

## 2 Peter 2:15-22

“It’s Not About Reformation, It’s About Regeneration”

We find ourselves this morning picking back up pretty much in the center of this section that deals with the depravity of deceitful teachers and our *responsibility* to be able to detect them. We’re to realize that they’re in our midst and we’re to know the word of God (with in its proper context) so that we can discern when dots aren’t really connecting, when things aren’t adding up, when something isn’t right with what I’m being told or taught. The book of Hebrews tells us, “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” Heb 4:12 The word of God discerns the inner man, the motive of man’s heart; it’s God’s word that’s going to enable you to discern subtleties, that will expose the nuances of something that’s being said or shared that isn’t of the Lord.

Don’t automatically assume that false teachers are going to stand out in some obvious form or fashion. They’re very subtle, very slow in their approach; they take *pains* practice the art of deception waiting for just the right time, the opportune moment to take advantage of you. It’s your responsibility to be aware *of* it, to be alert *to* it and be able to recognize a twisting of the scripture. Remember who it is that’s enticed, who it is that takes their bait? The answer is found in Vs 14, “unstable souls.” Or to understand that another way; weak and anemic believers, easily tossed to and fro by every wind or wave of doctrine that blows through the church; people who aren’t rooted and grounded in the word of God; it’s no wonder that the Jesus underscored the scripture saying, “*It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’*” Matt 4:4 When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he was informing them of God’s giving gifts to the church in the form of Pastor teachers and evangelists who would build on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles. Why? Why did God give to the church men gifted by His Spirit to share with them and show to them the things of God’s word? He said that it was for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry; what else? “*...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*” Eph 4:14 It’s amazing the subtle scams that people will come up with in order to get your money or to gain some form of platform or influence in your life.

Peter calls them *spots* and *blemishes*; exposing them as absolute reprobates that carouse in their own deceptions, having eyes full of adultery, that cannot cease from sin, they look to capitalize on the vulnerability of others having a heart *trained* in covetous practices and they are accursed children.

Vs15-16

“The way of Balaam;” this man Balaam is mentioned 3 times toward the end of the NT. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter calls attention to the *way* of Balaam, Jude mentions the *error* of Balaam and Rev Ch 2 calls attention to the *doctrine* of Balaam, each one emphasizing a different nuance of the depravity of this man, Balaam. What is the *way* of Balaam? Well, if we simply keep the context of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter Ch 2 we quickly realize that the reference is to that of *greed* and *covetousness*.

Balaam was one who was willing to lead others in a wrong way and teach people how to invoke God’s wrath upon His people and place a stumbling block in front of them for the sake of His own material gain. The “way of Balaam is” is the covetousness of one who will do a “religious service” purely for the sake of personal profit.

If you’re not familiar with the account of Balaam you do well to read over it and be familiar with it. You’ll find it in the book of Numbers Ch’s 22-24. Israel was encamped upon the borders of Moab. Balak (the king of Moab) is freaking out, he’s afraid because Israel has been destroying, in fact demolishing various nations along the way to the Promised Land being an instrument of judgment in the hands of God. Balak is afraid that they’re next, so he sends for Balaam (this mysterious man that God had some dealings with who wasn’t of the children of Israel) and he says, “Come curse the children of Israel for me, because I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed.” God tells Balaam, “Don’t go with these people and don’t curse Israel for they are blessed.” Balaam says, “I can’t go” they report to the king, the king sends more dignified people, higher ranks in greater abundance, he’s really buttering Balaam up, sends silver and gold and says, “Please I can give you whatever you want.” Balaam says, “Though Balak were to give me his house *full* of silver and gold I couldn’t go beyond the word of the Lord (hint hint).”

Long story short eventually God says, “Go, but don’t you dare say a thing that I don’t tell you to say!” Balaam hops on his donkey and proceeds to go; which *angered* the Lord. Now I don’t pretend to know the details that surround it all but have you ever had a child bug you and bug you about something and they know you don’t want them to do it but they won’t stop nagging you so eventually you say, “Look, just go” and even though they know you don’t want them to, they’re like “Thanks dad,” or “Thanks mom” and they take off? It just makes you mad, because they know your heart but persist in their own way. That was Balaam.

