2 Peter 2: 10b-16

Introduction

When my wife Karen and I lived in Dubai about 7-8 years ago, we hosted a weekly bible study in our home. One evening, one of regular attendees brought an acquaintance he had met who seemed interested in learning more about Christianity and what we believe as Christians.

This young man was originally from India. He and I began meeting up on a semi-regular basis to discuss the Bible, Jesus, and religion in general.

It did not take too long, however, to recognize that he was less interested in genuinely learning about Christianity than he was in sharing with me his beliefs of a higher power and how he had decided the world worked.

And as he expounded with confidence on his philosophy, it became clear that the god this young man had created in his mind was a god who aligned perfectly with how he man had decided he wanted to live his life. He had managed to delude himself into fabricating - without any proof or evidence, and I would argue, in direct contrast to a mountain of evidence that the true God of the universe has revealed about Himself - a deity that affirmed every decision and action this young man had taken.

Imagine, inventing and worshipping a god who affirmed that everything you did was right and nothing you ever did was wrong.

In many ways, that's precisely what the false teachers in our passage today have done.

Background

If you have your bibles with you, please turn with me to the second letter of Peter Chapter 2, beginning in the second half of verse 10. That's 2 Peter 2:10b. And as you turn there, let me provide a quick recap of our study of Peter's second letter up to this point.

Peter was one of Jesus' apostles, and it is believed that he wrote this letter to Christian believers from Rome close to the end of his life, before he was persecuted and martyred by the Roman Emperor Nero.

Peter's purpose in this letter is to remind churches to continue to strive to be holy, to live lives that are pleasing to God. As Martin put it last week, to live virtuous lives.

As we've seen over the past several weeks, he does this in Chapter 1 by encouraging Christians that through the grace of Jesus Christ, God has given them all they need to not only live godly, virtuous lives, but to also withstand the onslaught of attacks and

corruption of the world that is bound to come. It is a very positive and inspiring message.

As the letter continues, however, we see that Peter's tone changes dramatically in Chapter 2 to one of warning and caution. If Chapter 1 is meant to bolster our confidence that God has called us to be partakers of His diving nature (as we see in Chapter 1:4), then Chapter 2 is a loud, flagrant alarm of warning against being seduced by those who have denied the truth about Jesus Christ and replaced it with their own heretical - that is, destructively wrong - teachings about God; all as a cautionary exhortation of what not to do.

As theologian John Piper puts it, Chapter 2 "intends to do in a negative way what Chapter 1 aims to do in a positive way, namely, make us earnest about the business of confirming our call and election" by God.

As we heard from Martin last week, Peter begins Chapter 2 by calling attention to these false teachers, who denied that Christ would return, and by showing that their path, while seemingly attractive, only leads to destruction.

In our passage today, it's as if Peter now zooms in further to expand upon the specific characteristics of these false teachers and what exactly it is that they do that makes them so dangerous.

And as we'll see next week, God willing, Peter will conclude Chapter 2 by expounding on the grim fate of these false teachers and any who are unfortunate enough to follow in their apostasy, that is, in their falling away from the true faith.

But now, let’s look again at how Peter details the characteristics of these false teachers. Note that there is not a lot of subtlety here; we are meant to grasp the full weight and consequence of their sinful actions.

> Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. 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, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

This is a sobering read. This description should shock and grieve us. We know that all of God's word is instructive, and I believe that Peter offers these descriptions to not only help us identify false teachers, but also to instruct us in what sort of behaviors - the opposite of these descriptions - that we Christians are to adopt to live those lives worthy of our calling by God.

As we will see, these descriptions seem to come down to a love of power, of sex, and of money.

So that is our outline for today: three postures we are called to adopt that repudiate the actions of these false teachers and firm our calling as Christians.

First, we are called to shun pride and cultivate humility. Second, we are called to flee from sexual sin and run to sexual purity. And third, we are called to abandon greed and embrace lavish, christian generosity.

Shun pride and cultivate humility; flee from sexual sin and run to sexual purity; and abandon greed and embrace lavish, christian generosity.

1) Shun Pride and Cultivate Humility

First we are called to shun pride and cultivate humility.

