

The Teachers of Error

2 Peter 2:4-22

Pastor John Miller

I have in my hands here prescription medicine. And yes, it's my prescription medicine. I won't tell you what it is, but it's kind of a blood-pressure type of medicine. But everyone knows that when you have prescription medicine, you shouldn't transfer it to other containers without a label on it; right? If you take it and put it in a Bayer aspirin bottle or you put it in a Motrin bottle, someone else may take medicine that's not prescribed for them. That could be deadly or that could be harmful. We know that as parents, we have to label poison and keep it safe and put it somewhere where our kids can't get it. We know that we need to lock it in a cabinet, and we want to make sure we tell them, "Don't touch this. It's poison and it's harmful and dangerous." Nothing could be more loving than keeping children away from poison or things that are detrimental to them and making sure those things are labeled properly.

I believe that's what Peter is doing in this second chapter. He's labeling false teachers as false teachers. Now the reason I introduced this message that way is because a lot of people don't think that's nice; we shouldn't tell anybody you're wrong, that's wrong or that's false or this is true. We should be tolerant of other people's views, and we should accept one another and there's no truth or error. There's just all truth, and all truth is God's truth and we will all go to heaven. We'll all be okay. All religions are the same. That's not what the Bible teaches.

Jesus said it this way: "I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father..."—gets to the Father—"...except through Me." There's only one way to get to God, and that's through Jesus Christ. And that's not because that's what I want or necessarily what I think. That's because what God has declared to be true in His Word.

Now I want you to notice, going back to chapter 2, verse 1, Peter says, "But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who shall privately bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

So we're looking at the teachers of error, the Old Testament false prophets, who came among the people—that's a reference to the children of Israel. But now in the New Testament we have teachers. They teach God's Word. And he said, "There shall be false teachers among you." And notice what they do: they bring in privately or with secrecy. And they "bring in destructive..."—the King James says "damnable"—"...heresies."

So we saw in verses 1-3, they come with deception. They come with denial, verse 1; they "deny the only Lord God that bought them." And then they come with sensuality, verse 2. It says, "Many shall follow their pernicious ways." The word "pernicious" means "immoral." Then they come with greed, verse 3. They're covetous. "And through covetousness shall they with feigned..."—or "plastic"—"...words make merchandise of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation lingers not." So we saw last Sunday, in verses 1-3, their

description: they're deceptive, they deny Christ, they're sensual and they are covetousness, or filled with greed.

But Peter's not finished with these false teachers yet. Peter wants to label them very clearly what they are. But he takes kind of a parenthesis from verse 4-9, and he speaks about their judgment or their condemnation. And there are three things we want to look at: their condemnation, verses 4-9; their true character, verses 10-16; and their claims, verses 17-22.

Let's look together first of all at their condemnation. Follow with me beginning in verse 4. Peter says, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell..."—the Greek word is "tartaros"—"...and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, and spared not..."—verse 5—"...the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person..."—or "eight people He saved"—"...a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly..."—and then the example in verse 6—"...turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes and condemned them with an overthrow, making them examples unto those that after should live ungodly." And then another example: "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." So He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah but saved Lot. "For that righteous man..."—verse 8—"...dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds. But the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations..."—"trials" or "testings" or "tribulations"—"...and to reserve the unjust unto the day of punishment"—or "judgment."

Now Peter gives three Old Testament examples or illustrations to prove one point: God will judge sin. And we need to remember that. God's not going to wink at it. He's not going to turn His back on it. He's not going to ignore it. God is holy and righteous. We love to speak about God's love and God's grace and God's mercy—and He is truly all of those things—but did you know what the chief attribute of God is declared in the Bible? Holiness. The one thing God wants us to know about Him is that He is a holy God. Not only holy but thrice holy. When the angels sang, we hear them singing "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty." He's thrice holy. God, in His holiness, hates and judges sin. And we can never compromise on that. He is a righteous and holy God, and one day there will be a day of reckoning when these false teachers shall be punished.

