

MARKED MEN

2 Peter 2:10–16 ¹⁰ *and especially those who go after the flesh in its corrupt lust and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they blaspheme glorious ones, ¹¹ whereas angels who are greater in strength and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. ¹² But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, blaspheming where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, ¹³ suffering unrighteousness as the wages of their unrighteousness, considering it a pleasure to revel in the daytime—they are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they feast with you, ¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery and unceasing sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed—they are accursed children. ¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, ¹⁶ but he received a rebuke for his own lawlessness, for a mute donkey, speaking out with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.”*

Peter was not finished with the heretics! Unlike some gullible believers today, Peter was disturbed by the inroads that the false teachers were making into the churches. He knew that their approach was subtle, their teachings were fatal, and he needed to warn the churches about them.

Peter opened this letter with positive teaching about salvation, Christian growth, and the dependability of the Word of God. As He had a balanced approach to ministry, so we need to maintain that same balance.

Unfortunately, some people have a purely negative ministry and never build anything because they focus on fighting the enemy! Peter knew that it was not enough only to attack the heretics, he also needed to give solid teaching to the believers in the churches. In this portion of his letter, Peter condemned the heretics for three specific sins.

Their Reviling (2 Peter 2:10–12)

The picture here is of proud people who try to build themselves up while they try to tear down everybody else. They show little respect for authority and are not afraid to attack and defame people who are leaders.

God has established authority in this world, and when we resist authority, we are resisting God (Romans 13:1ff). Parents are to have authority over their children (Ephesians 6:1–4) and employers over their employees (Ephesians 6:5–8). As citizens,

we Christians should pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–4), show respect to them (1 Peter 2:11–17), and seek to glorify God in our behavior. As members of a local church, we should honor those who have spiritual authority over us and seek to encourage them in their ministry (Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1–6).

Human government is, in one sense, God’s gift to help maintain order in the world, so that the church may minister the Word and win the lost to Christ (1 Timothy 2:1–8). We should pray daily for those in authority so that they might exercise that authority in the will of God. It is a serious thing for a Christian to oppose the law, and he must be sure he is in the will of God when he does it. He should also do it in a manner that glorifies Christ, so that innocent people might not be made to suffer.

The reason for their reviling (v. 10): *“and especially those who go after the flesh in its corrupt lust and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they blaspheme glorious ones,”*

One word gives the reason: *flesh*. The depraved nature of man does not want to submit to any kind of authority. *“Do your own thing!”* is its insistent message, and many people follow it. In recent years, there has been an epidemic of books that encourage people to succeed at any cost, even to the extent of hurting or intimidating others. The important thing, according to these books, is to take care of yourself—*“number one”*—and to use other people as tools for the achievement of your own selfish goals.

Man’s fallen nature encourages pride. When the ego is at stake, these false teachers will stop at nothing to promote and protect themselves. Their attitude is completely opposite that of our Lord who willingly emptied Himself to become a servant and then died as a sacrifice for our sins (see Philippians 2). These men that Peter described were *presumptuous*, which means they were *“very daring and bold”* in the way they spoke about those in positions of dignity. There is a boldness that is heroic, but there is also a boldness that is satanic.

These men were also *self-willed*, which means they *“lived to please only themselves.”* They were arrogant and would even defy God to get what they wanted! They are described perfectly in Proverbs 21:24, *“The proud and arrogant man—“Mocker” is his name; he behaves with overweening pride.”* While outwardly, they appeared to serve God and minister to the people, *inwardly* they fed their own egos and feathered their own nests.

In their arrogance, *“they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities [glorious ones].”* While the immediate reference is probably to *“exalted ones”* in places of authority, the

angels may also be in view here, since in the next verse Peter referred to the angels. These false teachers revile even the angels! And they do not even tremble when they do it! They are so secure in their pride, that they even dare God to judge them.