Peter begins by describing the false teachers as bold and willful in their sinful apostasy. This is not merely making a mistake, no, this is on purpose - it's deliberate and intentional. They know exactly what they are doing. To what apostasy is he referring? Well, we see it in the phrase directly before it, at the beginning of verse 10 - the lust of defiling passion and despising authority.

Further, Peter says in verse 12 that these false teachers blaspheme about matters of which they are ignorant. And they do so like irrational animals, like creatures of instinct. This means that although these actions are intentional, they are not done thoughtfully or rationally.

Do you know anyone like that? Maybe someone on social media or television who, no matter the latest news story or controversy, suddenly fancies himself or herself as an expert on the subject - be it epidemiology or foreign affairs? Someone who is always confident but rarely right? Someone whose approach seems to be to supplement his or her lack of knowledge with boldness?

That's pride, isn't it? And it is one of the most dangerous, insidious, and destructive sins there is. It is not something with which to be trifled or in which to dabble. But yet that is exactly what these false teachers do.

It says they blaspheme the glorious ones in verse 10.

Now, scholars actually disagree on what this means. We know that to “blaspheme” something is to show irreverence or disrespect for it. Some say it is a reference to the glories of God and Christ, specifically Christ's second coming and judgment, which these false teachers denied would occur.

Most scholars, however, believe "glorious ones" actually refers to evil spiritual beings. Peter is likely explaining that these false teachers were dismissive that evil forces were aligned against them and/or overly-confident in their ability to resist such demonic spiritual warfare.

Either way, what’s most important here is that we again see it is the false teachers' prideful arrogance that allows them to make such brash and bold proclamations. According to Peter, even angels - who are greater in might and power than these men - recognize that it is not their place to pass judgment on them. That role is reserved solely for God.

Yet these false teachers have the audacity to put themselves in the place of the Lord. They want to rule on the throne. They want…power.

Their despising of authority - from church leaders to apostles like Peter - leads them to eventually despise the authority of Christ Himself, as we heard last week. And we see at the end of verse 12 where this pride will ultimately lead them: to destruction. We’ll hear more about that next week, God willing.

In contrast, how are true Christians supposed to respond to God?

Rather than despising authority, we are called to humbly submit to authority. We are to be like those angels who recognize their proper place in reference to the holy God of the universe.

But how do we do that, practically - particularly in the life of the church?

One way to do that is to trust the elders that the Lord has placed in leadership over this church - these men that we, as the congregation, have affirmed as shepherds to lead our flock.

I wonder, have you have thought of the elders as a gift to Westlake Lausanne from Jesus? They are.

Ephesians 4:11-12 says he gave shepherds to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ - His church.

Praise God for the kindness He has shown us in providing us here at Westlake Lausanne with such loving, caring leadership.

And it is also with humility that our elders are called to exercise that authority that God has given them. We see in Titus 1:7 that one of the qualifications of an elder - an overseer, a shepherd - is that he not be arrogant, but rather self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

And 1 Timothy 3:6 says an elder "must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." Doesn't that sound almost exactly how Peter is describing these false teachers?

Does that mean elders and their decisions are infallible and can never be questioned? Are we simply to blindly affirm everything they say and do?

Certainly not. And I imagine these men would be the first to humbly admit that they are far from perfect.

In fact, that is why our church may be led by the elders, but is actually ruled by all of us, the congregation. We as the flock regularly get together to make the major decisions about the life and direction of the church. And there is a reason why there are a plurality of elders and not just one, single person leading the church.

This entire structure helps protect the flock by making it very hard for a lone, prideful, and arrogant false teacher to lead us all astray.

As the apostle Paul notes in Galatians 1:8-9, we, the congregation, have the duty and responsibility - out of love - to fire any pastor who does not preach the true gospel of Jesus Christ found in the Bible. And I know that each and every elder of this church would humbly ask this body of believers to do just that to each of them if they stray from God's truth.

We should be regularly praying for our elders, thanking God for them, praying they would continue to serve us with humility, and asking the Lord to raise up more godly men from within our church to help lead our flock.

Another way we humbly submit to authority is simply through our regular lives together as a church, a body of believers who have covenanted together to care for one another.

