

# “The Angry Apostle”

## 2 Peter 2:1-10

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Cult-leader Jim Jones led a group of nearly 1000 from their People's Temple in San Francisco to a commune renamed Jonestown in Guyana, South America.

The morning of November 18, 1978 authorities found 909 corpses on the grounds of that commune; they had died in a mass murder/suicide.

Jones had led hundreds of well-meaning people, who called themselves Christians, to their deaths.

One of the victims was a little boy, the grandson of one of our parishioners.

Further investigation uncovered murders, beatings, and sexual abuse as part of the intimidation that Jones used to build his lethal empire.

Many of the adult victims were bright, professional people.

Many of them had been reared in Bible-believing homes – including the parents of the little boy I've just mentioned.

How could such people “buy into” the lies of Jim Jones?

They were deceived!

Jones was a master manipulator using a mixture of truth and error to enslave the minds of the people.

Of the over 200 children who died that day in Guyana, I've already mentioned one boy.

The boy's father had finally seen Jones for what he was and was trying to get his son away from Jones when the murder/suicide took place.

Can you imagine the guilt and anger that father must have felt?

The guilt was over involving his wife and son in such a group and the anger over the fatal deceptions of Jim Jones.

While the outcomes of other cults and false teachings don't usually end in mass suicide, their teachings and practices are also destructive of people's lives and destinies.

- I'm talking only about The Family International formerly known as the Children of God movement or The Way International, both of which are still actively recruiting followers.
- I'm also talking about Mormonism, Scientology, Christian Science, and Jehovah's Witnesses among other older groups.
- And also, albeit in a different way, I'm talking about the "Word of Faith," "name-it-and-claim-it" teachings of Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Paul Crouch and a host of others broadcast and received daily into some of our homes.
- And I'm also referring to the whole "easy believe-ism" of much of Evangelicalism today.

The Apostle Peter had apparently seen first-hand the destructive nature of false teaching and he was incensed.

He felt great responsibility for the people to whom he was writing.

He began his letter writing in chapter 1:1 "To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours..."

He went on saying, in verse 3 "(God's) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

And he notes in verses 10-11 "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do

these things, you will never fall, <sup>11</sup> and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

And he concludes the opening of his letter with this affirmation of the Scriptures as our guide for following Jesus, 1:20-21 “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Next, with what sounds like righteous anger, anger at the destructive nature of false teaching and false teachers, Peter warns his readers with very strong language:

**Please stand for the reading of God’s word:** 2 Peter 2:1-22 “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-- bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. <sup>3</sup> In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. <sup>2PE 2:4</sup> For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; <sup>5</sup> if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; <sup>6</sup> if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup> and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men <sup>8</sup> (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- <sup>9</sup> if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. <sup>10</sup> This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; <sup>11</sup> yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the

Lord. <sup>12</sup> But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. <sup>2PE 2:13</sup> They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. <sup>14</sup> With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood! <sup>15</sup> They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. <sup>16</sup> But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey--a beast without speech--who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness. <sup>2PE 2:17</sup> These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. <sup>18</sup> For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. <sup>20</sup> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. <sup>21</sup> It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. <sup>22</sup> Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

Evangelicals today are amused if not embarrassed by references to "hell-fire and brimstone" preaching.

But if ever I heard a "hell-fire" sermon this one from Peter would certainly qualify.

By naming the names I did earlier and then reading this strong text, I know I run the risk of being understood to suggest that all I named are equally in error and equally in danger of judgment.

I do not mean that.

Some I have named are, by their own statements, outside of the faith we profess.

Peter's condemnation would apply most immediately to them.

Others are, by their own statements, in the faith but some of their teachings are leading others far from the path of Scripture. Regardless of their personal faith and even their motivations, some of their teachings are destructive to others.

And Peter's warnings about God's judgment against sin need to be taken very seriously.

While Peter's words are most directly against the false teachers I don't think those false teachers were Peter's primary concern.

Peter was much more concerned for the people of the church who were susceptible to those false teachings.

And Peter's warnings are meant for them.

We're going to look at just the first 16 verses today and come back to visit the rest of the chapter next week.

Upon careful reflection those first verses are structured as follows:

- Verses 1-3 Peter summarizes his point.
- Verses 4-9 Peter illustrates both the certainty of judgment on sin and the certainty of rescue of those who follow God.
- Verses 10-16 Peter states and illustrates the arrogance, lust and greed of the false teachers.

See how he begins: "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. <sup>3</sup> In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

Peter says just as there were false prophets in the Old Testament years, so there are false teachers today.

And these false teachers will cleverly introduce ideas that are not consistent with the accepted teaching of the Prophets and Apostles – the Bible.

We never get a complete picture of what the destructive teachings were but we are given sufficient clues to see similarities in our own day.

And Peter says these heresies (meaning foreign ideas) are destructive – they lead people away from life and to death.

And this brings serious consequences because the destruction Peter is talking about in this context is that judgment of God at the end of time when unforgiven sinners will be cast into the lake of fire, away from the presence of the Lord forever.

