



FALSE  
TEACHERS

---

FLESHLY WAYS

---

DECEIT

---

DANGER

---

DOGS AND SOWS

2 PETER 2.12-22

# BEWARE FALSE TEACHERS

T. M. Moore

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*A ReVision Resource*

Beware False Teachers: 2 Peter 2.12-22  
Copyright 2015 T. M. Moore  
The Fellowship of Ailbe  
[www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org)

*Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

## 2 Peter 2.11-22: Introduction

False teaching is serious business, and Peter treats it with all the seriousness he can.

Christians need to beware and guard themselves against false teachers. They come appealing to all kinds of base and fleshly things, seeking to draw people away from the pure milk of God's Word into some Christian-sounding scheme of salvation by works or salvation for self-interest.

False teachers have always been and always will be in the church. Theirs is the way of destruction to all who fail to heed the Word of God and become mired in their self-interested ways. Follow false teachers and you'll discover a sad and terrible truth:

You may never have truly come to know the Lord at all.

Please visit our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Visit our website also to subscribe to our thrice-weekly devotional newsletter, *Crosfigell*, or our daily *Voices Together* devotional and prayer guide.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

1 and 2 Peter can encourage, embolden, and instruct us, if we're willing to take the Apostle's words to heart. My prayer is that all who take up this study will do just that. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

## 1 Bound for Destruction

*2 Peter 2.12, 13a*

*<sup>12</sup> But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, <sup>13</sup> and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime.*

**The Story:** So, does Peter think false teachers are a serious problem? In our day, when the spirit of pluralism and tolerance is so much afoot, and when just about everybody is reluctant to offer any word of judgment on anyone or any teaching, false teaching can – and does – spread like a wildfire. If we found ourselves some time, face to face with an “irrational animal,” a “creature” whose only instinct was for self-advantage, no matter who gets devoured in the process, do you suppose we would be so shy about denouncing his false views? A day of destruction is laid up for such people who care only about drawing others into their deception for the sake of fleshly or material gain. False teaching is not just someone’s benighted or misguided opinion. False teaching is blasphemy and wrongdoing. If we don’t know how to recognize false teaching, we’d better begin to prepare ourselves to do so. And if we’re not willing to confront, expose, and refute false teaching, then we may find ourselves caught in the net with it.

**The Structure:** The Lie of the devil takes many guises in this period in which the Kingdom of God is advancing on earth as it is in heaven. One of the favorite forms is as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11.14). Historically, the most destructive false teachers have used the language of the Gospel and Scripture, which they pervert in subtle or seemingly sophisticated ways, in order to mislead incautious hearers. Is this happening in our day? Count on it. And get ready for it.

*How do the leaders of your church work to protect your congregation from false teaching?*

## 2 Unsteady Souls

*2 Peter 2.13b, 14*

*They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, <sup>14</sup> having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.*

**The Story:** This problem of false teachers is more than serious; it's dangerous. Using the language of faith and the Gospel, false teachers hobnob with believers, schmoozing around in their churches and homes, spouting their lies, and poisoning the environment against the inroads of truth. In our day they might not do this in person, but through television, books, and the Internet. In Peter's days these false teachers were after fleshly gratification, and things haven't changed much since. Only these days, false teachers shroud their materialistic longings in a blanket of universal self-indulgence: "God wants you to be prosperous and healthy! He wants us *all* to be prosperous and healthy!" We are beginning to see the way false teachers in the Roman Catholic Church preyed on innocent children by the scores of thousands, using the Gospel as an excuse to gratify their lusts. It's not so obvious among Protestants, but it's just as widespread and venal. Any teaching that does not proclaim the Gospel, equip people for Kingdom living, and call them to repentance and holiness – but, instead, encourages them in self-indulgence – is a gospel of the flesh, and no true gospel at all. Only accursed children will gravitate to such teaching.

**The Structure:** "Unsteady souls" are those who do not have a firm footing in the Word of God and a growing relationship with Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Pet. 3.17, 18). They're always eager for the next "new thing" as they slip and stumble from one false teaching or pop star evangelist to the next. It's much easier to listen to someone tell us "This is the way; walk ye in it!" than it is for us to search the Scriptures daily and find our footing on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. But if we fail to do this, we may find ourselves fresh meat for the next devouring false teacher who is able to lure us into his orbit and capture us in his thrall.

