

# Grace and Knowledge: Waterless Springs

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[ 0 : 00 ] In this Easter season, we're working through the book of 2 Peter, the second letter that we have Peter wrote. And as we learned two weeks ago, Peter's written this letter to young Christians, both Jew and Gentile, and he's writing to help them in their spiritual growth.

And in this chapter, chapter 2, we learn of a danger that Christians can succumb to as they grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Peter wrote in chapter 1.

Now, to describe this danger, Peter used his language he would have used a lot and was familiar with from his first vocation, that as a fisherman.

In verses 14 and 18, we read that Christians can be enticed or lured away. Now, to be lured away requires bait.

And the ones that dangle that bait drew Peter's ire. I mean, not just ire. We're talking about Peter, a man known for his passion and perhaps his impulsivity.

[ 1 : 15 ] He was the first to say openly that Jesus was the Messiah. Yeah. And yet a couple times he had the nerve to rebuke and correct Jesus.

One time when he felt Jesus was being threatened, he grabbed the sword and just hacked away. Now, fortunately, he was a fisherman and not a swordsman. So he just managed to cut off a guy's ear and not anything worse.

Jesus healed that. One time he was out in the boat with the other disciples and they saw Jesus ashore. And instead of just waiting for the boat to move ashore, he jumps in and swims to shore.

Very passionate. And passionate Peter, he sees young Christians being lured into danger. And he unleashes this invective of biblical portions against those he sees as false teachers.

We're going to look at these false teachers and what it seems that they're teaching. And we're going to look at how all of this is relevant to us today.

[ 2 : 22 ] So let's pray. Amen. Father, we move about day to day in a cacophony of competing voices and worldviews.

We feel tugged and lured left and right. And we're here in silence and humility to hear the truth. Now, help me as I teach. If anything I am saying is unclear, would your spirit make it clear here? So that we can walk out of here refreshed, with our sanity restored.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So who are these false teachers and how are they described? Well, first of all, they're described as greedy.

They're seeking their own enrichment. Verse 14 says they're experts in greed. And we also learn in verse 14 that they have eyes full of adultery.

[ 3 : 46 ] They're constantly looking for the next person to have sex with. We learn in verse 15 that they are backslidden Christians. At one time, it seems that they were followers of Jesus, but have since turned away from him.

We learn in verse 10 that they despise authority. We also learn that they slander angels. I don't know anyone who's ever tried that. I don't know how you would do that.

And commentators themselves are also kind of perplexed as to what this means. But everyone seems to agree that it's a sign of their arrogance. And notice what Peter doesn't say about them.

He doesn't give us their names. I think he knew who they were. I think he heard a name or two and is not using their names. And I think there's a good reason. Actually, two.

The first is he wants this to serve as a warning to all teachers. People like Tommy and myself. And any who find themselves in positions of authority.

[ 4 : 50 ] It's a warning that an awful judgment awaits anyone who willingly leads God's people astray. Who would seek to serve and enrich themselves before serving the family of God.

James chapter 3 says, And the second reason I think he doesn't give us their names is he doesn't want us to be distracted by particular people and their personalities.

And he wants us to pay close attention to what we are taught. It's ultimately the lies that the false teachers tell that would lead us astray.

Lastly, he tells us that these teachers are destined for destruction, for the gloom of darkness. He compares their fate with that of those angels that rebelled against God, with Sodom and Gomorrah, with those in the days of Noah who were rebellious.

So what were these false teachers teaching? Well, Jesus told his disciples that after his resurrection from the dead, he would go away.

[ 6 : 08 ] And he did. He ascended into heaven bodily. And then later, he would come back to judge the inhabitants of the earth. And it seems that the apostles believed that this would happen in their lifetimes.

And those who the apostles taught also believed this. However, after waiting and waiting, that first generation of Christians started to pass away.

