words that helps unlock it] **just as** Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

So the angels which are committed to eternal chains committed a sin just as the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. What sin is he referring to? Well the first sin that comes to mind is homosexuality. But the Bible doesn't talk of angels relating that way. But there is another sin that is mentioned in the Sodom and Gomorrah account. Remember that when the angels came into town the men of Sodom and Gomorrah wanted to have relations with the angels. So that would be the answer. So the sin of intermarrying between angels and humans is what is being referenced.

So in this view this event is what is being referenced.

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8 | Page

2 Peter 2:4-16 For **if** God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

Some would criticize this view by saying that angels are spiritual beings and cannot cohabitate with humans. They would say that the Bible just doesn't tell us why God committed some angels to chains of darkness while he allowed other angels to carry out Satan's work.

Now put the interpretation issue aside for the time being and let's refocus on where the text is going. Because whatever your interpretation of that verse, either way, the point is very clear. God has the power to judge and he demonstrated it in the past through the judging of angels.

**[Given the fact]** God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

<sup>5</sup> **if** he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; <sup>6</sup> **if** by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup> and **if** he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked <sup>8</sup> (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); <sup>9</sup> **then** the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, <sup>10</sup> and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

So let's just list the evidence that Peter provides. As we list the individual pieces of evidence, we are going to translate the word **if** as **given** for added clarity.

1. Given the fact that God did not spare angels when they sinned.
2. Given the fact that God flooded the world but preserved Noah
3. Given the fact that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorah but preserved Lot
4. Given these things, we can rest assured that God will preserve the righteous and judge false teachers.

My favorite phrase in this section is the phrase, "The Lord knows how...." I love that. Because it is so obvious, but so helpful. I don't know how. But rest assured, the Lord knows how. And this kind of argument is helpful for the finite creature. **God is not trying to give us the specifics. He does not want us to trust in an explanation.** He wants us to trust in a person. He wants us to trust him. But he doesn't ask us to trust without some examples. So God graciously gives us some

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11 | Page

examples of His sovereign power to remind us that he is ultimately in control over evil.

And what both the Sodom and Gomorah passage and the Noah passage remind us is that there have been times in history when God has allowed evil to run its course unbridled for long periods of time. But this should not cause us to conclude that God is not in control. **He is in precise control and God will judge when it is appropriate. Like an insect dangling by a single strand of spider web over a boiling pot, God is able to cut that single thread that supports the wicked at any moment he pleases.** He is waiting...for his reasons. Do not think the Lord is unable to deal with evil. The Lord knows how. **We should not think that because we do not know how to deal with evil that God also does not know how.** We also do not know how to flood the world with a word from our mouth. We do not know how to rain fire and brimstone down on a city with a word. And so it should not be a surprise that the massive problem of evil is also outside our understanding. But it is not outside of God's.

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12 | Page

Just as a side note here. There has always been a debate surrounding the first 11 chapters of Genesis. How literal are we to interpret these first 11 chapters? Was the story of Adam and Eve legit? Was the story of the tower of Babel real? Noah? Was that real? **It is a mistake to allegorically interpret these first 11 chapters.** How helpful would Peter's argumentation be here if these were not real, historical accounts? **They would be less than non-arguments.** It would be like saying, **"If Cinderella is able to find her lost slipper and if Snow White is able to recover from the poisonous apple and if the Little Mermaid is able to escape from the spell of the wicked octopus lady, then you should be okay enduring the persecution you are about to experience."** **That is zero comfort because those are just stories dreamt up to make a point.** And if Noah was nothing more than a divine story dreamt up to make a point then I am stuck in a really uncomfortable place. My situation is not a story. It's real and I need comfort that operates in the realm of reality!

2. God is sovereign over the **wickedness** of false teachers and their teaching.

The question we are asking in this section is this: what is it about the false teacher and his false teaching that makes it so wicked? Listen for clues as we read the text. The second half of verse 10 all the way down to verse 16 is one long description of the false teacher and his teaching. And we get glimpses into what makes him tick. And we are going to take the list apart one thought at a time...

**Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones,<sup>11</sup> whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.<sup>12</sup> But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction,<sup>13</sup> suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing.**

What is the main point of this thought. These false teachers have no perspective on their inferiority. There is an arrogance and a scary elevation of self. They treat angelic and heavenly matters as if they are of little consequence and as if they share a peer relationship with angelic beings. So these false teachers are characterized with prideful speech that does not factor in their weakness and inferiority.

Just as a side note of application here. I think this text here might be a very helpful text in addressing how a believer ought to speak. **And particularly this text can help us understand why it is foolish for Christians to use swear words. I get the sense in our culture today that you can't be a cool Christian unless you exercise your freedom in swearing.** I'm not so sure we have that freedom based on what this text is teaching. What is the thrust of the judgment God is bringing against these teachers. They don't have any appreciation for the seriousness of heavenly matters. They talk in such a way that reveals their total ignorance of the power with which they are dealing. **They are like children laughing as they toss**

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15 | Page

**a baton back and forth. But it is not a baton.** It is a stick of dynamite. You don't treat dynamite like you treat a baton. And you don't use words like hell and damnation, and holy the same way you use common words. Now I'll give some examples here and I hope they are not offensive.

When a person is confused because of someone's sloppy handwriting and they exclaim, "What the hell is this?" That is a very foolish use of language. **There is no trembling at the seriousness of hell in that statement.** There is no acknowledgement that hell in all its torment will represent the final destiny of many, many, many people. **You don't talk about serious things that way. "I got a damn thorn in my tire."** You don't compare thorns in your tire to the damnation people will face when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Sometimes what is done is that very serious words are paired with very crude words like "holy crap." That pairing reveals a total ignorance of the concept of holiness and an arrogant non trembling at the principle of holiness.