The seriousness of their reviling (v. 11) “*whereas angels who are greater in strength and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.*”

The angels are reviled by the false teachers, but the false teachers are not reviled by the angels! Even the angels, though greater in strength and power, will not intrude into a sphere that is not their own. The angels remember the rebellion of Lucifer and know how serious it is to revolt against God’s authority. If God judged the rebellious angels, how much more will He judge rebellious men!

The suggestion here is that the godly angels do not even speak against the *fallen* angels. They have left all judgment to the Lord (cf. Jude 8-9).

Speaking evil of others is a great sin, and the people of God must avoid it. We may not respect the people in office, but we must respect the office, for all authority is God-given. Those who revile government officials in the name of Christ ought to read and ponder Titus 3:1–2—“*Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.*”

When Daniel refused the king’s food, he did it in a gracious way that did not get his guard into trouble (Daniel 1). Even when the Apostles refused to obey the Sanhedrin’s order that they stop preaching in the name of Jesus, they acted like gentlemen. They respected the authority even though they disobeyed the order. It is when the flesh goes to work that pride enters in, and then we use our tongues as weapons instead of tools. “*The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good*” (Psalm 36:3).

The judgment of their reviling (v. 12) “*But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, blaspheming where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,*”

Peter compared these false teachers to “*unreasoning animals*” whose only destiny is to be slaughtered! At the end of this chapter, they are pictured as pigs and dogs! Animals have life, but they live purely by instinct. They lack the finer sensibilities that humans possess. Jesus warned us not to waste precious things on unappreciative brute beasts (Matthew 7:6).

Like brute beasts, heretics tend to make a lot of noise about things they know nothing about! The Phillips translation of 2 Peter 2:12 says they “*scoff at things*

outside their own experience.” The New International Version reads, “But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand.”

It is sad when the media concentrates on the “*big mouths*” of the false teachers instead of the “*still small voice*” of the Lord as He ministers through those who are true to Him. It is sadder still when innocent people become fascinated by these “*great swelling words of vanity*” (2 Peter 2:18) and cannot discern between truth and propaganda. The truth of the Word of God leads to salvation, but the arrogant words of the false teachers lead only to condemnation.

These “*brute beasts*” are destined for destruction, a truth Peter mentioned often in 2 Peter 2 (vv. 3–4, 9, 12, 17, 20). As they seek to destroy the faith, they themselves shall be destroyed. They will be “*corrupted in their own corruption.*” Their very nature will drag them down into destruction, like the pig returning to the mire and the dog to its vomit (2 Peter 2:22). Unfortunately, before that event takes place, these people can do a great deal of moral and spiritual damage.

Their Reveling (2 Peter 2:13–14a) “¹³ *suffering unrighteousness as the wages of their unrighteousness, considering it a pleasure to revel in the daytime—they are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they feast with you,* ¹⁴ *having eyes full of adultery and unceasing sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed.,*”

The words translated “*considering it a pleasure to revel in the daytime*” contain the idea of luxury, softness, and extravagance. At the expense of those who support them (2 Peter 2:3), the heretics enjoy luxurious living. In our own society, there are those who plead for funds for their “ministries,” yet live in expensive houses, drive luxury cars, and wear costly clothes. When we remember that Jesus became poor to make us rich, their garish lifestyle seems out of step with New Testament Christianity.

Not only do they deceive others, but they even deceive themselves! They can “*prove*” from the Bible that their lifestyle is right. In ancient times, it was expected that people would revel at night, but these people dared to revel in the daytime, so convinced were they of their practices. A person can become so accustomed to his vices that he sees them as virtues.

If they kept their way of life out of the church, we would not have to be as concerned—but they are a part of the fellowship! They were even sharing in the “love feasts” that the early church used to enjoy in connection with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20–34). It was a time when the poorer believers could enjoy a decent meal because of the generosity of the Christians who were better off

economically. But the heretics only used the “love feast” as a time for displaying their wealth and impressing ignorant people who lacked discernment.