Peter gives us these three examples in verse 4; the example of angels that sin. We actually know very little about what Peter is saying here. We don't know exactly what angels they were, when they sinned and we don't know what their sin was. All we know is that they're angels, that they sinned and they're held in incarceration. It's called "tartaros," which is a compartment where God holds these fallen angels that are wicked, fierce and dangerous. He holds them in captivity until the day of judgment.

Now there are a few facts that we do know about angels. Satan himself is an angel, and he was created by God. He was Lucifer, which means "son of the morning," or some translate it "light bearer." And Lucifer, in his pride, wanted to exalt himself above God. You can read about it in Isaiah 14. It's called the "five I wills" of Satan: "I will be like God, I will exalt my throne

above God," et cetera. And he wanted to usurp himself above God. And as a result, God kicked him out of heaven. And what we have is called the "fall" of Satan. Now we don't know when in eternity past this took place, but we know God created him. He's not coequal, he's not eternal, he's not omnipresent—he doesn't know all things—he can't be everywhere at once. If you feel like Satan's hassling you, it's probably a demon, not Satan, because he's got bigger fish to fry. He's not after you, but he does have little helpers. Like Santa Claus has helpers, Satan has little helpers. But these are bad little helpers, these little demon people, and they're fallen angels.

So I said all that to say this: When Satan fell, other angels fell with him. Other angels rebelled with him. The Bible says one third of the angels fell with Satan. We don't know how many angels there were, so we don't know how many demons there are, but there're plenty. But some of those demons fell. And what sin Peter is talking about we don't know. Some say it's Genesis 6, when they think that demons cohabited with women. I don't hold that interpretation. Some say it was the original fall or rebellion. And they're just so wicked, they're held in captivity. Some say it was a different sin altogether. God has them in this place waiting for the final judgment. None of that is the issue from this Peter passage. The issue is if God judged angels, God is going to judge false teachers, because God is holy.

The second illustration is that of what theologians call the "antediluvian world," the world that existed before the flood of Noah, verse 5. And that's recorded for us in Genesis 6. And, by the way, I believe in the historicity of the book of Genesis. And I happen to believe that there really was a man named Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives. He really did build a great, big, old boat, there really was a flood, he was kept safe and he replenished the earth. I believe it's a real story; it's not a myth, it's not a fairy tale. And what's the message of that story? Because the wickedness of man had become so great, God, in His righteousness and holiness, decided to destroy all flesh upon planet earth.

So eight people—as the text mentions here, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives—survived, and then all the animals that came into the Ark. Do you know that Noah spent 120 years building that boat? And I think during that whole 120 years, he kept preaching, day after day after day after day. "Turn from your sin. There's coming a flood. God is going to judge the earth. Turn from your sin. Come into the Ark. Trust God." And people mocked it, laughed at it and ridiculed it until it began to rain. And then it was too late. The Bible said the Ark had only one door. And when Noah was safe, God, with His hand, shut that door.

You know, there is an Ark of safety for us today, and that Ark is Jesus Christ. Jesus is that one door, and when we run to Him, we're safe from the wrath of God. When Jesus died on the Cross, He took your penalty. He took your punishment. And now it's offered to you, but you must appropriate it by receiving it in faith. And if you reject that and say no to God, God's wrath will be poured out upon you. You will have to be judged by God, because God is holy and God judges sin. The context is the false teachers.

The third illustration, verses 6-9, is that of Sodom and Gomorrah. It's recorded in Genesis 18

and 19. And, again, I believe there were these two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. And because of their sexual immorality—homosexuality and sexual perversion—God judged Sodom and Gomorrah. Any other explanation to try to soften it or water it down or dilute it is twisting the Scriptures to suit your own sinful views. They were perverted sexually. They had come to the point where Paul says in Romans 1, they had “reprobate minds.” It means God gave them over to their own lust and desire until they had minds that do not work properly. They don’t know right from wrong. So God destroyed the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah. As Noah and his family were safe on the Ark before God’s wrath came down, so Lot was out of the city safely before God’s wrath came down. God knows how to deliver the righteous from the day of judgment.

