

## “Empty Wells”

2 Peter 2:10-22

Pastor Tim Dodson at Jesus Fellowship of Believers, Menomonie, Wisconsin - December 14th, 2025

2 Peter 2:10-22 ... *and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.""*



Peter is not finished with this issue that he began the last time we were together. Instead he now rather begins to get specific...to get personal, ...and if possible, to get even more blunt, concerning such offenders.

Peter...taking up a battle position, says “let me tell you what these men and women are really like...” I can easily imagine the original recipients of this letter starting to fidget in their seats, thinking “ok...here we go...” Maybe you are thinking the same? There is no way to hear Peter’s tone here, and as far as we know he didn’t start typing in capital letters. But certainly we can gather that he is getting passionate about his warnings. Clearly Peter considered these guys seriously dangerous! So He now begins now to give us an “M.O.” on these offenders...

We live in an extremely cynical age today wherein we are slow to believe anybody and anything, and much of that is a well-deserved reaction. Extreme warnings are generally accepted as mere suggestions. Especially for those of us that believe ourselves to be experts in a particular field or have achieved a chronological age wherein we are simply beyond anyone speaking into our lives! “Beware of the Dog” becomes a warning for those who do not know how to handle canines like we do. “Don’t text and drive” is aimed at those who can’t multi-task like we can, and “55-mph” is for little girls! Have you ever seen those “anti-meth” billboards with the haggard beat-up individual on it with teeth falling out? Does anyone not know the reckless danger when it comes to meth? Yet in 2024, an estimated 2.5 million people in the United States reported using

methamphetamine in the past 12 months. This drug currently accounts for nearly half (49%) of all federal drug trafficking cases, following a 168% increase in individuals sentenced for trafficking over the past 20 years.

Sadly, pastors have been guilty of ignoring the warnings...ignoring the scriptural direction, and progressing with an attitude that such is not a directive, but merely nice advice...and often just for the novice...not for the professional like me!

How often things end like they did for Roy Horn of Siegfried & Roy fame. He included lions and tigers in their act...despite the obvious danger, and was eventually mauled by a tiger so severely that it ended his career and almost his life. Our attitude is generally that because we got away with it once, now we are experts that can defy the dangers and will continue to get away with it. The signs...the warnings, become advisories for everyone else, but not for me. The fact is, so often we see the warnings...the signs, as not an alarm or alert of serious danger, but rather as a suggestion or some biased advice, and always for someone else, not me.

Peter puts up the signs of warning concerning these that "walk after the flesh." Often we are apt to think of such merely in terms of physical sins like sexual and carnal acts. But this scriptural principle actually goes much further than that. It speaks really of anything that I want...anything I desire, that would please me or fulfill me emotionally or physically, that scripturally runs contrary to God, His will, His directions, His plans, or His nature. Essentially, it's what I want verses what HE wants! Not just overt sins, but would even include that which Paul called "weights" in our spiritual race. (See Heb 12) The central tenant in this matter is one or the other... if I am "walking after the flesh," then I am not "walking after the spirit." Through all of this is one overriding element...one supreme ideal: ME. Walking after the flesh...is seeking after what I want...what pleases me.

One of the greatest universal traits of "the flesh" is its tendency to fight against all authority. It is the overwhelming spirit that says "you can't tell me what to do" and "I don't have to listen to you." Peter says these folks are "presumptuous and self-willed." Simply put, our "walking after the flesh" stems from unchecked pride. For many folks, when their pride is at stake, the gloves come off and they will stop at nothing in order to promote and protect themselves. Of course, this is the direct opposite of the life and ministry of Jesus, who willingly emptied Himself to become a servant, and then died as a sacrifice for our sins. There is no greater "smoking gun" that says clearly that the "old man" is quite clearly still alive in a person's life! Peter says they are "self-willed." Their living is encompassed with "what I want" ... "*my will be done*" in contrast with "*thy will be done*." (Matt 6:10) The passage includes an implication of obstinacy in that such individuals stubbornly insist on doing that which pleases themselves. It is a state of being where one is so obsessed with his or her own wishes that nothing else can be taken into consideration, nothing can stand in the way of their own self-gratification. Their "motto" is "I do it my way."

The commentator Barclay remarks that "The man who is (self-willed) is stubbornly and arrogantly and even brutally determined on his own way. The bad man is he who has no regard for either human appeal or divine guidance." (Barclay, William: New Testament Words:. Westminster John Know Press, 1964

Peter goes on to says these folks make a practice of "reviling accusations." That means a "critical or insulting verbal attack." Proverbs 11:9 says "With their words...the godless destroy their friends..." This is why open and transparent handling of these situations is so critical! When the facts are known, and the situation is clear,

we are "rescued" from such reviling accusations.

Peter says that even the angels do not deal with people this way! Yet, sadly, we are not so shy about doing so. Jesus Himself was often the recipient of such attacks. In Matthew 9, verse 33 - 34, history records that the "street"...the people who were truly seeking... "marveled" saying "It was never seen like this in Israel!" But there was those...specifically the Pharisees who said "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons!"

So again, it is a sad testament that it is often those who claim to be righteous before God, can actually be the worst of offenders...the worst embracers of "the flesh." MacArthur says that "The false teachers identified with Christ outwardly, but they would not live under His lordship. The two major characteristics of false teachers are emphasized in this verse: 1) lust and 2) arrogance."

