Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The second chapter of 2 Peter is a warning about false teachers. And so far, we have seen that there will always be false teachers who will lead many astray. And last week we saw that they will be judged, perhaps in this life, but definitely in the next, and that God will rescue and preserve His people. Well, so that we might recognize false teachers, Peter now provides us with a description of them. And he doesn’t hold anything back; he calls a spade a spade, as the saying goes. He doesn’t start with some positive aspects before moving on to the more negative ones; it is *all* negative. And there is straight out name-calling here – “*irrational animals … slaves of corruption … accursed children*.” And to illustrate what false teachers are like, he equates them with dogs and pigs! And as I was pondering this passage, it reminded me of **a police identikit sketch**. After a crime has been committed, witnesses will sit down with a police artist and give a description of the criminal. And the artist will sketch their facial features and hairstyle, etc, which is then released to the public so they can help the police locate the criminal. And the accompanying statement will say something like, this man is armed and dangerous. Do not approach him. Well, that is what our text is: **an Identikit Sketch of a False Teacher**. And it comes with a warning: Spiritually dangerous. Armed with false teaching and ungodly behaviour. Do not approach.

And we live in an increasingly post-Christian world. And this is the perfect environment for false teachers to flourish. So, we do well to post this identikit sketch of false teachers on the fridge, as it were, and be very watchful. But there is also **personal warning** in this passage. Each one of us should use this passage as a mirror; are any of these qualities in me, perhaps? And if there are, we should welcome their exposure as an opportunity to turn to Christ in repentance rather than to continue and perhaps fall away. For remember, that is Peter’s purpose with this letter: to warn those who profess faith not to fall away and instead to remain on the narrow path that leads to heaven.

So, let’s consider **Peter’s identikit sketch of false teachers**. And we have two main headings today. The first is that false teachers can be recognized by their **warped personality**, and then, secondly, by their **dangerous activity**.