And that’s a precedent we see through the Old Testament and on into the New Testament. By the way, this is one of the many reasons why I believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture. I believe the church “will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air” before God’s wrath is poured out on the earth. If God saved Noah and God saved Lot and God took Enoch home, He can take the church home. And we’re not appointed to wrath; amen? We are appointed to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He’s not going to pour out His wrath upon the bride, the church. We’ll be “caught up to meet the Lord in the air.”

But the point of this passage, in verse 9, is that “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations...”—and that word “temptation” could also be translated “tribulation”—“...and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment...” There is coming a day of judgment. So here we have their condemnation.

My second point, verses 10-16, is their character. And, again, it’s not a very pretty picture. And some of the character traits are repeated from the first three verses. But follow me beginning in verse 10 down to verse 16.

Peter says, “But chiefly...”—here is the chief characteristic of false teachers—“they walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness...”—that’s “sexual immorality”—“...and they despise government...”—or “authority”—“...They are presumptuous, self-willed...”—or “self-pleasing” or “self-seeking”—“...are not afraid of speaking evil of dignities....”—and I happen to believe that is a reference to angelic beings, which are now demons.—“...Whereas angels...”—verse 11—“...which are greater in power and might, bring not a railing accusation against them before the Lord.” So these false teachers are doing what angels don’t even do.

“But these...”—contrast, verse 12, these “false teachers”—“...as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of things they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption. And they shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the daytime.” Now when you riot at night, that’s bad. But when you riot in the daytime, that’s even worse. They are like “spots and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings, while they feast with you.” These were the agape or love feasts; we call them potlucks. They would gorge themselves in their feasts. “And having eyes...”—verse 14, how graphic this is—“...full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin, they beguile unstable souls,

and they have a heart that is exercised with covetous practices and are cursed children. They have forsaken the right way and have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity, the dumb donkey speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet."

Now we covered there a lot of verses, but I want to point out to you the chief characteristic in verse 10. They "walk after the flesh." You see that? Now what does that mean? He's not saying that they have human bodies, because you might read that and ask, "Well, how else do you walk but after the flesh?" But he's using the word meaning "sinful desires." They walk after their sinful, carnal, fleshly nature. When you were born the first time into the world, you came not only in a body, but you came with a sin nature. If you are a parent, you know what I'm talking about. You teach your kids to tell the truth. You don't have to train them to lie; right? It just flows. It just comes naturally. Why? Because they're little sinners. "Not my little angel!" Yes; your "little angel" needs to be saved.

And these people have never been born again. They don't have the Spirit of God. They're not children of God. They're cursed children. We're going to see in the last verse of this chapter, they're like dogs or pigs. They're not true sheep or children of God. They haven't really been regenerated; they have not the Spirit. So they're false teachers because they are false believers. Remember Jesus said, "Beware of wolves, which come to you in..."—what?—"... sheep's clothing." Jesus warned us that they would look like Christians, talk like Christians, act like Christians and they might even smell like Christians. But they're not Christians. They don't have the Holy Spirit; they haven't been born again. They come with their pretense.

Now I want you to notice the characteristics of walking after the flesh. First, it's their arrogance, verses 10 and 11. They're arrogant. They speak evil of things they understand not. They're "presumptuous." They're "self-willed." They "despise government." Now I believe in the context, he's talking about angelic beings, and even demon beings. They're cocky and proud and self-assertive, and many times when they are preaching, they're binding Satan.

