

False Freedom

2 Peter 2:17-22 ¹⁷ *These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been kept. ¹⁸ For speaking out arrogant words of vanity, they entice by sensual lusts of the flesh, those who barely escape from the ones who conducted themselves in error, ¹⁹ promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. ²⁰ For if they are overcome, having both escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and having again been entangled in them, then the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹ For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. ²² The message of the true proverb has happened to them, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”*

Freedom is a concept that is very important in today’s world, yet there is much confusion about what that means. It seems that everyone from the Islamist Jihadist to the American actor seem to have their own definition. No one is completely free in the sense of having the ability and opportunity to do whatever they want to do. Of course, doing whatever pleases you is not freedom—it is the worst kind of bondage.

You can meet people who have rejected all religious faith and profess complete freedom of thought. They may confess that they used to believe religious stuff, but “not anymore!” They may declare that they feel truly free for the first time in their lives! Such freedom is a false freedom, and Peter provides three reasons that explain why it is false!

1. **IT IS BASED ON FALSE PROMISES** (2 Peter 2:17-18)

Faith is only as legitimate as its OBJECT! A pagan may have great faith in an idol, but the idol is powerless—it can do nothing for him. However, when you put your faith in Jesus, that faith will accomplish all that God wills for your life because God keeps His promises. The Apostle provided three illustrations to emphasize the futility of godless false promises.

1) *“Springs without water”* (v. 17a). The Greek word, πηγή (pēgē), means *“a flowing spring”* rather than a well. A dry well may still be called a well. However, a spring without water is no spring at all! A spring ceases to exist if no water flows.

According to Ecclesiastes 3:11, there is within mankind an inborn thirst for God. People attempt to satisfy this thirst in many ways, but their substitutes do not satisfy the thirst. Only a relationship with Jesus, a drink of *Living Water*, can give inner peace and satisfaction (cf. John 4:13-14). The false teachers in Peter's day could not make this kind of offer, they might promise, but they could not produce.

2) "*Mists driven by a storm*" (v. 17b)—the picture is a mist being pushed by a squall over a lake or sea. Such mists should announce the possibility of rainfall, but this water by droplets is only being carried away by the wind. There are noise, motion, and moisture, but no rain. Farmers see the mist and pray for rain but to no avail. Similarly, the false teachers have really nothing to give, just emptiness!

3) "*Black darkness has been kept*" (v. 17c-18). The false teachers promise to lead people into light, but they end up in the darkest part of darkness (cf. Jude 6, 13). Since these teachers really have nothing to give, how are they able to attract people?

These teachers are eloquent promoters of the false doctrines. They are skilled in using their vocabulary to impress people: "*speaking out arrogant words of vanity.*" Many people cannot tell the difference between a religious huckster and a faithful believer who correctly interprets the Word of God.

Do not be impressed with religious oratory no matter how eloquent. In Acts 18:24-28, Luke describes Apollos as a fervent and eloquent religious speaker, but he did not yet know the right message to preach. Paul was careful not to build his converts' faith on either his words or his wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). He preached to express, not to impress! He knew the difference between *communication* and *manipulation*.

The false teachers were also successful because they appealed to the base appetites of the old nature, *the lust of the flesh*! Typically, we think of the "*lust of the flesh*" as sexual sins, but the flesh has other, equally dangerous appetites which false teachers can use as bait for their traps: "*...idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these*" (Galatians 5:19-21).

The third reason false teachers are successful in attracting people is that they focus upon spiritually immature believers—"those who barely escape from the ones who conducted themselves in error." False teachers have no message for the down-and-out sinner, but they do for the new believer.

This is why it is very important that churches produce mature believers to ground new believers in biblical faith. Like newborn babies, new believers need to be

protected, fed, and firmly grounded in their faith before they are released in this dangerous world where the “wolves” gather to devour the flock.

One reason that Paul wrote this letter was to warn the church to intentionally care for new Christians because false teachers were out to get them. If new believers are unstable, it is because the church has not taught them how to stand firmly! The freedom that false teachers offer is a false freedom because it is based upon false promises!

2. **IT IS OFFERED BY FALSE CHRISTIANS (2:19-20).**

We often say that “Freed People Free People!” The reverse of that is also true: “Enslaved People Enslave People!” These false teachers were in bondage, and they could not set someone free. They professed to being saved but had never really been redeemed (set free) at all.

The verbs in 2 Peter 2:19 are present tense meaning it was still true. While they promised the new believers liberty, they themselves were servants of corruption. They claimed to be servant of God, but they were only the servants of sin. When sin is your master, you are in the worst possible condition you can experience.

So, what sins enslave the false teachers?