As we talked about recently at our church retreat, one of the ways we continue to grow in our understanding and knowledge of God is through discipling relationships within the church.

A good definition of discipling is "deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ." This is men within the church regularly meeting up with other men and women with other women - not just to grow their friendships, but to specifically share each others lives with the purpose of helping one another follow Christ more.

As we learn more about God through studying His word and sharing our lives with other Christians, we learn more about our sin and His holiness. This helps kill pride and grow humility.

Similarly, this church service together here this morning - and each Sunday morning - is, as my former pastor Mark Dever has put it, a "coordinated attack on the fortress of our pride."

We gather to offer prayers to God's greatness and confess our failings; we sing songs that magnify Him, not us; and we hear messages like this one I'm giving right now that help us all better interpret and understand God's call for our lives.

Brothers and sisters, Sunday mornings are for killing pride - week in and week out - and we should make every effort to be here regularly, carefully heeding the words of the author of Hebrews, who tells us in chapter 10:25 to "not neglect to meet together."

So these are just a few ways we can shun pride and cultivate humility.

Flee from Sexual Sin and Run to Sexual Purity

But #2, a second way we repudiate the characteristics of these false teachers, is we must flee from sexual sin and run to sexual purity.

Let's look again at verses 13 and 14:

> They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls.

Another way to translate "revel" is to carouse, to party, to live it up. Peter is saying that these false teachers have no shame; they eagerly and unashamedly practice their sexual sin openly in public with no longer even a pretext of hiding it in the privacy of darkness.

They take pride - there's that word again - in their deceptions, all the while they are sharing meals with true believers - maybe even the Lord's Supper, or communion, like we will do together at the conclusion of today's service.

Their eyes are full of adultery. They sexualize all they see, and they see potential conquests in all they encounter. Sensual thoughts monopolize their minds. And they can't get enough. They are obsessed.

You see, sexual sin is devious and sneaky. It very rarely just appears out of nowhere. Instead, it normally starts with something small, maybe a mere flirtation or a small indulgence.

But we see here that this sin - like all sin - never truly satisfies. It's like water that never quenches your thirst, so you keep drinking more and more.

Just one more click, one more glance, one more encounter. The pattern that sin uses to seduce is painfully obvious: First, you are tempted, then you give in a little, then some more, and soon you have completely fallen.

Now, it's doubtful these false teachers began by sinning out in the open. No, what's more likely is that they started small and then became further ensnared as their sins never truly delivered on what they promised.

And did you catch that final part upon whom these teachers most readily prey? Whom they target?

Peter says that it is the "unsteady souls." It is the weak Christians they seduce, not the strong. Like lions or wolves, they go after the weakest among the flock. This is why Peter calls us all to be "established in the truths" about God in Chapter 1:12, to inoculate us and protect us from these seductions.

This means diligently studying God's word and applying it to our lives. This means likewise raising our children, often the most vulnerable, in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

You see, these false teachers first fell and then looked for a theology that justified their fall. Like that young man in Dubai, they seek to re-make the world in their image, not conform to God's.

How sad that even today, we have seen that far too many pastors have made shipwrecks of their lives over indulging in sexual sin.

In contrast, we true Christians are called to run, headlong toward sexual purity. We are called to be pure and blameless in Christ, not the "blots and blemishes" that Peter calls these men.

Beloved, when we declare to a watching world that we are followers of Christ, we are saying that people can see aspects of Him in how we live our lives. And when we engage in sexual sin, our actions are lying about who God is.

Sex and sexual desire are gifts from God and are actually good things. But they are meant to only be enjoyed within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman.

However, in this fallen world sexual desire has become twisted and contorted. As one pastor put it, "promiscuity has reduced God's great gift to a trifle."

Maybe you are here and you feel like you are immune to sexual temptation. Or you feel like you could be one of those "unsteady souls" and you regularly feel the strong pull of sexual sin. Or maybe you're here and you've already been ensnared.

Regardless of where you find yourself today, we all must fight for sexual purity. Sin - particularly sexual sin - thrives in darkness. It grows when hidden to the point where it corrupts so much - and leads so far astray - that it can then survive openly, brazenly out in the daylight, as with the false teachers.