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16 | Page

Do you want to know what Satan is up to in seducing many people to use swear words? He wants to dilute language so that it loses seriousness and significance. Hell in our society has lost its definition because it is used so frequently in a wrong sense. It's like the boy who cried wolf. If we use hell enough times in a trivial way, when we finally use it in a profound way, we don't even hear it. **Have you ever thought of the significance of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment?** Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. **In other words don't speak the name of God and in the same breath speak about very trivial matters.** God demands that his name be used with the respect it deserves.

So these false teachers have no perspective on their inferiority.

**They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you.**

The main thought here appears to be a boldness and an unashamedness in sin. Normally sin is done in secret because there is an intrinsic awareness that it is evil. The conscious will not allow the sin to be done in broad daylight. **John 3.19 talks about evil doers loving darkness. But when the fear of divine punishment vanishes and there is no fear of hell or God or angels or demons, what is left to restrain sin in broad daylight.** The heart has rounded a deadly corner when there is no longer any fear of sin done in the open. There appears to even be pride in their freedom to sin as they please.

**<sup>14</sup> They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!**

Here Peter characterizes these false teachers as open wells of lust. Lust is a craving for satisfaction in some place other than God. It can express itself sexually in lusting after a woman believing that this experience will bring you satisfaction. OR it can express itself monetarily in lusting after money thinking that money can

purchase the satisfaction that you long for. But in either case the problem is a misplaced search for satisfaction. **And here it what is really scary about the description.** The text says their hearts have been trained in greed. Peter is borrowing a word from the world of sports. The word trained could just as well be translated “exercise.” They literally exercise their hearts to be more sophisticated at lusting.

There is a powerful principle here for Christian living. If you do not want to lust after the world and the things of the world, then stop training your heart for greed. Recognize where this training takes place. **I had a very eye-opening experience this weekend as I came back from my vacation which caused me to recognize that I was training my heart toward greed.** I was camping and really enjoyed myself but of course when you are camping you do not have access to computers and email and internet. **When I came back from camping I hopped on the computer and went to a few of the sites I normally visit to find good deals on the internet and the feeling of having “missed” my daily dosage of**

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19 | Page

**advertising made me realize that I need to cut that out of my life completely.** It was poisoning my soul. I was training my heart to be discontent.

Think about it this way: “You don’t want what you don’t know exists.” And so you train your heart to be discontent when you discover through the consumption of advertizing that you don’t have it. That is training. That is not good.

Maybe your form of training comes another way. Perhaps you are obsessed with checking the stock market. **Perhaps you are tempted by promise of winning that the lottery or gambling has to offer.** Perhaps you love to shop at the mall just to enjoy the stimulation of newness and fashion and trends. Perhaps you have a certain lustful patter that characterizes the way that you look at women. We must stop training our minds to be lustful. We all must be on guard here against the error of false teachers!

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20 | Page

<sup>15</sup> Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, <sup>16</sup> but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

The main thought here is compromise. Balaam had dollar signs in his eyes as he took a bribe to try and curse the nation of Israel. The point here is that money has the potential to pollute and these false teachers had been polluted. The stories of this in our modern error are countless.

I was watching a documentary on oil and was interested to learn a little fact of history. Henry Ford originally designed his car to run on biofuels grown from corn and other crops. His thought was to try and give jobs to the farmers in America. **Well that decision significantly impacted the consumption of oil. So that was when the prohibition on alcohol was passed. The law said that you could not make alcoholic beverages, but it also said you could not distill biofuels.** Henry

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21 | Page

Ford made his cars compatible with biofuels for several years then eventually gave up. The very next year the prohibition was lifted.

This is an example of loving gain from wrongdoing. Other examples such as Enron, Aurthur Anderson, WorldCom, AOL Time Warner, etc.... But this is not just restricted to the world. I read an article in World magazine entitled "what would Jesus fly" and it listed 20 ministries across the US who owed corporate jets. There is money to be made in ministry, in writing books, in selling media, in putting on conferences. Being motivated by greed characterizes false teachers and should instill in us a healthy fear.

**Application: walk it out.**

The main point of the message this week is that God is sovereign of the wickedness of false teachers and their teaching. In his sovereignty he has allowed

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22 | Page

this battle to rage between right and wrong, truth and error. And we live life straddling that fault line.

God gives us some serious warnings about the danger of false teachers and their teaching. In the extreme form painted here we can see that it is absolutely lethal. But extreme forms always start with injesting small forms. And the lies of the world are all around us. How can we overcome? There are a billion things to say here, but let's just close with a thought about conviction.

In order to live a godly life in a pluralistic, relativistic world where good and evil are at war, we have to have conviction. And conviction is an interesting topic.

Think about this for a moment: What makes something wicked? Certain sins like adultery are obvious. Adultery is always wicked because there is no way in which you can redeem it. It will always be a breach of covenant and an offense to God.

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23 | Page

But what about watching TV. Is watching TV wicked? Is buying a new dress wicked? Is spending an hour alone wicked? And here is where we need to develop personal convictions. **If there is a universal battle going on between truth and error, then you can define wickedness this way.**

It is wicked if it pulls you away from your purpose and if it programs your mind contrary to the mind of God, if it tends you toward belief in error, then it is wicked. And we will all be different as to where Satan is able to enter.

Only you and God knows what areas you are prone to wander and lust after the world and believe lies. Maybe internet, maybe advertising or shopping, maybe hanging out with certain people, maybe facebook, maybe video games.

We are called to love the world and hate it. We are called to lay down our lives to bless it, but also cry out to God for his vengeance upon it. We are to be in the world and for the world but not of the world. And we must be on guard and

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24 | Page

develop convictions about how to prevent the world from gaining a foothold into our soul.

**Application: the concept of conviction.**