So the Angel of the Lord steps in front of the donkey, the donkey sees it Balaam doesn't. The donkey turns off the road to avoid the encounter, Balaam begins to beat the donkey to get it back on the road. The Angel again gets in the way, has his sword unsheathed and it's between 2 vineyards with a wall on each side, the donkey presses to 1 side and crushes Balaam's foot. Again he beats the donkey, a 3<sup>rd</sup> time the Angel gets between 2 things that they're passing through so that there's no room to maneuver. The donkey just lies down and refuses to move and Balaam begins to beat the donkey with his staff. God opens the donkey's mouth and the donkey is all, "Why do you keep beating like this!" with out missing a beat Balaam says, "Because you keep abusing me, not obeying me, if I had a sword I'd kill you right now!" He just converses with the donkey!

You know you're irate when an animal talks to you and that doesn't weird you out. You just talk back; you've lost it, you're officially out of your mind! That's why Peter speaks here of the donkey rebuking Balaam's iniquity with a man's voice restraining the *madness* of the prophet.

2 Things, #1 Balaam was so set on his sin, so focused on his gain that he was losing his grip spiritually. Be careful of covetousness, godliness with *contentment* is great gain, but fueling covetousness under the covering of godliness has been the ruin of many, many men.

Paul told Timothy, "*Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" 1 Tim 6:6-10 "The way of Balaam."

When you read through that portion of Numbers it almost appears as if Balaam made it out ok. He went to Balak, blessed the children of Israel a few times and seemingly that was it, he left. A few Ch's later however you come to realize that before Balaam left he told Balak, "Look, I can't curse them, because God has blessed them. But here's what you can do, send your women down into their camp, introduce them to your gods, have your women seduce them, and sleep with them, it'll invoke God's wrath upon them." That's what Balak did and Balaam's counsel worked; God sent a plague throughout the camp and thousands of Israelites died and God held Balaam accountable for that, it cost him his life. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, if he loses his own soul? "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Don't be blindsided by covetousness, don't set yourself so steadfast upon your sin that you'll sacrifice a relationship with God, don't follow after the way of Balaam.

#2 Be encouraged by the fact that God used even a dumb donkey to speak into a situation from His position. Why? Because if God can/will use even a dumb donkey, than surely He can use me... God can use anything, or anyone; if you're willing He is able to empower you, to open your mouth and fill it with His word to speak into someone's life.

Again I would point out that when he speaks here of "forsaking the right way" it's a reference to knowing the truth, simply choosing to reject it, walk away from it and abandon it for the sake of some personal gain. Be it money, or some sin that you've set yourself on that you refuse to repent of or whatever. We're not to pattern our lives according to the course of this world, but rather our lives are to be patterned after the person of Jesus Christ

Vs17

Peter here employs 2 illustrations to liken these men to along with the ultimate ramifications of their ways. He says they're like clouds that promise rain but are carried away by a tempestuous wind, they're like wells that have no water. Literally he speaks of them being like springs with no water, just an empty channel with nothing flowing into or out through it.

Here's the point; people are thirsty, they're thirsting for something in life that will satisfy them, that will bring some sense of completion to them and these guys, these gals are like wells with out water, they're like clouds carried away by the wind. There may be flash and flare, lots of noise and fanfare however the fact of the matter is that they're full of false promise, full of false hope with no true capacity to meet the deep need of your heart and satisfy that deep inner thirst of your soul. They've got nothing to give you because they themselves are empty...

Deep with in the heart of every man (all mankind) there is a thirst for something more than what this life has to offer. There is a restlessness that longs for rest; Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

Oh people will try to satisfy that thirst in all kinds of ways, they drink from the well of success, they drink from the well of debauchery, they drink from the well of various relationships or overly active lives. They'll drink from the well of entertainment and escape, but it's all like a grasping for the wind, just out of reach, just beyond the grasp. They search and they search and they search only to come up...empty.

One day Jesus was speaking to a Samaritan woman at a well; and He said, "*Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*" John 4:13-14

Now when He said that this is what He was saying, “Whoever drinks [present tense ‘keeps on drinking’] of this water [in whatever well of this life you choose to draw from] will thirst again [it won’t satisfy you, not ultimately, not indefinitely] but whoever drinks [that is takes one drink once and for all] of the water that I shall give him will *never* thirst,” Did you catch the contrast? You can drink as often as you like and as much as you want from the wells of this world, this life and you’ll never find satisfaction, but if you through faith take one drink of the Living Waters that Christ stands to offer you, you will be satisfied *forever*...

