

False Teachers Described, Part 2

II Peter 2:13-16

The last time I spoke we began to study II Peter 2:10-22 and see how false teachers are described in this passage. We made it through verse 12 last time.

Today we will study verses 13-16. Again, our text will be II Peter 2:13-16 and the title for this sermon is “False Teachers Described, Part 2.”

Before we begin to look at these verses, I would again remind you of three things we should keep in mind. First, the false teachers described in this passage are a real threat. This isn't a warning God gives in vain. False teachers are just as numerous and just as dangerous today, as they have ever been.

Second, these verses teach us about false teachers so that we might be prepared to confront, resist, and triumph over them. It does us no good to gain enough discernment from the Bible to recognize false teachers, if we never resist them and their false teachings.

Finally, as we study these verses about false teachers we should carefully examine ourselves. Are any of the sinful actions or attitudes described in these verses found in you? If the Holy Spirit convicts you of any of these sins it must be dealt with, or you open yourself up to the same judgment as these false teachers.

I. False teachers “shall receive the reward of unrighteousness.”

Beginning in verse 13 we are told false teachers “shall receive the reward of unrighteousness.” This is the 5th time in this chapter that we are told about the end of all false teachers. They will receive a reward. A reward none of would ever want: the reward of unrighteousness. By one sort of sin, false teachers prepare for themselves another.

False teachers are in a hopeless position. They are in an endless cycle of compounding error and sin. The reward of unrighteousness is further unrighteousness. For their unrighteous deeds, false teachers receive the reward of unrighteousness. There is no escaping from this cycle of sin.

This is true of all of us apart from the grace of God. The Bible is clear that we are all sinners. Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” John 3:19b, “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Ephesians 2:1, “You . . . were dead in trespasses and sins.” And sin pays a wage: Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death.”

Apart from the grace of God, the sin that is within us leads to an inescapable cycle of unrighteousness. We sin because we are sinners, and we are sinners because we sin. This cycle started with Adam, the first man, and it has continued ever since. Just like the false teachers described in this passage, we are all in an

endless cycle of compounding error and sin. We heap up for ourselves the just judgment of God.

But there is something very important that we must take notice of here. False teachers have hardened their hearts to the revelation God has given them. Look back in II Peter 2 to verse 1. There we are told that false teachers “deny the Lord who bought them.”

False teachers are not ignorant. They know the gospel. They claim to be Christians. They claim to be among the redeemed. They claim to be numbered with those who have been bought back out of bondage to sin by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Yet they deny Him. With their words, with their teaching, with their sinful and ungodly lives they deny the Lord. False teachers have hardened their hearts to the Gospel.

This serves to warn all of us. Apart from the grace of God, we cannot escape the sin cycle each of us is born into; this cycle where we sin and we heap upon ourselves more sin and more condemnation. But if you hear about the grace of God, if you hear the gospel, if you hear that the God of heaven and earth demands that you repent, that you turn from your sin, that you forsake your sin, and that you call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and that if you do repent, you will not only be forgiven, but you will then be welcomed into the kingdom of God as a child of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. If you hear that, if you hear

the gospel message, and you reject it, you don't do anything with it, you allow it to pass from your mind, then you are hardening your heart to the revelation of God. You place yourself in the same position as these false teachers, and you will receive the same reward: the reward of unrighteousness.

II. False Teachers “count it pleasure to riot in the day time.”

Verse 13 goes on to say false teachers “count it pleasure to riot in the day time.” Notice first this word that is translated here as “riot” or “revel.” It is a bit of an unusual word. The New Testament only uses this word one other time in Luke 7:25 where Jesus used it to describe people who live “delicately” in the courts of kings. It means having a feeble mind or body because of indulgence or debauchery.

False teachers “count it pleasure to riot.” False teachers find lives of indulgence and lives of debauchery pleasing. This is what they want. This is what they seek. Their lives are focused on the present things of this world, on gratifying their flesh.