I get a lot of questions about what it means to bind the devil. When Jesus said, "Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven"—if you look that up in any good Greek commentary or Greek manuscript, you find out that what it's actually saying is that "Whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven. And whatever they bind in heaven is already bound on earth." It's God Who does the binding. Not us. We can only declare what God has done. And I believe that when it comes to the devil, I don't see any clear teaching in the Bible that I bind the devil. I believe God can do it and Jesus can do it. When the devil knocks on my front door, guess what I do? I have Jesus answer the door. I don't go, "Okay, Jesus, You stay right here. The devil's at the door; watch me take care of him." The Lord would go, "I don't want to see." Who do you think you are binding the devil? If you could bind the devil, then bind him. Period. Get rid of him. You can't do that; only God can bind the devil.

And even Michael the Archangel in the book of Jude, when he was contending over the body of Moses and he was arguing with the devil—the mighty Michael the Archangel said to the devil,

"The Lord rebuke thee." So he let Jesus answer the door. He put Jesus between him and the devil. Even Michael doesn't speak lightly and flippantly of these truths, these things they don't understand.

The word "dignities," as I said, I believe are reference to angels. The New Living Translation renders that "spiritual beings." And when it says they "despise government," I believe that's authority. They despise not only divine authority, they also reject government authority and authority within the church.

The second way their flesh manifested is in their brutishness, verse 12. It says, "These, as natural brute beasts." I looked up the word "brutishness" before I used it here in my point. It means "animal like." It means they are like an animal, a dumb animal. They just live according to their instincts rather than what is right.

Thirdly, notice in verse 13, they live in debauchery. And as I pointed out, they also love unrighteousness, and they choose to make it "a pleasure to riot in the daytime." They riot in the daytime. So they're living in debauchery. The word means they're "living in luxury and softness and extravagance." And it conveys not only the idea of luxury, softness and extravagance but sensual, including sexual perversion in their luxurious living. They are sensual and extravagant. I believe many times these false teachers can be noticed because all the time they talk about extravagant living, luxurious living: cars, boats, planes, houses, rings, watches, money, money, money, money, money, money and more money.

There is nothing wrong with being wealthy, in and of itself. God may bless you with wealth, but that's a great responsibility. It takes a steady hand to hold a full cup. It's a responsibility. You're going to give an account to God of what He's entrusted to you. Let me tell you what my firm conviction is. Nowhere in the Bible are Christians promised or guaranteed health and wealth. It's not there. I know there are verses they like to take out of context, but that's what they're good at. They like to twist them. They like to misapply them. There's no teaching in the Bible that if you're a Christian you'll never get a stuffy nose or you'll never get a toothache or you'll never get a stomachache or you'll never have cancer.

One of the members of our church came up to me after first service who was just diagnosed with cancer. And we prayed, and I believe God can heal. But I can't promise them that God will heal them. I can't guarantee God will heal them until they go to heaven, and they get a new body; amen? When I die and go to heaven, I'm not going to deal with sickness anymore—any infirmities or any weaknesses. I'm going to have a new body. You're going to have a new body. Some of us need new bodies. These tents are leaning right now. They're flapping in the wind. It's time for a new body; amen?

But nowhere does it say that godliness is a way to get rich. "God will bless you. You follow Biblical principles and you'll prosper. God will take care of you." But He's promised to take care of our needs and not our greeds. The problem here is that they're greedy. They believe that godliness is a way to get rich. And they emphasize faith; if you had enough faith, you could be

wealthy and you could be healthy. Now I'm not saying that these men are heretics, but I'm saying that's not taught in the Bible. It's aberrant; it's not sound teaching. It's not Biblical. So they come to teach soft living: prosperity and health. "I'm a King's kid; I outta drive a nice car." That's fine and wonderful, but Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have nowhere to lay my head."

