

Dear Friends,

When I first contemplated writing on 2 Peter Two, I confess. My first thought was "How will I deal with Chapter Two?" We prefer to keep our focus on Jesus, faithful believers, and fellowship with both. However, the Holy Spirit directed Peter to write this chapter as a necessary warning. All in the faith-way is not "Sweetness and light." False teachers are inevitable. How should godly faithful people view and deal with them? Ignore them? If we choose to ignore them, they feel free to spread their false teachings far and wide. They thereby create more confusion and more falling away from Biblical faith.

When Jude explained the purpose for his letter, he gave us good instruction to understand 2 Peter Two.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4 KJV)

Louw-Nida defines the Greek word translated "**once**" ("**...once delivered unto the saints**") as "**...a single occurrence to the exclusion of any other similar occurrence.**" By definition, Jude's instruction excludes any post-New Testament "Revelations" anyone claims when attempting to lead people away from their faith. The Lord doesn't deliver a "New truth" to each generation of believers. He delivered one body of truth to His apostles who taught them to all who chose to follow Jesus in that one--and only one--delivered way. Any claim of a "New Revelation" by anyone should raise big red flags in the mind of faithful believers.

We can't know what is in the heart of a false teacher, but the Holy Spirit who directed Peter to write these words does know, and He revealed it to Peter, and, through his writing, to us.

I love the "Big picture" flow of thought in 2 Peter. Chapter One anchors us in that once-delivered faith, along with reminders how to grow a fruitful, God-honoring faith. Despite a real and glorious experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter reminds us that we have a "**...more sure word of prophecy,**" something that is more reliable than our own experiences and our interpretation of them. Much of contemporary Christianity lives by "Personal experience and opinion rules over everything, even over Scripture." Godly believers respect and imitate the "noble Bereans," (Acts 17:11 KJV) members of the synagogue in Berea who heard Paul reason from the Scriptures (Old Testament) and searched those Scriptures to validate what they heard.

Following the anchor of faith in Chapter One, Peter reminds us that false teachers shall come our way who work long and hard to turn us from that "**...more sure word of prophecy**" to their own ideas, often their own "**...private interpretations**" of those Scriptures. The contrast urges and warns us to avoid them.

Peter closes his letter with a touching and powerful refresher course on the Second Coming. His final word shall admonish us to "**...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**" (2 Peter 3:18 KJV) After walking through Chapter Two with you, I now look forward to studying this rich reminder with you.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

A Proverb of Spiritual Disaster

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:22 KJV 1900)

Peter opened this chapter with a broad statement of purpose. False teachers are as inevitable now as in the Old Testament. Prepare yourselves. I view this final verse of the chapter as a similar general statement of the spiritual outcome of false teachers. I've probably heard more discussions and friendly debates on this verse than any single verse in 2 Peter. The typical dilemma of discussion is "Were they saved or not saved?" As I observed at the beginning of our study of this chapter, Peter's stated objective is not about saved or not saved people, but false teachers. In the chapter, Peter teaches us about the heart and motive of false teachers. Whether saved or not saved—and Scripture teaches that they can be either—Peter closes this chapter and theme with a vivid reminder. False teachers are more motivated by their carnal appetite or ego than by godly spiritual motives.

Some may ask, "Is this possible for a born-again, saved person?" And Peter answered the question. Let's review his teaching in 2 Peter 1.

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:8-9 KJV)

When they follow the inspired faith-life of a saved person, believers work non-stop to add—and to increase—the seven lifestyle qualities which Peter listed in verses 5-7. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul named the fruit of the Spirit, listing nine descriptive terms. Notice “Fruit” is singular. The Spirit produces one “Fruit,” and Paul described that “Fruit” for us with nine qualities. Although the list includes some behavioral features, the primary focus of his descriptions relates to internal qualities. No surprise, and no need to wax theological, if we live apart from those nine qualities, we fail to manifest the Holy Spirit’s influence in our conduct. We do well to put this list from Paul together with the list from 2 Peter 1. In 2 Peter 1:5, Peter named the foundational premise for all godly, spiritually fruitful conduct faith. A person who manifests faith, God-given faith, has the foundation for a fruitful faith, but every born-again child of God who has faith by the Spirit’s work within does not cultivate that faith to make it fruitful.

A good example. Although “Charity” appears as one of Paul’s descriptions of the Spirit’s fruit in the Galatians 5 list, Peter admonishes us to add “Charity” to our faith. It is my belief that, in the new birth, the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit imparts the ability and disposition to love selflessly. But Peter admonishes us to actively follow that indwelling ability and disposition by adding it to our conduct. “Charity” passively dwelling within does nothing God-honoring, nothing to make our faith fruitful. Only when we engage Peter’s teaching and begin working to add those qualities to our pre-existing given-by-the-Spirit faith do we make that faith fruitful. And thereby we also draw our God-given-by-the-Spirit faith out into conduct through our adding these qualities to it.

Further, in Verse 9, Peter warns us that our failure to add those seven qualities to our faith will inevitably lead to our becoming so spiritually cold that we are liable to forget that the Lord saved us at all.