*How firm is your footing in the Word of God and your relationship with Jesus Christ? Is there room for improvement?*

### 3 Madness!

2 Peter 2.15, 16

*<sup>15</sup>They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; <sup>16</sup>but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.*

**The Story:** False teaching is madness because it leads people away from the true orientation and path of life into the woods and wilds of the Lie. In the film, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, the main character, Colonel Nicholson, was led astray by a mixture of good and bad motives – compassion for his troops coupled with pride and resentment against his captors. Losing the larger perspective of the war effort, and becoming impervious to sound reason, he let his emotions get the best of him and almost ended up becoming a traitor to his country. False teachers want only one thing – self-aggrandizement, whatever the form of that may be. And we are their means to achieve it. If we fail to hold fast to the right way and to shore up our footing in Scripture day by day, we may find ourselves led away by our passions into spiritual madness, and not even know it. What will it take to bring us to our senses? Will we have to hear some “dumb ass” warning us of our folly?

**The Structure:** I cannot emphasize enough how important this topic is that Peter is lingering over for this entire chapter. Paul warned of false teachers. John warned of false teachers. Jesus warned of false teachers. False teachers will always be with us, and if we let their smooth pitch overcome sound reason and Biblical clarity, we may descend into madness with them. Believers need to watch out for one another, and whenever they see false teaching rising in their church, they need to be willing to play the role of the “dumb ass” and confront those who are heading down the path to certain destruction.

*How would you suggest confronting a Sunday school teacher or Bible study leader who was becoming enthralled with false teaching?*

## 4 Particularly Vulnerable

2 Peter 2.17, 18

*<sup>17</sup>These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. <sup>18</sup>For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.*

**The Story:** Man, Peter just won't let this go! Here he alludes to the empty promises of whatever false teachers present. But the most important thing in these and the next several verses is to note who is particularly vulnerable to false teaching. Peter says that they will be enticed by false teaching whose fleshly passions are aroused. Now don't automatically think "Sex!" That's in there, at least for some of them. But think, "Stuff! Success! Power! Prestige!" as well, because these are equally horrible attractions of the flesh. They are vulnerable to such things who have known and pursued them most of their lives. Perhaps they are new believers and so have barely "escaped that kind of worldview and ambience. Or maybe they've been in the church for many years, but have never bothered to sink down roots in the Scriptures or to grow in a true relationship with Christ. So they remain, for all practical purposes, practicing non-believers, living like the people around them, except that they go to church. Such people won't watch out for themselves very well. Those with solid footing in the Word will have to look out for them.

**The Structure:** The true "wells" to which we should be aspiring as those of the Holy Spirit – Who causes rivers of living water to well up in us and overflow from us (Jn. 7.37-39). Notice that, in the divine economy, blessing flows from God, by His Word and Spirit, to us, and then through us to others, the return praise and glory to God. In the economy of false teachers, blessing flows from God, then through the things of the flesh and the world, to us. Period. Sure, we may feel generous and share some of our stuff with others. But that's not necessary – except, of course, to send our gifts and offerings to those who continue to lead us astray. Like Peter, I'm pretty much fed up with this routine.

*Do the teachings and practices of false teachers disgust and horrify you? Should they?*

## 5 Slaves of Passion

2 Peter 2.19, 20

*<sup>19</sup> While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. <sup>20</sup> For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.*

**The Story:** Peter is continuing to warn the particularly vulnerable, those who have just barely “escaped” a lifestyle of fleshly and material self-indulgence. False teachers promise liberty – freedom from want, from bad health, from chronic ailments, from loneliness or depression, from fear and misery. They make the “secrets” of their teaching the “key” to knowing such freedom. What they do instead is make people slaves of their desires. They breed covetousness, which is idolatry, rather than contentment in Christ. Instead of teaching contentment, hope, and trust, they encourage greed and inculcate want, nurturing loyalty to themselves as the way to true freedom. But this is the way to enslavement. The knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is eternal life (Jn. 17.3) and for which we are to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1.5-11), liberates us from any enslavement to conditions or things and sets us truly free in the Word and Spirit of God. Someone who has “tasted” this knowledge, and then wants to go back to what he knew before, is in danger of becoming enslaved to the flesh once again.