What Jesus stands to offer you, you will not find in the wells of this world. It’s no wonder then that on the last day, that great day of the feast Jesus stood and cried out saying, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” John 7:37-38

These guys are wells with out water, clouds carried by a tempest (notice) for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. By the way that word forever, it’s a word of *finality*, it speaks of *permanency*, something sealed for *eternity*. Throughout 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter Ch 2 Peter has exposed the deceitful teachers *motivation* (greed, covetousness, self indulgence) he’s exposed it’s outward *manifestation* (deceitful/destructive doctrines which lead people astray) and here he shares with us the ultimate *ramifications* of their ways. There’s a reservation awaiting them, a place reserved for them in the blackness of darkness forever...

Contrary to popular opinion this life is not the end, it’s only the beginning, eternity is in store for every living soul; and for those who refuse to come to the light there is the blackness of darkness forever. How critical it is that we repent of our sin and come to Jesus Christ

Vs18-19

In a different context Jesus spoke of the blind leaders of the blind, here in similar fashion they promise to lead into the light while they themselves are in darkness, how can the blind offer sight, how can a slave offer freedom? They promise liberty, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. How then are they able to attract anyone to follow them?

Notice they speak, “Great swelling words of emptiness” today we’d say it like this, “They’re full of hot air!” Literally this translates that they speak “inflated words that say nothing” they’re great with spiritual rhetoric, they’re very eloquent, very articulate, they’re masters in crafting their words in such a way as to engage and entertain you. It’s sad to say but it’s true, many people can’t tell the difference between a religious scam artist and a genuine servant of Jesus Christ!

Listen, refuse to be impressed by religious oratory. Should a teacher of the word do his very best to communicate? Absolutely.

Should he seek to craft his words in such a way as to maintain the interest of the listener? Of course, but at the end of the day it's not the eloquence or the oratory skill of the man behind the pulpit to which we anchor our soul...

Paul the apostle was very careful to not build his converts' faith upon either his words or his wisdom. He said, "*I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*" 1 Cor 2:1-5 Now Paul was a brilliant man, do you think eloquence was within his grasp? I do, yet he kept his ministry very simple, very practical. He preached (listen) he preached to *express* not to *impress*. He knew the difference between *communication* and *manipulation* and when he taught it was for the purpose of *communication* not *manipulation*, there's a big difference.

These guys will appeal to the lusts of your flesh, they'll want to satisfy some carnal appetite within you under the banner of liberty. He says there that they "allure" (that is bait you) through the lusts of the flesh, perhaps your pride. Telling you that you're basically a good person or they'll seek to justify some other sin in your life, telling you what you want to hear, they'll scratch your itching ears. They won't use words like sin, or repentance, they don't want you to know that in you, that is your flesh no good thing dwells, that you're lost and in need of a Savior. They'll appeal to your ego or some other area that's got a grip on you and help you to feel better about that. Perhaps you recall there in John 14 when Jesus spoke of the ruler of this world (Satan) and He said that he had nothing in Him. That is Satan found nothing, no fallen nature in the Lord to allure Him through, to seek to bait Him by, however you and I have a fallen nature.

They allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness the ones "who have actually escaped" from those who live in error. Or we could also understand that to say that they are actually escaping, meaning that they're in the process of escape, why note the difference? Because some will say that these are new believers, others will say that they are those who are beginning to take an interest in the things of God, they're beginning to pull out of the pollutions of the world and considering Christ, but while they're vulnerable, open and searching; they get snatched. Either way the point remains that they prey on the weak, the immature and ungrounded.

Now the difference lies in the fact of whether or not you believe someone can walk away from a relationship with the Lord and forfeit their salvation. If you don't believe that, you probably lean toward the thought that they're considering Christ but haven't committed, if you *do* believe that than you might lean toward the fact that these people are new believers.

But the appeal (Vs 19) is to liberty, that it's ok to do this or do that and you can still be right with God. Yet the bible says, "*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh,*" Gal 5:13 that is, don't say, "Hey I can do whatever I want, I'm free in Christ!" Yeah, you're free *from* sin, not free *to* sin. Remember this Vs? Rom 6:2, "*How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*" When someone dies they cease to be active in this world. Even so in Christ you've died to sin, you're no longer to be active in the world of sin, having been set free from sin now you're to be a slave of righteousness. Do yourself a favor and read Rom Ch 6 in its entirety, it might take you 2-3 minutes, but if you let it soak in...it'll change your life.