So, to our question, can a born-again person fall so low as to match Peter’s description of the dog and the pig? And my answer is, yes, he can. It was members of Jerusalem Church who sowed discord by false teaching (Circumcision is necessary for salvation) in Antioch Church. The apostles’ and Jerusalem Church’s response never questions their salvation, only their error. A personal experience will explain my thought. A man served as an active member of a church which I served for several years. Success in his job and the siren song of that success allured him away from his faith into a sinful lifestyle. Precisely as Peter warns in those 2 Peter 1 verses, he forgot his spiritual life and blessings. He abandoned his faith and our church. After some time away, a deacon and I contacted him and asked to visit with him. He agreed, but he was cold—frozen—to any interest in returning. It was a friendly caring meeting, but it was also a fruitless meeting. During our conversation, he quipped, “I guess I’m just a wolf in sheep’s clothing.” And I responded, “If so, you are the wooliest wolf I ever saw.” He never returned to the church. Several years later, I boarded a plane to attend a church meeting some distance away. To my surprise, there this man sat in first class with an alcoholic drink in his hand. His appearance suggested that it was not his first of the day. He noticed me and momentarily seemed embarrassed, but he wasn’t interested in anything more than a polite hello. The sad persona I observed on the airplane that day seemed so different from the vibrant, spiritually and personally alive man I had known in our church time together. Folks, the lifestyle that chooses to ignore Holy Spirit implanted

faith and its fruitful dominance of our life by failure to cultivate those seven qualities never ends well. Don't allow the allurements of this world to entice you away from your faith, your fruitful faith.

Peter's reference to the dog was drawn from Proverbs.

As a dog returneth to his vomit, So a fool returneth to his folly. (Proverbs 26:11 KJV)

Why do people repeatedly do the same things that never worked as they thought it would? If something produces bad results, we should rethink and learn, not "Foolishly" repeat the same thing and think we'll get a different result. Often false teachers appear so devoted to their errant ideas that nothing, not even sound Biblical teaching, will change their mind. We might wisely study the Proverbs to learn more about the thought processes and motivation of the "Fool." Do a simple concordance search of Proverbs and turn to each appearance of "Fool" to learn the context of the verse and its powerful message. One example.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes:

but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. (Proverbs 12:15 KJV)

Solomon rightly, "Wisely," teaches us a needful lesson. To measure what is right by our own thoughts or opinions is a foolish thing. People who adopt this attitude refuse the counsel of godly friends. Over my lifetime in ministry, I have occasionally wondered. If I were to reach the point that I believed differently from my church on significant spiritual, doctrinal beliefs, what should I do? How should I react? A false teacher will claim some form of special revelation and think himself divinely appointed to correct the church, but he most often sows discord and confusion. On those occasions, my conclusion has always been the same. I'd try to quietly and peacefully inform the church and exit to identify with a people whose beliefs more aligned with my "New" ideas.

We can think of this verse in two instructive ways. 1) The fool always thinks he is right. Anyone who thinks differently is ignorant and beneath him. You see this pattern in human behavior generally, not just in church. Observe the current political climate in our country to see the behavior and to see the outcome, separation and divisiveness rules. 2) The godly, the wise, response when we find ourselves out of step with people we respect is to listen to the counsel of others. Regard their collective counsel over our private ideas. (Philippians 2:1-4. Following this admonition, Paul reminds us that Jesus is our example for this other-serving, selfless conduct)

According to Paul's inspired words, (1 Timothy 3:15 KJV) "...**the house of God, which is the church of the living God...**" is "...**the pillar and ground of the truth,**" the standard bearer of the Lord's truth to and for His people. When a false teacher convinces himself that God has appointed him to be God's "pillar and ground of the truth," he usurps the divinely appointed function of the Lord's church and thereby abandons the Biblical model of both the Lord's church and truth. The Christian community of our time, and, sadly to a great extent, many of our own dear people, have lost the Biblical teaching regarding the Lord's church. In this verse, Paul compared the Lord's church to a building. Both the foundation, "**ground,**" and the framework which supports and gives integrity to the whole building, "**pillar,**" depict the Lord's intended purpose and function of His church. Often false teachers choose to ignore this Biblical teaching and promote themselves as having a new "Revelation" to correct the church, to become God's "...pillar and ground of the truth." Can churches err? Yes, the New Testament church letters make that point. However, the collective body of a church is a far more stable framework for preserving the Lord's truth than any individual person. While the apostles corrected those errors in the first generation of the faith, the office of apostle ceased with the men the Lord appointed in that age. There are no divinely appointed and approved apostles in our age. None. For a man to think himself above and therefore divinely appointed to correct all the Lord's churches presumes the office of apostle.

What is the New Testament function of preaching and pastoring? Is it not to instruct and correct? Ephesians 4:11-16 fully informs us. Pastors and preachers are to "perfect" the saints, complete them more fully in their faith. Further, the object of every spiritual gift named in the New Testament is to bring God's children together in the unity of the faith, not further divide and confuse them.

It should instruct and warn us. How many new religious groups started in the nineteenth century? And most of them started with someone claiming to have experienced a "New revelation" directly from the Lord by which he/she was to restore pure Christianity. I do not reject that the Lord reveals Himself and His truth to His people. However, His revelations **never** contradict what He already revealed in Scripture, the exclusive Book which His "**Pillar and ground of the truth**" church looks to for its instruction. The Ephesians 4 model of ministry is to complete and unify believers in the one faith which was once (And for all time) delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3 KJV) False teachers often seek to bypass local pastors and clandestinely influence members of these churches to embrace their errant ideas. Wise members should question the false teachers who approach them—anyone who approaches them with ideas that contradict what they've been taught by their pastor—with "Have you discussed your ideas with my pastor? No? In that case, we have nothing to discuss."

After having studied through 2 Peter 2 and the presence and motives of false teachers, spend a long reflective study of Ephesians 4:11-16. Refresh your mind with God's revealed climate of sincere, responsible—and public, not clandestine—teaching. God has given us a treasure that blesses us and honors Him. Study His Book and live to preserve it and nurture it.

Elder Joe Holder