In this way false teachers like “natural, brute beasts” as verse 12 describes them. Unlike animals, man has the ability to extend out thoughts beyond the things of this world. We can live at a level that is higher than just the things of this world that relate to our physical existence. When we reduce physical life to just what we

experience with our physical senses, when the focus of our lives is on the lusts of our flesh, we have lowered ourselves to the position of brute beasts.

God gave us not only our bodies, but a spirit, a soul. We were made for more than empty hedonism. We are called to live above the lusts of our sinful flesh. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ.

False teachers have no such compelling. Not only do they live lives of riot, lives of indulgence and debauchery, but they take pleasure in it. They enjoy it. They seek after it because they love it.

Worse still, this passage tells us that false teachers count it pleasure to riot “in the day time.” They have no shame. They carry on their riotous living in the day time, when their wickedness is on full display before all men.

Throughout the Bible sin is often associated with the dark, with night time. If you remember in Genesis 19 two angels came to the city of Sodom to deliver Lot from the judgment to come. Lot welcomed them into his home. And later, when night time came, the men of the city surrounded Lot’s house, intent upon great wickedness.

In Proverbs 7 we can read of a young man who went to a harlot’s house. Proverbs 7:9 tells us when he went: “In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night.”

Jesus said in John 3:19 that: “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

I Thessalonians 5:7 says that those who are drunk are drunk in the night.

False teachers go against this trend. They are so hardened in their sin that they no longer have the shame that is found even in the wicked. They are so consumed by lust and rebellion that they carry on with their sin out in the open.

III. False teachers are “spots and blemishes.”

Next we are told that false teachers are “spots and blemishes” (v. 13). False teachers are spots, a blemish, a disgrace upon the church. We can gain more insight into this passage by looking at another passage of Scripture where these same words are used in a positive sense.

Ephesians 5 uses the same language to describe the ministry of Jesus Christ to the church. Listen to Ephesians 5:25-27, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, *not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*” Christ makes the church, the true church, holy. He makes it pure and clean and right. He makes it have no spot, no wrinkle, no blemish.

False teachers do exactly the opposite. They are themselves spots and blemishes. Their presence corrupts the purity of the church.

This is why false teachers cannot be tolerated. We should be careful with how we use this terminology. Just because we disagree with someone doesn't mean that they are a false teacher. True Christians can disagree on some things. We don't have to have uniformity to have unity.

However, if someone matches the description Scripture gives of false teachers, then they absolutely cannot be tolerated. We cannot be friends with false teachers. We cannot make a place for false teachers to feel welcome. We cannot consider ourselves as brothers and sisters in faith with those who are clearly false teachers. The purity of the church is at stake. Christ will not tolerate impurity in His body.

How are false teachers spots and blemishes? Verse 13 says they "sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you." This could be a reference to their presence at the love feasts in the early church. Jude 12, a parallel passage, says, "These [false teachers] are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear." False teachers delight themselves in their own deceptions while they try to join themselves to a fellowship where they know they don't belong, the fellowship of the saints. They are not concerned about pleasing God, but only about pleasing themselves.

Verse 14 says, "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." Again, we are told that false teachers are given over to lust. They have no self-control. They make not attempt to guard their eyes and no attempt to stop the

wicked thoughts that follow their lustful gaze. Their eyes are full of adultery. Matthew 5:28 says, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” By this standard they are constantly guilty of adultery.

They are given over to sin, and they sin without restraint. They cannot cease from their sin. They love their sin and have become hardened in their sin.

See here the danger of a wandering eye and unrestrained lust. These things *should not* be in a child of God. These things *will not* be in a child of God. We must take every thought captive to obey Christ. Unchecked sexual lust is celebrated by the world, but it is condemned by God. Don’t follow the path of false teachers and become hardened in this sin.