There's a phrase in here that I want you to notice: "Even denying the Sovereign Lord who bought them."

I wish to speak to that phrase next week in the context of the end of the chapter.

For now I want you to let go of it and stay with me on the topic at hand.

(Now having told you to not think about elephants, I suppose that is all you can think about.)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> verse begins to give us clues to the kinds of teachings that these false teachers promulgated: It says, "Many will follow their shameful ways."

"Shameful" is also translated sensual.

Their teachings appealed to self-interest, even to sinful desires.

Sexual overtones run throughout chapter 2 and Peter's description of these false teachers and false teachings.

Sexual sin is lurking behind every illustration Peter uses in this chapter.

And in verses 13-14 "Carousing, adulterous eyes, and seduction" are words he uses.

Whether it is The Family International/Children of God movement or many others, it seems that sexual perversion too soon becomes part of the practice.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> verse gives another clue: It says, “In their greed...”

It’s our own sinful cravings that get us in trouble.

A teacher or teaching comes along that promises us things that we want so much to be true that we more than willingly go along with the heresy to get what we want.

A preacher in our own city, like many others, sends an appeal letter asking for your prayer requests and your money and then “promises she will slip into a ceremonial breastplate and “press your prayer request to (her) heart,” and “place your requests on (her) shoulders.”

(Contact Jerry Nelson for source)

The beguiled begins to think, “Surely if someone of that spiritual stature asks God to give me what I want, I will get it.”

This person, again like others, teaches us to have a “God-kind of faith” or that “confession brings possession” and “receiving follows giving.”

The guidance she gives for our bodies goes like this:

“Say to your body, ‘You’re whole, body! Why, you just function so beautifully and so well... Speak to your leg...or foot...or back; and once you have spoken and believe that you have received and don’t go back on it... God will create what you are speaking.” (Contact Jerry Nelson for source)

When you are desperately sick or a loved one is, who wouldn’t want to believe such a thing?

Entire religious empires are built on such false teaching.

Gloria Copeland (wife of Kenneth Copeland) in her book, *God’s Will is Prosperity*, promises what she calls the “hundredfold” - Give \$10 and get \$1000.

Then she adds, “Give one house and receive one hundred houses or one house worth one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the plane. Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime

of cars. In short (she says) Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.”  
 (Copeland, 54)

Who wouldn't want to believe such things, especially when you can't quite make ends meet?

Listen to Paul Crouch of TBN, the Trinity Broadcasting Network, “If you're broke, if you're at your wit's end, if you're out of a job, out of work, let me tell ya (sic). Not only are we gonna (sic) bless the world and preach Christ to millions and multitudes around the world, but you can be saved, yourself, by planting seed (translated “money”) in this fertile soil called TBN.” (July 21, 1992 TBN program “Praise the Lord”)

Need is the hook and greed is the motivation.

Peter uses strong language to put every preacher and religious teacher on notice; to the extent that our teaching leads people away from Jesus, 2:3 “Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

The Bible throughout pronounces special judgment on false teachers.

And with that, in verses 4-9, Peter enters into a longer argument about the certainty of judgment and also the certainty of God's protection of his own.

- 2:4 “if God did not spare the angels when they sinned...”
- 2:5 “if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people... “but protected Noah...”
- 2:6 “if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah...”
- 2:7-8 “and if he rescued Lot...”

Using those four illustrations, Peter makes this point:

2:9 “If this is so then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment...”

When Peter first refers to angels sinning, some say he is recalling Genesis 6 where it says that the Sons of God mated with the daughters of men and the world became increasingly evil leading up to the flood.



Others say Peter is referring to Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19 which some say is reference to Satan's sin and fall before creation.

We can't be certain of the event to which Peter refers but we can be certain of his point.

2:4 "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment"

Even angels, when they sinned, are judged.

They are kept in some horrid place where apparently their actions are restricted (see Jude 6) and they await the final judgment spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:41 "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

The second illustration is clearer to us.

Genesis 6:5-8 "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup> The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth... So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth... But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."

Here again the emphasis is on the devastating judgment against sin.

The third illustration was equally well known to all.

2:6 "he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly."

The book of Jude speaks to these same illustrations Peter does and Jude 7 reads: "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."

Again the finality of judgment is clear: "burning them to ashes."

**God takes sin seriously.**

But in stressing the certainty of judgment on sin, Peter doesn't want to drive his readers to despair.

He recalls for them that even though Noah and Lot were minorities in the midst of a multitude, God saved them.

2:5 “but (God) protected Noah” and verses 7-8 “and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men <sup>8</sup> (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard).”

In both cases these men's lives were testimonies to the truth even though everyone else ignored that truth.

We even learn here that Lot was greatly distressed by what was going on around him – he was tormented by the sin everywhere.

And so Peter concludes in verse 9 “if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment, while continuing their punishment.”

The ideas the false teachers present may be appealing but know this: Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

Verse 10 introduces a sharper description of the false teachers:

Peter writes, “This (judgment) is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.”