I read one book from one guy who said Jesus was rich, Jesus had a house and Jesus had a big house. Really! I was fascinated by that. Well, how does he prove that Jesus had a house? You remember what Jesus said to Peter, James, John, Andrew and the Apostles when Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, where dwellest thou?" Jesus said, "Come and see." "There you go; Jesus had a house and it was big." Wow! That's deep. How do you get all that from Jesus saying, "Come and see"? He probably showed him a spot under a tree in the Garden of Gethsemane. "See my bed roll right there? Right under that third tree from the left. That's where I live. That's where I crash every night. Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but I don't have anywhere to lay my head." And Jesus said, "If you come after Me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me."

Jesus didn't own a house. You say, "Well, if He invited His Apostles over—there were a bunch of them—it must have been a big house or He wouldn't have invited them over." How do you know He invited them to a house? You're just guessing. It doesn't say that. "Well, He had a garment that was seamless. It was real nice so Jesus must have been rich." You don't know if someone might have given Him that garment, that it wasn't something He purchased. Jesus said that He came to identify with the poor. When He was born, He was born in a stable, so that no one would think He's too high to approach. But people come and they live in luxury.

And then, number four, they live in sensuality and greed, verse 14. "Having eyes full of adultery." You know what that means? I was shocked when I looked it up in the Greek. It literally means "eyes full of adulterous women." It means they view every woman they see as a potential adulterous. And you can look at some modern translations, and they convey that meaning. The New Living Translation does it quite well. Every woman they look at they see as a potential adulterous. Their eyes are full of adultery, because they're living sensually.

And then in verse 14, they seduce "unstable souls." It's translated "beguile" in the King James Bible. The word "beguile" or "seduce" means literally "to catch with bait." So they use trickery to draw people into their sexual perversions.

And then they are greedy. They are full of greed, verse 14, and they are "cursed children." Again, I believe, an affirmation that they are not true children of God. They are not Christians.

And then, lastly and fifthly, verses 15 and 16, they are covetous. He gives us another Old Testament story, which I happen to believe—a story from Numbers 22, which is a story about Balaam and his donkey. You could title that Dumb and Dumber. You had a dumb donkey and a dumber prophet. It says, verse 15, they "have forsaken the right way..."—by the way, I have circled and underlined the phrase "the right way." That means there's a right way and there's a

wrong way. This is the way of Balaam—"...gone astray following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." There is the way of Balaam: he loved money, he loved riches, he wanted to get rich. But it says he "was rebuked for his iniquity..."—verse 16 —"...the dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice forbade the madness..."—or "the dumbness"—"...of the prophet."

Don't you love the story of Balaam? It's recorded in Numbers 22 where Balak, the king of Moab, wanted to curse the children of Israel. They had come into the land, and he wanted to curse them. So he calls for the prophet, Balaam, who was not an Israelite but a Moabite. So he calls for Balaam and he says, "Hey, can you curse these people for me?" And Balaam says, "Look, king. I'd really like to, but I can't because they're God's people. They're chosen, special people of God. You can't just curse them." So the king sent a lot of money on the back of a donkey to Balaam a second time and said, "Balaam, if you will do this, I'll give you all this gold, silver and all of this money." When Balaam saw this donkey loaded down with all this money, he thought, "Hmmm. Maybe I should reconsider this." That's when he began to go wrong. The moment you begin to consider something you know is not God's will, you're in trouble. Not only did he begin to think about it, but the more he looked at the donkey and his loot, he started to pray. And he asked, "God, can I please go? Please! Oh, God, look at all that money! And please, in Jesus' name! I want that money. Please, Lord, let me have it!"

Do you know it's a big mistake to pray about things that God has already said no to? I can't tell you how many times I've talked to somebody who said, "I really prayed about it. God told me it was okay to divorce my wife and run off with this other woman. Because I prayed about it and I had a peace." "No, you didn't." Those are the people I want to pastorally slap. Can I just give you a pastor's slap right now? "Wake up, dude." "But I just had this peace, and whenever I'm with this woman there's such electricity and there's such, aww." Slap that dude.