IV. False teachers “beguile unstable souls.”

Verse 14 tells us that false teachers “beguile unstable souls.” This word, “beguile,” was used by fishermen or people who trapped animals and it means “to entice with a bait.”¹ False teaches bait others into wickedness. They are not content with their own immorality. They are not pleased with their own wickedness. They have given themselves over to the pursuit of the lusts of the flesh and they wish for others to join them. And beware, because like anyone who constructs a trap, false

¹ Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 112.

teachers go to great lengths to make the bait as alluring as possible and they do all they can to hide the snare.

What can we do to guard ourselves from the well crafted snares of false teachers? How can we avoid being duped by the alluring baits offered by false teachers? Verse 14 tells us who falls into the traps of false teachers: “unstable souls.” People who are unstable in their faith, people who are not well grounded in the Word of God, people who have shallow spiritual roots: these people are ones who fall into the snares set by false teachers.

If we neglect Bible study and prayer. If we ignore the practical application of the revelation we have been given. If we treat Christianity like a coat we can put on for Sunday and then hang up in the closet for the other six days of the week. If we are not firmly established in the grace of God, then we are unstable souls as spoken of in this verse. We must not just flee from false teachers, but we must flee to Christ. We must be firmly established in our faith. This is how we protect ourselves from the snares of false teachers.

V. The hearts of false teachers are “exercised with covetous practices.”

Verse 14 continues and teaches that the hearts of false teachers are exercised with “covetous practices.” Chief among the lusts of false teachers is their lust after

material wealth. This word “exercised” was used to describe the way an athlete would train his body for the event he planned to compete in.

The Bible uses this word several times in a positive sense. Paul told Timothy in I Timothy 4:7: “Exercise thyself . . . unto godliness.”

The writer of Hebrews used this word in Hebrews 5:14, “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Christians are called upon to discipline and train in godliness and discernment.

False teachers discipline and train themselves to covet.

Paul warned Timothy in I Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Jesus warned in Matthew 6:24, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

A false teacher will always be more concerned about serving the best interest of his bank account than he will be about serving God.

Who has your heart this morning? Are you exercised to serve the God who created you? Or are you, like the false teachers described here, exercised in the pursuit of temporal riches?

VI. False teachers are “cursed children.”

The end of verse 14 calls false teachers: “cursed children.” This is now the sixth time that we have been told in this passage about the end of false teachers. With their great wickedness they have brought a curse upon themselves. They live lives dominated by sin and because of this they will suffer the eternal wrath of God.

VII. False teachers compared to Balaam.

Finally, in verses 15 and 16 we see false teachers are compared to Balaam. Verse 15 tells us that false teachers “are gone astray, following the way of Balaam.” What is the “way of Balaam?” Verse 15 tells us that he “loved the wages of unrighteousness.” Verse 16 tells us that he was “rebuked for his iniquity.”

We can read more details about Balaam in Numbers 22. In Numbers 22 we find Balak, the king of the Moabites. Balak was afraid of the Israelites. The Israelites had promised that they had no intention of declaring war on the Moabites. God had instructed them not to. The Israelites had offered to pay to travel through the lands which belong to Moab. But the Moabites didn’t believe it and they prepared themselves for war.

Balak knew that his people would be outmatched in battle against the Israelites, so he did something somewhat surprising: he sought for God's help. There is nothing wrong with seeking Divine deliverance from danger, we could certainly all agree with that. But the means by which Balak sought God were his own means, and God will never honor man's means for seeking God. And the end Balak hoped to accomplish, the cursing of God's chosen people, went against the purpose of God and God would never honor Balak's request. But still, Balak tried.

Balak himself wasn't a worshipper of the one true God. Like his people, the Moabites, Balak was an idolater. So he sends for help. He needed a professional worshipper, Someone he thought could access God for him. He sent messengers to Balaam.

Numbers 22:5 tells us that Balaam lived in Pethor. We don't know for sure where Pethor was, but the name implies that it was probably somewhere along the banks of the Euphrates river. That's a long ways away from the land of Moab. Certainly there must have been prophets for hire much closer to the land of Moab. But apparently Balaam's reputation for results was so good, that Balak sent his servants on the long journey to try to hire him.