Notice two things: they follow their corrupt desires and they despise authority.

In the section that follows (11-16) Peter will illustrate both of these.

He starts with the latter: 2:10b-12 “Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; <sup>11</sup> yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. <sup>12</sup> But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are

like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.”

Exactly what situation Peter is referring to is not known but his point again is quite clear.

- These teachers are arrogant.
- They are not afraid of anything.
- They apparently aren't afraid of judgment.
- Maybe they've come to believe that God will overlook their sin.  
But Peter says they are wrong and judgment is coming.

Then using an Old Testament character by the name of Balaam Peter illustrates his second point: They are not just arrogant but they follow their sinful natures.

Without retelling the whole story, Balaam was a false prophet hired to curse the people of God.

But God manipulated him to bless the people instead.

Peter says it was greed that motivated Balaam just as it is greed that motivates the false teachers.

When we read the text mixing both Peter's remarks about the false teachers and his commentary on Balaam we find that "corrupt desires" include both material greed and sexual sin.

Hear it in 2:13-15 "They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. <sup>14</sup> With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood! <sup>15</sup> They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

The book of Numbers tells us that when Balaam couldn't curse Israel the way he was paid to, he took a different tack; he encouraged the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men.

It worked like a charm and a plague from God was required to kill 23,000 Israelites before the lustful sinning stopped.

Money, sex and power have always been effective tools against God's people.

They appeal to "the corrupt desires of our sinful nature", our lusts, and we wander off like lambs to slaughter or as Peter said it, "like brute beasts to be caught and destroyed."

Arrogance, lust and greed (hypocrisy, sexual misconduct and financial fraud) are three sins that even the world despises.

And it seems that over and over again in Christianity, leaders succumb to one or the other or all three.

And just as tragically, hundreds follow them.

While I can't know the motivations of a person's heart, I can see that false teachers have led millions astray.

- David Berg of The Family International (formerly The Children of God or The Family of Love).
- Mary Baker Eddy of Christian Science
- L. Ron Hubbard of Scientology
- Joseph Smith of Mormonism
- Charles Taze Russell of Jehovah's Witnesses
- Herbert W. Armstrong of the original Worldwide Church of God

I've already spoken of the Word of Faith movement of Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen, Ken Hagin, and many others.

I add Mel White and company with a different false teaching.

Mel was for years a ghostwriter for Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell.

But for the past 15 or more years, while claiming to be an Evangelical he has twisted the Scriptures and cleverly manipulated the idea of grace to teach that homosexual activity is a perfectly normal lifestyle created by God.

Jumping on the bandwagon, with the world around, he loudly shouts that only graceless homophobes could possibly want to discriminate against so many of God's children.

But the false teaching to which I think Evangelicals are most susceptible today is the teaching of salvation without holiness, grace without justice.

It is to downplay Gods judgment against sin.

There have been conscious decisions by evangelists and pastors to minimize discussion of sin, repentance, and judgment.

No one says sin is okay but we have taken the teeth out of God's warnings.

The teaching that we can accept Jesus as Savior but not as Lord panders to our sinful desires.

The careless teaching of "once saved always saved no matter what" has left in its wake generations of careless Christians, if Christians at all.

I believe in the perseverance of the saints not in eternal security because "eternal security" has been turned into a license to sin.

What's happened to us?

We hear that our God is holy and awesome and his name is not to be used lightly because his name represents him.

And yet the name "God" or variations are used even by Christians increasingly as an exclamation or even an expletive – mindless uses of the holy name of God.

We read "You shall not steal" but we cheat on our taxes by padding deductions and under-declaring income.

We take from others through gambling and lotteries and rationalize it by calling it a game.

We hear, "You shall not murder" but we rationalize our hatred for those who have harmed us and we lust for revenge.

We know "You shall not commit adultery" but we feed our minds on images that will forever influence us and warp our relationships.

Even married couples use pornography to excite their sex lives. And by our televisions and movies we have become virtual voyeurs peering into the very bedrooms of others.

And now to be sexually successful we have implants for every part of the human body; what has happened to us!

And while God says we are not to covet- we have made covetousness a national pastime through our lotteries and gaming and through our mad rush to acquire every new toy that the marketers parade in front of our eyes.

What's happened to us?

As I said, we've been taught a salvation without holiness, a grace without justice.

- We think we can sin with impunity.
- We think we can defy God's laws free of punishment.
- We have been taught and we have wanted to believe that holiness is legalism.

We are afraid of being labeled "Victorian," "Puritanical," "Fundamentalistic," or "prudish."

Nothing could appeal to our sinful nature better than suggesting that spiritual self-discipline must be legalism.

We've sown the wind by taking sin, judgment and hell out of our thinking and we've reaped the whirlwind of godless lives.

I think Peter would stand with the psalmist saying of such people: Psalm 36:1-2 "There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

Oh, Christian do not be deceived by the false teachings that pervade Evangelicalism today.

Beware of false teachers appealing to your sinful desires.

Galatians 6:7-8 "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."