And you pray, "Oh, Lord, if it's your will that we rob this bank, just go before us. We'll give you 10%." Yeah. "Just may our getaway be smooth, in Jesus' name." "It ain't gonna happen, dodo bird!" You'll be in Sing Sing wondering, "Why didn't God answer my prayer?" "Because you're stupid!" That's why. God already said no. He said, "Don't do that."

We don't need to pray about greed or covetousness or sexual immorality. God already said this is My will: your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality. It's clear in the Bible. "Thou shalt not lie. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet." I don't need to pray about those things. God has already told me His will. It's black and white in the Scriptures.

Now back to our story. Balaam says, "Lord, please let me go." I don't quite understand, but God said, "Okay, you go, but you only tell them what I want you to say." Some call that the permissive will of God. "God, let me go." And he's all excited. "Ah, I'm going to be rich! I'm going to be rich!" He's jamming along the road on his donkey, and then an angel appears on the path to block the donkey. Balaam can't see the angel, but the donkey is smarter than the prophet. The donkey can see more than him. So the donkey crashes into the cliff and smashes Balaam's foot. And he kicks his donkey and is beating his donkey. And then finally the angel is

standing there with a drawn sword, and the donkey just falls down on the ground. And the prophet, Balaam, just jumps up and flips out, just kicking, hitting and screaming and yelling at his poor, little donkey. Then the donkey spoke. You go, “You really believe that, Pastor John?” Yes, I do.

People often ask me if our pets will be in heaven. I hope this donkey is, because I want to talk to that guy! What a cool donkey. I grew up on Mr. Ed, the Talking Horse, so I love this story. This is awesome! This is the real deal. Hollywood, you know. “Haven’t I always been a good donkey? Haven’t I always been faithful? What’s the deal? Why are you beating me?” “I do well to beat you, you dumb beast! My foot’s killing me!” And then his eyes were immediately opened, and he saw this angel with a drawn sword. “I’ll go back! I’ll go back! Sorry, Lord.” The Lord said, “No. You go ahead, but you only speak what I put in your mouth.” And then every time he got on the hill and started to speak, God put a blessing in his mouth. Balak the king said, “No, no, no, no, no, dude! I didn’t hire you to bless them. I hired you to curse them! Well, maybe it’s this mountain. Maybe the angle has something to do with it. Let’s try a different angle. Maybe this mountain is a better one.” But he spoke and he blessed them.

Balaam said, “Look, king. It’s futile. This is God’s people. No way am I going to curse them. But I want to tell you what you can do to bring a curse on them.” The story’s not over yet. Balaam said, “You send some of your Moabite women in among the men of Israel. And you get them to seduce these men and bring them into their tents, and the moment they get in there with these Moabite women, these Moabite women will bring out their little gods. They bring out these little god statues to the god of Moab, and if you do that, they’ll begin to worship them and there’ll be a curse brought upon them.”

So there’s two things that always go together: idolatry and immorality. Now the way of Balaam is covetousness, but the doctrine of Balaam is idolatry. So there is covetousness and idolatry, and he uses that as an example of these false teachers, that they are covetous.

Now the third and last point I want to make in verses 17 to 22 is their false claims. They make claims that cannot be delivered, and I’ll show you the reasons why. Let’s finish verses 17 to 22. “These are wells without water. They are carried with a tempest to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever. When they speak they speak with great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them...”—that’s the key, verse 19—“...liberty...”—everyone wants to be free—“...they themselves...”—that is, the false teachers—“...are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of this world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. It happened unto them according to the true proverb...”—he’s quoting from Proverbs 26:11—“...‘The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that has been washed to her wallowing in the mire.’”