Balak wanted the best he could find. He truly believed he needed God's help and he was willing to go to great lengths to find someone he thought could get him the results he wanted. To procure God's favor, Balak would spare no expense, short of submission and obedience of course.

Who was Balaam? The Jews believed that Balaam was indeed a prophet who knew God. He came to be known as a person whose predictions came to pass and whose prayers were answered. However, he grew proud and covetous and because of this God departed from him and to support himself he turned to witchcraft and so-called magic. Other commentators believe that Balaam started his career as a magician and that he sold himself to worship and prophesy for any god someone was willing to hire him to worship.

We see later in this account that God does indeed speak to Balaam, but that is no indication of a faith relationship. Throughout the Bible we see that God spoke to wicked men when it served to accomplish God's purposes. The Pharaoh of Egypt, Laban, Abimelech, Nebuchadnezzar, and on and on we could go. Any wicked person today can hear from God. Simply pick up a Bible and read it, and you can hear from God. God speaking to Balaam doesn't confirm that Balaam was a true prophet, it simply confirms that God can accomplish His will, even among wicked men.

Verse 7 tells us that the messengers sent from the king of Moab brought with them the "rewards of divination." Balaam had a reputation as a prophet for hire: "Have curses, will travel." Our text in II Peter calls this money the "wages of unrighteousness." And this was Balaam's weakness: He was covetous. He loved money. These messengers from Moab came and offered these gifts as payment for cursing the people of God.

It is reasonable for us to assume that Balaam, in the line of work that he was in, had heard about the God of Israel. We know from other passages in Scripture that news had travelled about the destruction the God of Israel had brought upon Egypt. This was why God destroyed Egypt with the plagues: to show Himself strong on behalf of His people. That ancient superpower had been brought to its knees by God as He demonstrated His power in delivering His people from bondage. What tremendous power that was! We can imagine that the greedy false prophet Balaam salivated at the thought of the great riches he could earn if he could tap into even a very small portion of that power. But if Balaam knew anything about God, he should have known that God would never honor a curse upon His chosen, covenant people.

When these messengers from Moab arrived, look at what Balaam did. In verse 8 he says, "Lodge here this night and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me." Balaam should have given the immediate and obvious answer, "I cannot curse those whom God has blessed."

Instead he said, "Let me pray about it and I'll let you know."

Matthew Henry wrote, "When we enter into parley with temptations, we are in great danger of being overcome by them."

In the night, God revealed Himself to Balaam and told him in no uncertain terms in verse 12, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

Balaam got up the next morning and in verse 13 he says to the messengers from Moab, “Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you.”

That was not a faithful relay of what God had told him. God didn't refuse to give Balaam leave to go. God forbade him from going. God had told Balaam that he **could not** go with the Moabites and that he **could not** curse the Israelites. God had forbidden it, but Balaam makes it seem that God didn't give him permission to go now, but He might give him permission to go in the future.

We prepare ourselves to fall to temptations when we speak lightly of God's prohibitions, as if God was merely denying us permission for the time being. If you desire something today that goes against God's Law, that thing will never be okay to do at some point in the future. To go against God's law is not merely going without God's permission. To go against God's law is to go against God Himself, to raise your fist in rebellion and try to smite God off His throne in heaven so you can take His place. It is nothing less. A prohibition is not merely a lack of permission. If we treat God's prohibitions lightly, we prepare ourselves for a fall into sin.

Balaam prepared himself for the sin which followed by saying these messengers, “God doesn't give me leave to go with you.”

The messengers further diminished God's prohibition by saying to their king in verse 14, “Balaam refuseth to come with us.” No mention of God was even

made. This answer didn't satisfy Balak, so he sent better, more honorable messengers back Balaam with better gifts and promises.

When Balaam met these new messengers he said in verse 18, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." Notice how highly Balaam speaks of God. He says, "The Lord my God." Of course, there are many who call upon God who are not His children. Let this be a reminder to us that a false teacher can use all the right language and still be a child of the devil.

