

EPISTLE: 2 PETER

2



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PRACTICE QUIZ

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The Didache says this about false teachers, “Not everyone who speaks in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he follows behaviorally in the path of the Lord. Accordingly, from their conduct the false prophet and the true prophet will be known.” This is the theme of 2 Peter 2, where the apostle discusses the importance of avoiding false prophets and their sinful lives.

St. Peter begins by warning that Christians will encounter false prophets and teachers who, while successful in winning followers to themselves, are nonetheless leading both themselves and others to destruction through their false teaching (which even includes denying Christ Himself) (2:1-3).

We shouldn't be fooled by the popularity of these teachers into thinking that what they say is true: God will ultimately judge them (2:3). We can know this because He has judged in the past beings who rebelled against Him: the angels who sinned are being reserved for judgment (2:4), and the ungodly in the time of Righteous Noah were destroyed (2:5), as were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6). In contrast, God saved the true “preacher(s) of righteousness,”

Righteous Noah and Righteous Lot (2:5, 7-8); He will do the same for us if we continue to follow and serve Him (2:9). Oecumenius the Philosopher tells us these verses are vitally important for us, “Notice how all along (St. Peter) has been using the examples of wicked people in order to reinforce the message that the deliverance of the righteous is foreordained and thereby to comfort those who emulate the righteous by showing that they are much better off than the ungodly.”

It is obvious that a false teacher teaches things which are untrue – the Holy Apostle Paul describes false apostles as people who “preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached” and proclaimed “a different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4) – but what is less obvious is that false teachers tend to lead false, depraved lifestyles. Such people, St. Peter tells us, “speak evil of the things they do not understand” and have “eyes full of adultery and...cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls” (2 Peter 2:12, 14). These people are like Balaam the son of Beor, who attempted to prevent the Israelites from entering the Promised Land but was unable to curse them – in fact, the Angel of the Lord even made Balaam's donkey speak to persuade the prophet to abandon his plan (2:15-16; see Judges 22:22-38). The monk Andreas explains,

The common interpretation of this is that Balaam's ass condemned him because it obeyed the angel and submitted to him, whereas Balaam, although he heard God, did

not go and warn the people, nor did he obey God's will. Thus the ass became Balaam's teacher.

Unfortunately, while these false teachers promise liberty through their licentious living, in reality the people who follow these teachers become enslaved by sin and corruption (2 Peter 2:18-19). This is particularly horrible for people who had escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but after leaving the Orthodox faith to follow false teachers are now in worse spiritual shape than they had been before becoming Christians (2:20-21). In fact, St. Peter says, it would have been better for them if they had never known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then abandoned it: they are now so disgusting that they resemble a dog that has returned to its vomit or a formerly clean sow that returned to wallowing in the muck. Blessed Theophylact sums it up in this way:

Peter is saying that the evil awaiting those who turn away from their faith is so great that it would have been better if they had never accepted it in the first place. At least that way their wickedness would seem natural, instead of being as bizarre as a dog returning to its own vomit.

LIFE TIP

St. Leo the Great warns us to avoid abandoning our faith and falling into sin: “We must take care not to be ensnared again by the devil's traps and become entangled once more in the very errors which we have renounced. For the ancient enemy does not stop laying down traps everywhere and doing whatever it takes to corrupt the faith of believers.”