Now the false teachers' claims were that they claimed and promised them liberty, verse 19. "You want to be free? Then follow us." "But they themselves were the servants of corruption." Only Jesus Christ can set you free from sin, from Satan and from self. If you've got a true preacher, a true teacher of the Word, he's going to point you to Jesus Christ. Not to himself but to Jesus, because Jesus is the answer to our problems. Right here, this morning, only Jesus Christ can set you free from your lust and your greed and your anger and your hatred and your bitterness and your jealousy and your unforgiveness and from your sin. Only Jesus Christ can set you free. Only Jesus Christ can make you a new creation. "Old things pass away. All things become new." Jesus Christ can give you eternal life. He's "the way, the truth and the life." We're lost, He's the way. We're ignorant, He's the truth. We're dead, He's the life. And it only comes from Him, and you need to trust in Him and look to him to be saved. Amen? So these false teachers make these professions.

But notice what they are like. In verse 17, they are like "wells without water." What good is a well without water? Empty, dry well. Remember the western movies in which the cowboys are out riding in the desert, and they see what they think is an oasis or well and they run up to the well and they drop the bucket in and dust comes out? What a disappointment. Maybe you're thirsty and you go to a drinking fountain. It's broken and there's no water there. That's what these false teachers are like; they promise but they can't deliver.

And then he says they are like clouds, but they bring no rain. Now we know about that in this area. It doesn't rain that much. And we're wanting rain and we see clouds coming and we say, "Hey! Look at the clouds. It's going to rain! Oh, it didn't rain." And the rain clouds just blow right through; right? It happens all the time. "Hey! It looks like it's going to rain!" No, it doesn't rain. The clouds blow right by. They promise but they don't deliver. This is what these false teachers are like.

Then notice, verse 18, when they speak, they use "great swelling words of vanity." I could say a whole lot about this, and I have to guard myself here. But a lot of times we put the focus on method, style and not on content. I'm all for somebody who is gifted as a great speaker. They can communicate and they're captivating and they're exciting and they use humor and illustrations and they're fun and they're wonderful and all that stuff, but the question is, what content do they have? I hear people say all the time, "Oh, they're such a good speaker. Oh, they're so dynamic. They're so powerful. Oh, they just preach up a storm." "Really? What do they preach on?" "I don't know, but it was so good." "Oh, I heard this preacher on television, and he was so dynamic." "Really. What did he preach on?" "I don't know but it was really good. Everyone was clapping, cheering, shouting and yelling. It was so exciting." And then you interview them five minutes after church. "What did he preach on?" "I don't know but it was good." We're all about style, but we have no focus on content.

Now I realize you can have content and be boring. That's not good. But if I had to choose between the two, content is far more important than style. Truth over just the style of my preaching. There has to be content. When you listen to a preacher, ask yourself, "Is what he is saying Biblical?" Not from the Bible, because they use verses—they use them out of context—

but is it Biblical? In other words, is it true in light of all the Scriptures teach? Is it Scriptural? Not, did he use verses? "Oh, he used a verse. He quoted a verse." Yah, one or two from different places out of context, misinterpreted and misapplied. He's using the Bible as a pretext to convey his own meaning. He's actually writing from the Scriptures instead of submitting to the Scriptures.

I love the illustration of the drunk who leans on the light post. He comes out of the bar and he's totally—I guess I shouldn't try to impersonate him too much. "Pastor John, you're pretty good at that." But this dude comes out, he's drunk and there's this light post and he leans on this light post. "Thank God for this light post." Is that what light posts are for? For drunk people to lean on? Is that why we put light posts out on the sidewalk? No. They're to give light. And we have a bunch of people who take Scripture, and they lean on it. They use it for what it's not intended for. It's not there for you to lean on; it's there to give light. God Word is to give us light. Not just to whip up a big, exciting message, and so forth. I travel to other churches and talk to pastors about preaching, and this is one of the things I talk to them about: make sure there is Biblical content. You're preaching the Word. They preach "great swelling words," verse 18.