Peter goes on to blisteringly call them "brute beasts" or "unreasoning animals." Rather than following reason and revelation, these folks are guided only by their ignorance and their instinctual sinful passions. They are ultimately religious hypocrites who profess to have deep religious insights when in reality their natural sense and cravings guide them rather than spiritual truths. 2 Timothy 3 speaks of such as those "having a form of godliness but denying its power...always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth...from such people turn away."

Clearly Peter spares nothing here when it comes to warning true believers about these folks. In our genteel church age, it is easy to be shocked by Peter's handling of this issue. In our "kid gloves" approaches... in the modern "church club" atmosphere, it seems we will spare no effort to avoid any insult and offense. But make no mistake, such is simply a modern social adaptation, not a biblical practice! For Paul of "they are lazy gluttons" fame, ...for David of "let them be put to shame" rep...for Jesus, of the "Fools!"... "Brood of Vipers"... "Whitewashed Tombs"... "Blind Guides"...and "Hypocrites!" renown, it was clear that sometimes clarity superseded modern etiquette.

Their danger is to be posted. The warning sign is up. Because the danger of their very existence is so real to the body of Christ. It would be bad enough if their actions destroyed just themselves, but that is not their M.O. The danger is that they invariably come looking for you. Especially hunting down the weak, the uncommitted, the wavering, the young in faith. They "entice unstable souls." With "great swelling words of emptiness, they allure...they "entice," ...through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped. That's you and me. They promise them "liberty" ..*freedom*, but instead they are "brought into bondage."

You see, it is never enough for these folks to reject Christ and His scripture alone, no, they need recruits. They need to make you one of them. And thus the whispers begin. The quiet 'behind-closed-doors' accusations. The emails, and texts...the private phone calls come, trying to pull you down with them. Because indeed "misery loves company." They are "stains and blemishes" amongst us. Please note that fact. Peter is clearly warning the reader that such danger is not "out there" in the obvious world away from all things holy...away from the body of Christ. But rather they will "come in amongst you" and will attempt to tear you down for their own glory and satisfaction.

Note the specific language "they promise you freedom." The accusation therefore is that you who are committed to the personal lordship of Christ and the furthering of God's kingdom are under some sort of bondage. That you are a modern lackey. How often... upon their exit from the faith...their first declaration is that they feel so "free"

now! But scripture is abundantly clear that no man is so free. We are either under the control of sin and Satan, or under the control of Christ. But no man is "free," in the sense of "master of their own domain."

Indeed Peter uses some sarcasm here to emphasize the ridiculousness of the possibility that people who are slaves of sin could themselves ever set anybody else free! So be careful when someone promises you freedom with "no strings attached" ...or that a person could ever be free of rules, authority, responsibility or accountability. We could talk to countless incarcerated individuals to get to that truth! The glory of the Gospel brings true freedom, while the disgrace of this "brand" of false teaching brings bondage to sin, self and Satan.

Peter tells his people that indeed they are free but they must not use their freedom as a cloak of maliciousness (1Pe 2:16) as Paul echoed the same saying "they must not use it for an occasion to the flesh." (Galatians 5:13)

These false teachers appealed not to the best but to the worst in a man. Peter is quite clear that they did this because they themselves were slaves to their own lusts. Seneca said, "To be enslaved to oneself is the heaviest of all servitudes." These teachers were offering liberty when they themselves were slaves, and the liberty they were offering was the liberty to become slaves to their lust. The one who heeded their council only found himself a slave.

For those that have attempted to embrace Christ and a sanctified life...and then to return to the world they left behind, it is invariably worse than it was before they looked to Christ in the beginning. This is a scriptural fact, and an experiential fact. It is one that I have witnessed over many years of ministering. Many have tried such a run, and all have fabulously failed. And it is a sad thing to watch, as they go back to the very "vomit" that they left behind. Whether it was drugs, illicit sexual practices, alcohol, rebellion against authority, or whatever. It seems they merely picked up where they left off. It has killed some we know, and returned others again to incarceration. It has destroyed marriages, condemned children, and brought shame to God's kingdom. It is a sad but amazing thing to witness!

Peter speaks in graphic language, to be sure. He seems desperate to make his point. Passionate to make the warning...that we heed his 'danger signs.' It is all such a repulsive picture! But its truth cannot be soft peddled nor its warning ignored. As Peter packs up to depart this world via his impending martyrdom, this is his priority message: "Don't let these folks steal your crown. Build your house 'on the rock'. And when the storms come...and they will come, you will remain firm." But Christian, that foundation must be built today...not when you see the storm clouds gathering. For at that point it could be quite possible that it is too late.

From this chapter as a whole, Pastor Arthur Herries gives these 8 'wolf' characteristics, so we might recognize them:

1. Subtle -- they privately bring in damnable heresies ("he will secretly introduce destructive heresies")
2. Sensual -- "many shall follow their immoral ways"
3. Greedy -- cf. example of Balaam from Numbers 22 (2 Peter 2:14-16)
4. Despise Authority
5. Self-willed
6. Revile or cause others to blaspheme God
7. The message they preach is meaningless (made up by themselves)
8. Dishonest

Lastly, let me say this: The issue of the flesh is the crack in the wall that Satan seeks to exploit. Because we lack understanding and/or truthful handling of this matter, we tend to often run to the far fringes of the property line under the auspices of “grace.” Whenever the abuse of grace is present, so is the icing of pride on top of it all. We become unsubmitive, self-reliant, and self-assertive. And most of all we become blind. It’s then no longer about my church or church family, but rather it all comes down to being about me and what I’m doing. We can put a spiritual spin on it, and in our biblical ignorance and overt pride we can take the high road. But the facts remain evident, albeit to everyone else but that individual.