**The Structure:** What does it mean to really “know” Jesus Christ? Peter dealt with that in chapter 1. If we aren’t being “all the more diligent” (v. 10) to reinforce our initial knowledge of Christ with virtue, the pursuit of holiness, and love, then we have to wonder whether that “knowledge” we claim is true knowledge at all. This is tough talk. Peter does not mince words. He has no room for “tolerating” various opinions about what it means to be a Christian. It’s his way or the highway. Either we are slaves to Christ or we are slaves to our passions.

*How would you counsel a fellow Christian who seemed to you to be more “into” the things of the world than the things of Christ?*

## 6 Better? Really?

*2 Peter 2.21*

*<sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.*

**The Story:** What is this “holy commandment” that was delivered to those who have just barely escaped the ways of the flesh into the knowledge of Jesus Christ? Does Peter have some particular mandate in view, something which was addressed to all who declared themselves eager to come to Jesus Christ? If the commandment is holy, it comes from God Himself. And if it is holy it is designed to promote holiness. Holiness is a dramatic and progressive change of life in the direction of Christlikeness. When someone becomes a Christian, therefore, this holy commandment directs the believer to leave the past behind – the time for such folly being sufficient already (1 Pet. 4.3) – and to press on in the direction of becoming more like Christ. Stop chasing the ways of the flesh and start pursuing the ways of Christ. If this is the case, then it seems pretty clear that holy commandment can be reduced to one word: “Repent!” Turn back from that command, and, yes, your previous condition will only get worse.

**The Structure:** This is not a word with which contemporary Christianity is much identified. It sounds so old fashioned. So *demanding*. So, well, judgmental. Who are we to command anyone to repent of anything? Let him who is without sin, and so forth. But without repentance, there will be no holiness. And without holiness, none of us can expect to see the Lord (Heb. 12.14). If we will not preach and practice repentance, then we can only expect that the condition of the Church and its witness to our age will only become weaker and weaker.

*How would you explain to a new believer what it means to practice repentance?*

## 7 Dogs and Their Vomit

2 Peter 2.22

*22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*

**The Story:** Peter is a tough guy. He doesn't mince words. And the reason is because these are matters of life and death. People who profess to believe in Jesus and are "washed" in baptism, but then fall under the thrall of false teaching and turn back to indulge their fleshly ways demonstrate this much: They were never really saved at all. Sure, they had some "experience" of the Lord, and they professed to "believe" in Him. But that doesn't count for anything unless it is backed up by a life of repentance and seeking the Lord. Dogs eat their vomit; clean sows ultimately find their way to the mud again. Just so with those whose hearts have never truly been turned to the Lord. We may not like the way Peter puts it, but we'd better make sure his warning doesn't apply to us.

**The Structure:** We've endured an entire chapter of Peter warning us of the dangers of false teachers, of allowing ourselves to be enticed by passion and the flesh, and of clinging to a mere profession of faith as anything like true assurance of salvation. In this age of restoration, the purpose is to be *restored* and not just to know that we're going to heaven when we die. But restoration is hard work. It must be grounded in truth and pursued with diligence. It doesn't just happen. And there are plenty of dangers and temptations to distract those insufficiently grounded in the Word and Christ from making any real progress in the faith.

*How do you know that your profession of faith in Jesus Christ is true? How do you protect yourself against the allure of the vomit and the mire?*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. How are Bible teachers vetted in your church? What training do they receive in handling and teaching the Scriptures?
  
2. To what kinds of things do false teachers appeal today? Why are these things more appealing than the truth of God?
  
3. False teachers hold out empty promises, while the true Gospel holds out precious and very great promises (2 Pet. 1.4). What are those precious and very great promises? Why are they so much greater than the false promises of false teachers?
  
4. What would you suggest as a daily regimen of Scripture reading and study sufficient to equip us to recognize and resist the temptations of false teaching?
  
5. Why do you suppose more believers don't follow such a regimen? How can believers help and encourage one another in this matter?
  
6. What's one thing you can begin to do in order better to prepare yourself to guard against false teaching?

*Prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship, so that we can continue to make these and many other resources available to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.