It reminds me of the story of a church where a guest preacher came, and he really preached up a storm and the people were so impressed with his dynamic oratory skills. But there was a humble, native-American Indian in the church who was a Christian. "What did you think of the preacher today?" This native Indian said three things: "High wind, big thunder, no rain." And that's what I would say about a lot of preaching. "High wind, big thunder, no rain"; they promise but they don't deliver. Verse 19, they "promise them liberty, but they themselves are the servants of bondage."

Then I want you to notice that not only do they make false promises, they also make false professions, in closing, verses 20 and 21. "They have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior." It would have been better for them to have never known than to have once known and then to be "entangled again" at the beginning. Now that doesn't mean that they were saved. That means that they were reformed. And you are foolish to not acknowledge and understand that a person can look like a Christian and act like a Christian and talk like a Christian, and he can have all the Christian exterior and not be a Christian. Just because you are at church here today listening to this message doesn't make you a Christian. You could be baptized and not be a Christian. You could have a Bible and read it and not be a Christian. You can sing songs and not be a Christian. So they know the truth, but they turn away.

An apostate is a person who has never been born again. They were never regenerated. They just have the outward trappings. And I believe that happens even in our church. There are people who come, they maybe accept Christ, but they weren't really born again, there wasn't true repentance, they didn't trust Christ, they weren't really saved, they didn't get the Holy Spirit, they looked like a Christian for a few months, and then they fall away. People go, "What happened? They lost their salvation?" No; they never had their salvation. "Well, they backslid." They never "front slid." Can people backslide? Yes. Only God knows the heart, but there are a

lot of people who never really get saved.

One of my greatest fears as the pastor of this church is that people will come here and be lulled into complacency thinking that all is well with their soul, believing they are going to heaven, but they haven't really been born again. That's not going to get you to heaven. You must be born again. "That which is flesh, is flesh. That which is spirit, is spirit." Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. It's not being religious; it's having a relationship. It's not having a reformation; it's having an inner transformation.

So they knew the truth. It's like the house that is clean and swept. Jesus talked about the house that was clean and swept, cast the demon out and then the demon goes back and he looks in the window. It's clean and he says, "There's no one there. It's empty!" He goes out and invites seven demon buddies. "Hey, come. The house is open and clean." So he goes back in, and now the person is worse than the beginning. You're better off never having known the truth, because knowledge brings responsibility. Now that you have that knowledge and turn away from it, you're going to be responsible for it. So they are "professors" but they are not "possessors." Judas Iscariot, even Jesus' disciple—they had one man who was a "Judas," who wasn't real, who wasn't genuine. I don't believe Judas was saved. He wasn't authentic. He wasn't real. It wasn't genuine.

And then he likens it unto the proverb and the fact that lunch is coming very soon—I won't go into it. "The dog sniffs back for its vomit, and the pig that has been washed, goes back to wallowing in its mire." You can take a pig and give it a bath and put a tuxedo on it. You ever seen a pig in a tuxedo? You know what you have? A pig in a tuxedo. And the minute that pig has an opportunity, it's going to go right back into the mud. You put a pig in a tuxedo, it doesn't say, "Huh, I will not get dirty now that I am clean and dressed." Put a little perfume on it, and it begins to behave like a person. No. It's going to act like a pig. Why? Because it is a pig. It hasn't been changed.

Have you been changed? Have you been given a new nature in Christ? You're not a Christian because you reformed, because you stopped doing bad things. You're just like a dressed-up pig in a tuxedo. You need a new nature. You need to be born again. And if there's anyone here this morning who doesn't know for sure that they are a child of God—if you're here right now and you don't know that if you died you'd go to heaven, I don't want you to leave here without an opportunity to receive Jesus Christ and to be saved. If there is any doubt in your heart—if God's Spirit is speaking right now to your heart, and you know that you haven't really repented and trusted Jesus, and you know you haven't really surrendered to Him and been saved, now is acceptance time. Today is "the day of salvation." The Bible says, "If you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts."

So let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.