You'll begin to understand practical holiness and what it means to honor God with the everyday aspects of life. Believe me when I tell you that, that is of paramount importance because if not you'll find yourself sliding back into old habits, old patterns of life becoming entangled and ensnared in them again and in the end it'll be worse, not better. Notice

Vs 20

Beware of the "deceitfulness of sin" (Heb:13). Somehow and in some way it always promises liberty but always brings bondage, it promises life but brings death, it will bind you, blind you and grind you; often times people entangled in sin believe that they're free and it's not until they're life is completely destroyed that they discover that they're prisoners of their own appetites. Deceitful teachers bring bondage through lies, Jesus brings freedom through truth; it's truth (Christ) that makes you free, the word of God will break chains and work deliverance in your life, the Holy Spirit will liberate you and release you from the shackles of sin.

Now again those who tell you that these people were never saved will split the hair between the words "pollution" and "corruption" they've escaped the pollution, but not the corruption, there's been some moral reformation, but not spiritual regeneration. I think that either way you stand we would all agree that life in Christ is not about *reformation* (a new set of moral values) it's about *regeneration*, a transformed life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Where do I stand on this particular passage? Truthfully I've volleyed back and forth on it for various and sundry reasons, to me it's all the more reason to make your calling and election sure, to do what you got to do to draw near *to* the Lord and ground yourself *in* the Lord, the safety zone is to abide in Christ!

Is it possible to experience reformation apart from regeneration? Absolutely, Jesus spoke of that; He said, “*When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*” Matt 12:43-45 This guy experienced reformation, things got cleaned up and set in order in his life for a season, but not having experienced regeneration, not filling the void with Christ, in the end it was worse for him than had he not sought the reformation in the 1<sup>st</sup> place.

It’s not uncommon to see people recognize that things are out of line in their lives, and perhaps they’re crying over it, wanting something to change and so seek to reform some things, do away with this and begin doing that. But they’ve not truly said “yes” to Jesus, they’ve sought to somehow get what they consider to be the best of both worlds or something and ultimately they slide back down into that pit of despair, depression and bondage in worse way than before.

Remember when Jesus said that to whom much is given, much more will be required? Every time you come into the awareness of the word of God, the ways of God, and the heart of God yet you choose to willfully persist in your own sin, you leave in a worse position than when you arrived. Because you’ve been made aware of God’s heart for you, yet you’ve opted to reject His word, and walk in rebellion...you guys that’s the truth.

We talked last time about the fact that people don’t consider the *end* of their ways, they trade the eternal for the temporal. Deut 32:29, “*Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, That they would consider their latter end!*”

You’re open *to* the Lord, you come into the knowledge *of* the Lord, you perhaps are even open to and/or are seeking a relationship *with* the Lord, but rather than pursue the Lord you take interest again in the interests of your flesh...your latter end will be worse than the beginning, have ears to hear; turn from your sin, give your heart to Christ completely, unreservedly, live for Him fully and with out restraint.

Vs21

The greater the revelation, the greater the accountability.

Vs22

How can you tell if someone has a genuine encounter with Christ versus an emotional upheaval, perhaps a reformation but no regeneration? Ultimately it shows in the practical overflow of a person’s life, it’s not the *profession* of spirituality, it’s the *possession* of the Spirit of God in your heart.

If you've ever been to certain parts of Mexico, or some 3<sup>rd</sup> world country you will see that dogs aren't generally domesticated pets. They're mangy (often time ulcerated) scavengers, that's the picture Peter is painting. You can clean a pig, but it's his nature to wallow in the mud, it's only a matter of time before he'll jump back in the pit. A dog can expel uncleanness but ultimately he'll take it back in because that's his nature.

That's why Jesus said it's important to cleanse the inside of the dish, then the outside will take care of itself, but if you focus on the outside, that does nothing for the sin nature with in you, you'll ultimately return to the ways of the world. Make sure that as it pertains to you, it's not a matter of reformation, it's a matter of regeneration, turn from your sin and draw near to Jesus...

#### Prayer Points:

Father You've challenged our hearts today, You've exhorted us once again unto holiness, and practical righteousness, may we have ears to hear. Help us God to have the necessary discipline to get rooted and grounded, to grow and mature in You, to forsake our sin and walk in the freedom with which You have made us free. Keep us mindful of the eternal, that we consider the "latter end" and have Your way in us.

If God is dealing with your heart right here and right now, if you know that you're in a place whereby if you leave here the latter end will be worse than the beginning if you don't give your heart to Christ, if you don't turn from your sin and submit yourself to God's word then lets remedy that right now. It's not God's heart to frighten you, but He certainly loves you enough to be honest with you, that you might turn from your sin, give your life to Him and be forgiven, satisfied by the Living waters of the Holy Spirit gushing forth into and out through you satisfying your deepest thirst; are you thirsty? Drink deep of Living waters today.