Instead of bringing blessing to the fellowship, these false teachers were “*stains*” and “*blemishes*” that defiled the assembly. Somehow their behavior at the feasts defiled others and brought disgrace to the name of the Lord. It is the Word of God that helps to remove the spots and blemishes (Ephesians 5:27), but these teachers do not minister the truth of the Word. They twist Scripture to make it say what they want it to say (2 Peter 3:16).

These “*deceptions*” are a deadly thing. The Pharisees were also guilty of it (Matthew 23:25–28). False doctrine inevitably leads to false living, and false living then encourages false doctrine. The heretic must “adjust” God’s Word or change his way of life, and he is not about to change his lifestyle! So, wherever he goes, he secretly defiles people and makes it easier for them to sin. It is possible to go to a church fellowship and be defiled!

Certainly, churches need to exercise authority and practice discipline. Christian love does not mean that we tolerate every false doctrine and every so-called “*lifestyle.*” The Bible makes it clear that some things are right and some things are wrong. No Christian whose belief and behavior are contrary to the Word of God should be permitted to share in the Lord’s Supper or to have a spiritual ministry in the church. His defiling influence may not be seen immediately, but ultimately it will create serious problems.

Peter’s description in 2 Peter 2:14 makes it clear that the heretics attend church meetings for two reasons: first, to satisfy their own lusts; second, to capture converts for their cause.

They keep their eyes open, looking for “*weak women*” whom they can entice into sin. Paul warned about similar heretics who “*creep into houses and lead captive weak women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts*” (2 Timothy 3:6). More than one “minister” has used religion as a cloak to cover his own lusts. Such conniving men can take advantage of vulnerable women in “counseling sessions.”

The satisfying of his lusts is the false minister’s main ambition: “*unceasing from sin.*” The verb suggests “*they are unable to stop.*” Why? Because they are in bondage (2 Peter 2:18–19). The heretics consider themselves to be “*free,*” yet they are in the most terrible kind of slavery. Whatever they touch, they defile; whoever they enlist, they enslave.

“Enticing unstable souls” presents the picture of a fisherman baiting a hook or a hunter baiting a trap. The same image is used in James 1:14 where James presents temptation as ***“the baiting of the trap.”*** Satan knows that he could never trap us unless there is some fine bait to attract us in the first place. Satan promised Eve that she and Adam would become ***“like gods”*** if they ate of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:4–5), and they ***“took the bait”*** and were trapped.

What kind of ***“bait”*** do the heretics use to catch people? For one thing, they offer them ***“liberty”*** (2 Peter 2:19). This probably means a perversion of the grace of God, ***“turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness”*** (Jude 4). ***“Since you are saved by grace,”*** they argued, ***“then you have the freedom to sin. The more you sin, the more of God’s grace you will experience!”*** Paul answered their false arguments in Romans 6, a portion of Scripture that every believer ought to master.

Along with ***“freedom,”*** they also bait the trap with ***“fulfillment.”*** This is one of the ***“buzz words”*** of our generation, and it goes right along with ***“doing your own thing”*** and ***“having it your way.”*** They say, ***“The Christian life that the church offers is old-fashioned and outdated. We are free to live fulfilled to discover your true self!”***

Alas, like the prodigal son, these unstable souls try to find themselves, but they end up ***losing*** themselves (Luke 15:11–24). In their search for fulfillment, they become self-centered and lose the opportunities for growth that come from serving others.

There can be no freedom or fulfillment apart from submission to Jesus Christ. ***“The purpose of life,”*** said P. T. Forsyth, ***“is not to find your freedom, but to find your master.”*** Just as a gifted musician finds freedom and fulfillment putting himself or herself under the discipline of a great artist, or an athlete under the discipline of a great coach, so the believer only finds true freedom and fulfillment under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Who are the people who ***“take the bait”*** that the heretics capture in their subtle traps? Peter called them ***“unstable souls.”*** Stability is an important factor in a successful Christian life. Just as a child must learn to stand before he can walk or run, so the Christian must learn to ***“stand firm in the Lord.”*** Paul and the other Apostles sought to establish their converts in the faith (Romans 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 13). Peter was certain that his readers were ***“established in the present truth”*** (2 Peter 1:12), but he still warned them.