Transparency and confession are like sin disinfectants - they shine a bright light into the dark corners of sin and burn it away.

Brothers and sisters, make sure there are others who know you and your struggles with sin - to whom you have given permission to ask you lovingly difficult questions about your heart and your desires and to confront you with any sinful behavior to which you may be blind.

Make sure you are confessing these sins and struggles to both God and to others whom you trust, whom you know will walk alongside you in pointing you back to the purity to which God calls each of us.

As a church, we must continue to teach on God's good purposes for marriage and courtship. This church community is where we protect and guard this good gift from God, regardless of what the world says it is.

So we must flee from sexual sin and run to sexual purity.

Abandon Greed and Embrace Lavish, Christian Generosity

Third and finally, we must abandon greed and embrace lavish, christian generosity.

Let us again turn to Peter's description of the false teachers in verses 14-16:

> They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

What happens when you train for something? Let's say you're training to run a marathon or your job requires a certain number of training hours to be certified. When you train, you are putting in a significant amount of time and effort, aren't you? You are doing the work to hone and improve yourself for a particular purpose.

Well, Peter says here that these false teachers have trained their hearts for greed. That means they've worked at becoming more greedy; they're committed to it. They are driven to become experts in greed. It is their raison d'être - their reason for being.

Peter likens these men to Balaam, the son of Beor. You may remember the Old Testament story of Balaam. We don't have time to read it now, but it might be a good idea later today or this week to go back and read this story in the book of Numbers chapters 22-24.

In short, Balaam was a prophet who took money to curse people. He did not have principles; he was for sale. Like a mercenary, his allegiances and skills went to whomever paid him the most.

At one point, the king of Moab wanted to pay Balaam to curse God's people, the Israelites. And Balaam was keen to do the job. However, God opposed this and sent an angel of the Lord to stand in Balaam's way as he was riding his donkey to go conclude the deal.

Balaam was so stubbornly committed to his greed that the Lord finally had to open the mouth of the donkey to actually speak in order to restrain Balaam's madness, as Peter says.

Can you imagine? Even a donkey - not generally considered the most intelligent of animals - could see Balaam's foolishness, but yet Balaam himself could not. He was blinded by his greed.

What was Peter's description again of the false teachers back in verse 10? They are like irrational animals? How so very true - they are even less insightful and discerning than a donkey.

You see, much like sexual sin, the promise of more and more money never actually delivers. And in some ways it is even more subtle in its temptations.

Now, you may have very valid, justifiable reasons you want more money. Maybe it's to help save for university, or for retirement. Maybe it's simply to feel that sense of financial security.

These may be good motives - or they may be self-justified greed. So how do you know the difference? The answer depends on the posture of your heart. The problem arises when you put your faith and trust in money and what you think it brings you - financial security, respect, influence - more than you do in God.

Many of you here are well acquainted with the four-year-old - soon to be five-year-old - force of nature that is my son, Robbie.

During our family devotionals in the evening, one of areas on which Karen and I work with Robbie is memorization of the New City Catechism for Kids. For those who are not familiar, this is a small book of questions and answers aimed at helping children learn the core doctrines of the Christian faith.

Over the past few weeks, we have been working with Robbie on memorizing Question #17: What is idolatry?

The answer is simple: Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator. Let me repeat that: Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator. Full stop. So simple a child can understand, yet so difficult for many of us.

Greed and the love of money is idolatry, and it is a clear path directly to the same apostasy practiced by the false teachers. Jesus cautioned against the love of money throughout his earthly ministry, and the teachings of the Bible are overflowing with how Christians should approach wealth and possessions.

Take for example 1 Timothy 6: 9-11 - a passage with which most of us may be familiar:

> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

There is no more apt description of the false teachers here in 2 Peter than this. “Some have wandered away from the faith,” or as Peter puts it in verse 15: Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray.

In contrast, true Christians are called to view all of life’s possessions and material goods as a stewardship from the Lord - for which we will one day give an account to Him. Something that comes from Him, should be used for His purposes, and remains with Him long after we have departed this world.

So how do we fight greed? Not by believing we can satisfy it by acquiring money and possessions, but rather by liberally and extravagantly using the resources God has given us for His purposes. This is the way to break any chains on our hearts our wealth may have.