1. So, we begin with verses 10b-16 and the **Warped Personality** of false teachers. And the two chief categories here are **Insolent** and **Insatiable**, and then the **Illustration** that Peter provides is Balaam.
   1. And we see their **insolence** described in verses 10b-13a.
      1. To be insolent means to be disrespectful and rude. For example, when a child answers back to their parent or a student is rude to their teacher, they are being insolent. And false teachers are insolent. Peter describes them as bold and wilful and not trembling as “*they blaspheme the glorious ones*.”
         1. And this is a fascinating phrase. The title “***glorious ones***” can refer to angels, but it can also refer to human beings – church leaders or civil authorities – because it is God who gives them their authority. But because angels are mentioned in the next verse by way of contrast, and because the particular sin of the false teachers that is identified in the first half of verse 10 is “despising authority,” it is probably the apostles and office-bearers who are in view here as “glorious ones.”
         2. And instead of submitting themselves to these Christ-sent officers of the church, the false teachers were blaspheming them, or openly and unashamedly insulting them. They had zero respect for them, they rejected their authority and admonition, and continued to teach false doctrine and sensual living.
      2. And look at the **strong warning** that Peter delivers: “*But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing*.”
         1. In contrast to the angels, who Peter portrays in verse 11 as very careful and measured and restrained about what they say about “*glorious ones*,” false teachers are like the dumbest of animals that are driven by the most basic instincts.
         2. Think of the mouse, for example, who does not stop to look at the spring-loaded latch on the piece of wood and consider if it might be a trap, but just lunges for the peanut butter or cheese, and bang, down comes the bar and that is the end of the mouse.
         3. And false teachers are the same. They refuse to consider if what they are doing is good and upbuilding and pleasing to God. And no one can persuade them of their wrong; they refuse to listen. Well, their end will be the same as that of the mouse; the Lord will destroy them.
      3. And the key point here is that you can recognize false teachers by how they speak about lawful authority in the church. They have disdain and disgust for those who are trying to be obedient to the command of God.
      4. But there is also a **general lesson** here for all of us. When we looked at **1 Peter 5**, we saw the duties of elders explained. But church members were commanded “*to be subject to the elders*.” Hebrews 13:17 says the same thing. So, we must be very careful about our attitude toward those whom the Lord has placed in authority over us. They are far from perfect, and we should approach them if we have concerns about their work, but it should be with humility and respect. And we must be careful to avoid gossip and slander or even disrespectful jokes. You see, once you lose respect for the office-bearers, you are ripe and ready for false teachers to fill the vacuum by appealing to that attitude.
   2. But false teachers are not only insolent. For we see in verses 13b-15a that they are also **insatiable**. And insatiable means constantly greedy for more. And two things are in view, particularly:
      1. The first is **sex**. Verses 13b-14a says of them: “*They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin*.” So, false teachers can be recognized by their hunger for the pleasures of the flesh.
         1. And church history is littered with clergymen who have used and abused women and men and even children.
         2. But notice that Peter talks about them “*revel[ing] in the daytime*.” So, what may have begun as a secret and hidden activity of the sinful mind eventually grows into unhidden sensual activity, like adultery, that anyone can see. And in this way the Lord exposes this characteristic of false teachers for all to see.
            1. Just this week I was listening to an interview with a godly minister who was describing a kind of celebrity pastor of the wider Reformed scene from about 10 years ago. And this celebrity pastor was good looking and immaculately styled, and he always wore tight shirts and was ripped. And he was a gifted communicator. But the godly minister was watching him speak at a conference once, and he said to his wife, Something is off with that guy. Its just too much ‘look at me.’ And the godly minister said, I am no prophet, but just one week later his session announced that the celebrity pastor had been removed from the ministry for a number of adulterous relationships.
         3. But we shouldn’t go past Peter’s reference to false teachers having “*eyes full of adultery*,” without mentioning the **pornography** pandemic that plagues the world and the church. Brothers and sisters, if you are struggling with pornography, please ask for help. It causes so much damage to yourself and to others. And it can be the gateway to other types of sexual sin because it caters to the insatiable; it is never enough. But there is forgiveness in Christ and by His Spirit there can be victory over this sin. But, and I can’t stress this enough, the nature of this sin means it is best fought *with others* to whom you can be accountable and who will encourage you.
         4. But the key point here is that false teachers have an insatiable appetite for sensuality.
      2. And their other insatiable appetite is for **money**. And we see this in verses 14b-15a: “*They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray*.”
         1. False teachers are usually obsessed with wealth. And just like John D Rockefeller, the world’s first billionaire, who, when asked how much money was enough replied, “Just a little bit more,” false teachers can never have enough money; they always want more.
   3. And to **illustrate** insatiability, Peter refers to **Balaam**, whom we read of earlier. His words to Balak’s emissaries sounded good, didn’t they: “*Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God to do less or more*.” But then, even though the Lord had made perfectly clear that Balaam was not to go with the messengers, Balaam said, Look, I tell you what. Don’t rush off. Just stay here with the fees for divination that you have in your sack, and I will just go and check with God again. Maybe He might have changed His mind. And God allowed Him to go with them, but then, as we read in that incredible account, spoke to Balaam *through his own donkey* to convey His anger at his greed. And **does anyone know what happened to Balaam in the end**? We are told in Numbers 31 that he made his home among the wicked Midianites and was eventually killed by Israelite soldiers in a war against Midian. That is where his greed led him in the end.
      1. A New Testament equivalent of Balaam is **Demas**. In Colossians and Philemon, Paul sent his greetings to believers, along with those of Demas, who he described as his fellow worker. But in 2 Timothy 4:10, we read that “*Demas, in love with this present world, [had] deserted [Paul] and gone to Thessalonica*.” Demas loved money more than he loved Christ, and was either backslidden or apostate.
      2. Earlier in the service we read **Proverbs 14**. And during the week I read a daily devotional on verse 14, which says, “*The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways…*” And the author of the devotional said, “A backslider turns back from following Christ. He does not guard his heart. He yields to a single temptation, but that step fails to satisfy. He then yields to another, then another until his heart grows cold towards the Lord and he loses the ability to resist what is wrong.” And this is what happened to Balaam and Demas.
      3. But could it be happening with you, friend? Has Christ been replaced with things of this world? If so, listen to the Lord Jesus who speaks to you in **Malachi 3:7**, saying, “*Return to me, and I will return to you*.” Humble yourself, confess your sin, receive Christ’s forgiveness, and then resolve in your heart to put Him first in your life and to turn away from what has taken His place.
2. So, false teachers can be recognized by their **warped personality**. They are insolent, and insatiable, just like Balaam was. But secondly, false teachers can be recognized also by their **Dangerous Activity**. If you work in the corporate world, you are probably familiar with KPIs - Key Performance Indicators. They are how your boss measures your performance at work – the number of new customers or interviews completed or cases closed. Well, the ‘KPIs’ for elders are that they teach sound doctrine well, set an example of godliness, and are not addicted to wine or anything else. But the opposite is true of false teachers; they are **Empty** and **Enslaving**, as **illustrated** by dogs and pigs.

* 1. And what I mean by **empty** is described in verse 17: “*These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm*.”
     1. Can you imagine crawling in a desert and finally finding a well, but it is empty? Or you sometimes see videos of little children trying to drink from a drinking fountain. But they don’t understand that you must hold the lever *and* drink at the same time. So, they press the lever, let go, and try and take a drink but the waterspout stops.
     2. Well, the preaching of sound doctrine, the pure gospel, the full counsel of God’s Word is ***living*** **water**. From it we receive Christ and learn right and wrong and how to live a life that is pleasing to God. It satisfies and revives!
     3. But what false teachers offer is like an empty well or a mist driven by a storm. It ignores the gospel. It has no substance. It does not reprove or rebuke or exhort or convict or expose or humble or edify or instruct. Here is how one author summarizes this type of preaching:

*To be a minister today in the typical church of a prosperous suburb, one must be as skilled as a politician in the rhetoric of ambiguity, circumlocution, and doubletalk. He must talk plain language though in such a way that no listener can take offense. He may attack race prejudice, but it must be done obliquely so that no one in the congregation imagines that it refers to him. He may attack business ethics, but it must be done in such a manner that no businessman who listens will think that he is implicated. Today's preacher can indeed use all doctrinal phrases but always so cunningly that conservative listeners will take them one way, liberal listeners another. In brief he must learn to preach without saying anything.*

And congregation, you will not have to travel very far to hear preaching like this. And people lap it up and thank the minister for the good sermon at the door. Last week we had a visitor at church who has been a Christian for 5 years and in all those years of attending a city church, he has not heard a single reading or sermon from the Old Testament. And that is a huge red flag, right there. You see, if you do not hear the full counsel of God’s Word, then when crisis or trial or persecution comes, there is nothing to hold on to, because it is like a mist.

* + 1. And that is why Peter says, “*For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.*” To stand in a pulpit and to pretend to be a minister of the gospel, all the while teaching false doctrine, and thereby to lead people astray, is the worst type of wickedness. And the condemnation will be most severe.
  1. But not only are false teachers empty, they are also **enslaving**. And we see this in verses 18-19: “*For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error*. *They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved*.”
     1. Brothers and sisters, sin is like an incredibly powerful magnet. We are drawn to it like a piece of pure iron. Whether it is alcohol or drugs or food or drink or pornography or same-sex desire or gossip or materialism or overwork, or the escapism of too much Youtube or Netflix or video games, sin crouches at the door and wants to master us. It does not want us reading theology or visiting someone in a care home or doing Bible study. And it certainly does not want ministers who are prepared to call God’s people to repent over sins like these. It much prefers ministers who preach easy-believism – grace, grace, grace – your sexual desires are your identity, so it is OK – don’t let anyone judge you – all that sin stuff is legalism. But where this sort of ‘gospel’ leads is addictions, dysfunction, brokenness, and falling away.
     2. A couple of weeks ago a Facebook friend who is a minister posted a quote from a Scottish minister of many years ago, who said, “The best preaching is: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and keep the Ten Commandments.” Now, if you had to comment on that quote, what would you say? I hope you would say, Amen! But that is not what most commented. That’s legalism! That’s salvation by works! We cannot keep the Ten Commandments. We have been set free from the law. We are saved by grace alone… But this post is not explaining how we may be saved; it is explaining what the best preaching is. Think of the Great Commission that Christ gave to the church: Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." And the Ten Commandments summarize the whole of the moral law. So, the best preaching is: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and keep the Ten Commandments.” We must be pointed to faith in Christ as our only hope of salvation *and* taught to observe all Christ’s commands. That is living water!
  2. And we see the danger of ‘easy-believism’ spelled out further in **verses 19-21**. That is where Peter says that those who hear the gospel and begin to live according to the commands of Christ, but then go back to a life of unrepentant sin are in a worse off position than if they had never heard the gospel at all. And to **illustrate** people like this, Peter refers to dogs and pigs. And they are not pleasant images, but they sure make the point.
     1. A sick dog, if it is hungry enough, will eat its own vomit. How disgusting! And having taken a bath in clean water, a pig will head straight back to mud and manure for a good wallow.
     2. Well, one preacher once described the gospel as like a spiritual emetic and laxative. An emetic is a medicine that makes you vomit up the poison or drugs that you have swallowed, and I am sure you know what a laxative does. And in a similar way, the gospel makes us ‘vomit up’ our addictions and habitual bad behaviour. But false teachers basically put addictions and habitual bad behaviour, which is what sensuality is, in front of us again and they tell us it’s all OK, and in so doing, they invite us to eat our own vomit.
     3. And we would be as disgusting as the dogs and pigs described here to listen to them.

Well, I don’t know about you, but I almost feel like I need a shower after all of this. It has not been pleasant by any stretch of the imagination. But people of God, it has been necessary because these words are a warning to every era of the church, including ours. Peter was called by the Lord Jesus to feed His sheep. And one of the ways that a shepherd feeds and cares for sheep is to steer them away from predators and poison. And there will be those who try and lead us away from Christ and the Christian life. But now we know what they look like; we know their warped personality and dangerous activity. So, let us look to God in prayer and thank Him for this instruction and ask Him to help us to persevere in godliness. Let us pray:

*Our Heavenly Father, in your strength, we ask that we would think clearly and soberly about what you have laid before us. We thank you for telling us what to watch out for in regards to false teachers. Make us always watchful and alert. Give us a discerning heart, by your Word and Spirit. O Lord, we want to walk the path that is hard and to enter through the narrow gate, such that we finish well. So, for those of us who find ourselves enslaved and continually falling, bring the living waters of repentance and faith in Christ. And cause us to grow to be more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*