- **Money**—their covetousness forced them to use every deceptive technique they knew to exploit people (2 Peter 2:3, 14).
 - **Fleshly Lust**—they had eyes on weak women whom they could seduce (2 Peter 2:10, 14).
 - **Pride**—They thought nothing about speaking evil against those in authority, including angels and God! They promoted themselves and derided everyone else!
- Note the three men Peter mentioned in this chapter—Noah, Lot, and Balaam:
- **Noah** kept himself separated from the faithlessness of the world, boldly preached God’s righteousness, and was faithful in his walk and witness though only followed by his family.
 - **Lot** knew the truth and kept himself pure, but because he did not keep himself separated from the ungodly, he lost his family. Though Lot did not share in the wickedness of Sodom, he lived amidst it, which exposed his daughters and wife to godlessness.
 - **Balaam** not only followed the ways of sin, but he encouraged other people to sin. He told Balak how to seduce Israel, and his plan almost succeeded—Lot lost his family, but Balaam lost his life.

Beware of “*the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hebrews 3:13)! *Sin always promises more than it can deliver; takes you farther than you want to go; and keeps you longer than you want to stay!*

Sin promises life but always brings death! Sin has a way of gradually captivating a person until there is no way of escape, except through the gracious intervention of the Lord. Even the bondage of sin is deceitful because the people who are bound think they are free! Only after it is too late, do they discover they have been imprisoned by their appetites, habits, and lifestyle!

Jesus came to bring freedom! But both His meaning and method of freedom are different from the false teachers. Freedom does not mean “doing your own thing” or “having it your way”—such attitudes are the very essence of sin!

The freedom that Jesus offers is *enjoying fullness in the will of God*. It means achieving your greatest potential to the glory of God. Jesus frees us to become our very best in this life with the certain hope to be like Him in the next!

The false teachers brought their followers into bondage through lies, but Jesus brings us into freedom through the truth (John 8:32; 17:17). Those who live by God’s truth experience increasing freedom, while those who live in deception experience increasing bondage (2 Peter 2:20). Temporary reformation without true repentance and rebirth leads to greater sin and judgment. Reformation cleans up the outside, but regeneration changes the inner man, which changes our “*want to!*”

Sinful tendencies do not disappear when a person reforms—such tendencies merely hibernate and grow stronger. Holiness is not simply refusing to do evil things—it is the personal transformation that conquers even the *desire* to disobey God.

Indeed, false promises from false Christians result in false freedom!

3. **IT INVOLVES A FALSE EXPERIENCE** (2:21-22)

Peter called the false teachers “*unreasoning animals*” (2 Peter 2:12). However, he was not simply showing his personal contempt for them, he was teaching a basic lesson. Of course, Peter was referring to the false teachers and not to their converts.

It is not the profession of spirituality nor charitable works that marks a genuine believer—it is the possession of God’s Holy Spirit within (Romans 8:9).

Of course, these false teachers did have some sort of religious experience that gave them fervor, as well as knowledge of religious truth (i.e., “*the way of*

righteousness”). Their influence indicates that they did have some sort of desirable *religious experience*, but their experience, like their promises, was false.

In his first letter to these people, Peter emphasized the new birth (1 Peter 1:3, 22-25). He reminded his readers that they were “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4). In his first letter, Peter described the believers as sheep (1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4). Jesus used the same imagery when he reinstated Peter after his denial (John 21:15-17).

There is no indication that the false teachers had ever experienced the new birth. They had knowledge of salvation and were familiar with church language, but they lacked the true saving experience of being born again. They had never *trusted Christ to become His sheep*.

Instead, they were “*pigs*” and “*dogs*.” You can wash both dogs and pigs until they are clean on the outside—they look and smell better, but neither has changed. They have the same old nature and soon demonstrate that unchanged nature!

These men could point to “*an experience*,” but it was not a genuine life-changing transformation—it was a false experience. Of course, Satan is the great counterfeiter who has a *false gospel* (Galatians 1:6-9), preached by *false ministers* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15), which produces *false christians* (2 Corinthians 11:26). We see this reality in Jesus’ *parable of the tares*.

Having an experience does not change our nature unless it is the *new birth* experience. According to 2 Peter 2:20, these false teachers “*escaped the pollutions of the world*.” “*Pollution*” refers to defilement on the outside, but true believers have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:4). Corruption is much deeper than outside defilement—it is inner decay! True believers receive a new nature, a divine nature, and we then have new and different desires and appetites. We have been transformed from *pigs* and *dogs* into *sheep*.

We need to understand why this “*freedom*” offered by the false teachers is a *false freedom*—a freedom that leads only to bondage. It is based on false promises, empty words that sound exciting, but which have no divine authority. It was offered by false Christians who were involved in a false experience. From start to finish, this *freedom* is the product of our adversary, the devil!

The important point is that we can have the assurance of a true, life-changing experience with the Lord Jesus. He is the truth (John 14:6)! Following Him leads to life and freedom. Any other direction leads to bondage and death!¹

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