As Christians, we are called to be givers.

Now I’m not just talking about giving money to the church, although that is part of it. I’m talking about giving in all its forms: opening your home to Christian hospitality, donating to the Lord’s work in one of the many mission and charitable organizations we support at Westlake Lausanne; and giving of your time and talents - in addition to your treasure - to advance God’s kingdom.

Three weeks ago, Martin preached a sermon on Giving Sunday that cast a vision for our new church building. This is a perfect example of how to faithfully shepherd God's resources to bring Him further glory.

In fact, one thing I would add is that one of the prime reasons we are called to give so generously is that it's good for our hearts. It's says something about what we value. It literally puts our money where our mouths are and helps us from becoming deceived and self-justified like these false teachers.

There is an excellent book that I would highly commend to you, particularly if you find yourself struggling with this issue. It's called "Money, Possessions, and Eternity" by Randy Alcorn. If you're interested and cannot afford to buy it, come find me. I will gladly purchase a copy for you if you promise to read it - that, for me, would be an excellent use of God's resources.

In the book, Alcorn puts it perfectly:

> Our use of money and possessions is a decisive statement of our eternal values. What we do with our money loudly affirms which kingdom we belong to. Whenever we give of our resources to further God's kingdom, we cast a ballot for Christ and against Satan, for heaven and against hell. Whenever we use our resources selfishly and indifferently we further Satan's goals.

As Christians, we are called to hold our possessions lightly and employ them in service of the Lord. Therefore, we must abandon greed and embrace lavish, Christian generosity.

Conclusion

Well, we should conclude.

I wonder if you are here and you are not a Christian just what you think of all of this? First of all, let me say you are most welcome. As I mentioned, we believe there is no better place for you to be on a Sunday morning.

But perhaps you are struggling to understand just what's so wrong with what these false teachers are doing. Maybe you believe that being bold and having pride in oneself is a good thing. Maybe you think that all sex between two consenting adults is perfectly fine. Maybe you see no problem with the acquisition of wealth.

I have to tell you, however, that none of that is what the Bible teaches.

You see, as Christians, we believe that there is a perfectly holy God who created and rules over everything - who created all of us. And yet all of us have sinned against Him - seeking our way instead of His - and fallen far short of His glory.

For that, we deserve his eternal punishment. But in His love, he has made a way for his rebellious people to be reconciled to Him. He sent His son, Jesus Christ, to live the life of perfect obedience that we could not, and to die the death that we deserved as a substitute for all of those who would turn from their sins and put their faith and trust in Him.

And after three days, God raised Jesus from the dead to show that His payment was sufficient. He now sits at the right hand of God the Father, and - contrary to what the false teachers asserted - Jesus will come again one day to judge the living and the dead.

You see, we now seek to obey what God commands and live virtuous lives not to try and be good enough for God to forgive us. N, we know that this is impossible. Rather it's because we are already forgiven because of what Christ has done, not us, that we now seek to live new lives in service to Him.

We seek to shun pride and embrace humility because it was the god-man Jesus who humbled himself to the point of death on a cross; we seek to flee from sexual sin and run to sexual purity because it is Jesus who is the spotless lamb of God slain for us; and we seek to abandon greed and embrace lavish, christian generosity because Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice to reconcile us to God.

Friend, we would love to tell you more about Jesus. Please either find me, ask the person with whom you came, or simply reach out to anyone around you or outside after the service - this is the best news we could ever hope share with you.

Unlike the false teachers in both Peter's day and today - and unlike that young man in Dubai - all of whom orient their god around their beliefs, we Christians are called to radically re-orient our lives and our beliefs around the one who died for us - around Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and instruction on how we can live virtuous lives in gratitude for what Jesus has done to reconcile us to you. Lord, help us shun pride, flee from sexual sin, and abandon greed so that we may not fall prey to the sinful lies of false teachers or follow in their destructive path.

We ask that your Holy Spirit continue to work in our hearts to instead cultivate humility, run to sexual purity, and embrace lavish, Christian generosity - actions that speak the truth about you to a watching world.

And we ask all of this in the mighty, saving name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.