Their Revolting (2 Peter 2:14b–16). ¹⁴—***they are accursed children.*** ¹⁵ ***Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,*** ¹⁶ ***but he received a rebuke for his own***

lawlessness, for a mute donkey, speaking out with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet."

They *"have forsaken the right way!"* The heretics know the right road, the straight path that God has established, but they deliberately abandon God's way for their own. No wonder Peter called them *"unreasoning animals"* (2 Peter 2:12) and compared them to *dogs and sows* (2 Peter 2:22). The psalmist (Psalm 32:9) warned, *"Do not be as the horse, or as the mule!"* While the horse likes to rush ahead and the mule likes to lag behind, both can get you off the right path. Believers are *sheep*, and *sheep* need to stay close to the shepherd, or they will stray.

We have already learned one reason for the heretics' godless conduct: *they want to satisfy the cravings of their flesh*. But there is a second reason: *they are covetous and want to exploit people for personal gain*. Peter mentioned this in 2 Peter 2:3 and now develops the thought. Not only is the false teacher's outlook controlled by his passions (2 Peter 2:14a), but his heart is controlled by covetousness. He is in bondage to lust for pleasure and for money!

In fact, he has perfected the skill of getting what he wants. *"They are experts in greed"* says the New International Version, and the Phillips translation is even more graphic: *"Their technique of getting what they want is, through long practice, highly developed."* They know exactly how to manipulate people to give. While the true servant of God trusts the Father to meet his needs and seeks to help people grow through their giving, the heretic trusts his *"fund-raising skills"* and leaves people in worse shape than he found them. He knows how to exploit the unstable and the innocent.

There is certainly nothing wrong with a ministry sharing its opportunities and needs with its praying friends. However, we must be diligent in determining if ministries are trustworthy before giving our time, talents, and treasures. Since we cannot support every good work that God has raised up, try to exercise discernment and invest in the ministries God has chosen for you.

As Peter wrote about the devious practices of these people, he could only exclaim, *"accursed children!"* They were not the *"blessed"* children of God but the cursed children of the devil (John 8:44). They might succeed in building up their bank accounts, but in the end, at the throne of God, they would be declared bankrupt. *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41). *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Matthew 16:26)

Covetousness is the insatiable desire for more: more money, more power, more prestige. The covetous heart is never satisfied. This explains why the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). When a person craves money, he is tempted to rationalize any sin to satisfy that craving. He has already broken the first two of the Ten Commandments, because money is already his god and idol. It becomes a simple matter to break the others—to steal, lie, commit adultery, take God’s name in vain, and so on. No wonder Jesus warned, “*Take heed and beware of covetousness*” (Luke 12:15).

Peter knew his Old Testament Scriptures. He had already used Noah and Lot to illustrate his words, and in 2 Peter 2:15–16, he used the Prophet Balaam (cf. Numbers 22–25).

Balaam is a mysterious character, a Gentile prophet who was hired to curse the Jews. Balak, the king of the Moabites, feared Israel, so he turned to Balaam for help. Balaam knew it was wrong to cooperate with Balak, but he wanted the money and honor that Balak promised him. Balaam knew the truth of God and the will of God, yet he ignored the will of God and went astray. He is a perfect illustration of the heretics in their covetous practices.

From the outset, God told Balaam not to help Balak and, at first, Balaam obeyed and sent the messengers back to Balak. But Balak sent more princes and promised more money and honor—so, Balaam decided to “*pray about it again*” to reconsider the matter. The second time, God tested Balaam and permitted him to go with the princes. This was not God’s *perfect* will; it was His *permissive* will, designed to see what the prophet would do.