Balaam also seems, by these words, to have a high regard for the word of God. He speaks as if he is resolved to stick to the Word of God and not stray from it. He says, "If Balaam were to give me his treasury, I wouldn't transgress God's words." It is an easy thing for bad men to speak very good words and follow them with very wicked actions. God knows what is in the heart of men, and we, as believer priests, must pray and ask God for discernment to recognize and avoid false teachers.

Now look at what Balaam said in verse 19, "I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more."

When the apostle Peter, a true servant of God, was asked to sell the blessing of God, he said to Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:20, "Thy money perish with thee." And that was the end of the issue.

But when Balaam, a false prophet, was asked to sell the curse of God (A curse God had already strictly forbidden), Balaam said, “Well, let me ask again.”

This reveals Balaam’s the low view of God. Balaam thought that God might change His mind and allow something He had already forbidden. Balaam thought that the thing God had called evil He might later call good. In short, Balaam thought that God was like Balaam. It is a terrible affront to God when we ask for His permission to sin, and it reveals the depth of wickedness in our own hearts.

Now we get to verse 20, and this is where we might have difficulty in understanding this passage. In verse 20 God again spoke to Balaam and said, “If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.”

Did God change His mind? Did God just give permission for Balaam to go with these men? Is God like a man, that He would change? No, certainly not. What we see here is not an example of God changing His mind; but rather, this is an example of God giving someone over to a sin that they persistently pursue.

Beware of any pet sin that you harbor in your heart! Beware of any temptation that you make space for and place yourself under! Beware, for the day may come, as it did for Balaam, when God loosens the reigns of conscience and allows you go unchecked after the lusts of your heart. Don’t presume upon the mercy of God. If you are experiencing conviction about sin today, deal with it

today. Tomorrow may be too late. You may grow hardened in your sin. God may give you over to your sin. And then there will be no more mercy, only judgment.

In verse 21 we see the result of Balaam being given over to his sin. Verse 21 says, “And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.” Balaam was so eager to go, that he did not wait to be called as God had said in verse 20, but he rose up early and prepared to go with the Moabites.

Again, to quote from our text in II Peter 2, Balaam “loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

Jude verse 11 describes Balaam as running greedily into error for reward.

This is the motivation of false teachers. They will transgress the clear word of God because they are greedy. They desire material wealth more than they desire to obey God. Like Balaam, false teachers are hardened in their sin and given over to the lusts of their flesh.

Verse 22 tells us that God was angry with Balaam because he went. God allowed Balaam to sin, but this did not make the sin any less sinful before God. Never think that the sin of sinners is never less provoking to God because He permits it. Never think that because God in His providence allows sin, that He somehow approves of it. God hates sin. He suffers sin, and yet is angry with sin.

Verse 22 also tells us that God sent an angel to stand as an adversary against Balaam. At first, Balaam's eyes were closed to this adversary. He couldn't see the angel. He couldn't see the danger he was in.

But notably, the donkey upon which Balaam rode could see the angel and fled from the danger. Have you ever wondered why God allowed the donkey to see what Balaam could not

Remember, Balaam was a man with a reputation. He was a man of visions. He was a man who could reach God for you. He was a man who could get spiritual results.

God, as part of his judgment against Balaam showed that Balaam had less spiritual perception than a dumb beast of burden.

Going back to our text, II Peter 2:16 tells us that Balaam was "Rebuke for his iniquity." Who delivered this rebuke? A donkey. Verse 16 continues, "The dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet." Like Balaam, false teachers declare themselves to be wise, and like Balaam, false teachers will ultimately be revealed as fools.

This passage warns us about false teachers so that we can recognize them. It describes false teachers at length so that we are equipped to resist false teachers and their false teachings. And we would be remiss if we failed to examine our own lives to see if any of these sinful attitudes or actions are found in us. If so, we must repent and forsake these sins and take forward steps in following Jesus Christ.