Balaam jumped at the chance, but even his donkey knew better. On his journey to observe the Israelites, God rebuked the disobedient prophet through the mouth of his donkey. How remarkable that the animals obey God, even when their master does not (cf. Isaiah 1:3)! God permitted Balaam to set up his altars and offer his sacrifices, but God did not permit him to curse Israel. Instead, God turned Balaam’s curse into a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:4–5; Nehemiah 13:2).

Balaam could not curse Israel, but he was able to tell Balak how to defeat Israel. All the Moabites had to do was invite the Jews to be “*friendly neighbors*” and share in their feasts (Numbers 25). Instead of maintaining its separation from the pagan nations, Israel compromised and joined the pagan orgies of the Moabites. God disciplined His people and thousands of them died.

You can see in Balaam the two aspects of heresy that Peter emphasized in this chapter: *sensual lust* and *covetousness*. Because Balaam loved money, he was instrumental in leading Israel into lustful sin. He was a man who could get messages from God, yet he led people away from God! When we read his oracles, we cannot help but be impressed with his eloquence; yet he deliberately disobeyed God! Balaam confessed, *"I have sinned"* (Numbers 22:34), but his confession was not sincere. Though he prayed, *"Let me die the death of the righteous"* (Numbers 23:10), he did not want to live the life of the righteous.

Because Balaam counseled Balak to seduce Israel, God saw to it that Balaam was judged. He was slain by the sword when Israel defeated the Midianites (Numbers 1:8). Peter called the earning that Balaam received, *"the wages of unrighteousness."* This phrase reminds us of Judas, another who betrayed the Lord, to receive *"the reward of iniquity"* (Acts 1:18) and who also perished in shame.

Balaam rebelled against the will of God. Like the false teachers who Peter described, Balaam knew the right way but, in his greed, deliberately chose the wrong way. He *"played with the will of God"* by trying to get *"a different viewpoint"* (Numbers 22:41; 23:13, 27). He apparently had a true gift from God, but he sinfully used that gift to gain personal honor and wealth.

A greedy, covetous person always has his price, and when it is met, he will do whatever he can, even in revolt against the will of God. Peter called this attitude *madness*—*"to be deranged, out of your mind."* But Balaam thought he was doing the smart thing; he was taking advantage of a situation that might never come along again. Of course, any rebellion against God is madness and can only lead to tragedy. It was when the prodigal son *"came to himself"* that he realized how foolish he had been (Luke 15:17).

Peter condemned three sins of the false teachers: their reviling, their reveling, and their revolting. All these sins spring from pride and selfish desire. A true servant of God is humble and seeks to serve others (cf. Philippians 2:20–21). The true servant of God must not think about praise or pay, because his commitment is to serve God with a loving and obedient heart. The true servant of God is committed to honor God and submit to the authority that God has established in this world. In short, *the true servant of God patterns himself after Jesus Christ.*

In these last days there are an abundance of false teachers pleading for support. They are gifted and experienced when it comes to beguiling people and getting their money. God's people must be so established in the truth of God's Word that they

know and can determine when the Scriptures are being twisted to exploit God's people. Although there are agencies that help to expose "religious rackets," there is still the need and personal responsibility in discerning and confronting false and deceitful ministries.

Unfortunately, not all "religious frauds" will be discovered and put out of business, but certainly, God will one day deal with all of them! Like animals, they will be "destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12). They will receive "*the wages of unrighteousness*" (2 Peter 2:13) to compensate for the wages they have exploited from others. As "*accursed children*" (2 Peter 2:14), they will be banished from the presence of the Lord forever.

As marked men and women; they will not escape!¹

1. Discernment Question (Head)

Where do you see the influence of "false teaching" today—not just in churches, but in culture—and how can you tell the difference between truth and deception?

2. Heart Check Question (Heart)

Which of the three areas—reviling (pride/authority), reveling (sinful desires), or revolting (going your own way)—are you most tempted to struggle with personally, and why?

3. Application Question (Hands)

What practical steps can you take this week to become more spiritually stable so you don't become an "unstable soul" that is easily influenced?

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2). Victor Books.