And Jesus still hadn't returned. So these false teachers said, well, it's not going to happen. It's never going to happen. And if Jesus isn't coming back, well, that means there must be no judgment coming.

And if there's no judgment coming, well, then it seems we can just do whatever we like, right? No consequences. And so they enticed some weak Christians into lives of sensuality.

Not only was sexual gratification an attractive element of these false teachers' teachings, but so was inclusion into the social life of the culture.

[ 7 : 15 ] Christian morality excluded the early Christians from many aspects of business and social life. Businesses and social clubs often held meetings in temples associated with the worship of pagan gods.

The idolatry and sexual immorality associated with that kind of worship would have precluded many Christians from participating in those gatherings. So Christians are being told, I can still be a Christian, plus be sexually gratified in whatever way I want, plus I can be included in every aspect of culture and social life.

That sounds great. Why not? So now consider this teaching against the backdrop of a particular worldview in Greek and Roman thought called Epicureanism.

Epicureanism taught that the highest good is pleasure. That we're to seek not just pleasure, but the absence of pain.

And ultimately, what we're to strive for is a state of tranquility. We reach tranquility when we free ourselves from the anxiety that comes from thinking about death and a possible judgment by the gods or God in the afterlife.

[ 8 : 37 ] Why fear death when our atoms will just disperse? We won't experience that. We'll have experienced painlessness. So it's nothing to fear. And this kind of thought filters down into Jewish and Greek thinking in more popular forms.

It certainly could have influenced the audience of this letter. Now, there weren't teachers saying, hey, if you like this Jesus guy, then you're also going to like this guy named Epicurus and the things he taught.

They wouldn't have done that because those two systems of thought are very much opposed. But that doesn't exclude the possibility of an amalgamation of different ideas and worldviews and moral frameworks.

So what I think is important for us to observe is that the presence of Epicureanism and the background noise of the culture prepared many weak Christians to be lured into accepting some of Epicureanism's implications without actually subscribing wholesale to that philosophical system. Does that make sense? So in this case, they end up following Jesus plus Epicureanism. They've been like prepped to assimilate some of the more attractive parts of Epicureanism.

[ 9 : 56 ] And it could have happened in other parts of the empire differently. So here it's Jesus and Epicureanism. Somewhere else it could be Jesus plus Stoicism. A little later on, it could be Jesus plus Gnosticism.

I'm not trying to give us a philosophy lesson because I'm not qualified to do that. But what's important for us to know is that there are all kinds of philosophical systems floating around in the background noise of our culture.

And unless we're hypervigilant, we tend to adopt a Christianity plus something else. And we've looked at these false teachers and their teachings.

And now we're going to discuss why it's relevant to us. That's what we're doing. Just as popular ideas in the surrounding culture prepared weak Christians to be enticed by false teaching, so can we.

This is because beneath the layer of day-to-day cognition lies what? It's our desires. Right? We're feeling, desiring, loving creatures.

[ 11 : 04 ] And those desires, they're shaped and they're formed. Right? By what? By our day-to-day rhythms, our practices.

And over time, those shape the things we love. Often contrary to the things that we believe or to the things that we think. And we end up making our decisions based on our gut feelings and not by the things that we think.

You can call those rhythms and practices that shape our feelings as liturgies. And so there's like liturgies of materialism that shape our desires. We want things.

And there's other liturgies that shape and form the things that we want. We can say that we are catechized into a way of feeling.

Into a certain kind of imagining. Now, if you sat through our foundations class, you've already gotten this. And if you haven't, I highly recommend you taking our foundations classes and our other catechesis classes.

[ 12 : 11 ] But what I thought would be helpful here today is to look at, maybe walk through a checklist of ways that we tend to have Christianity plus something else. Ways our desires have been formed.

So let's look at hospitality. How frequently do I invite into my home people who are profoundly different than myself? Ethnically, socioeconomically, politically.

When is the last time I shared a meal in my home with someone of a different color of skin? Now, if that doesn't happen very often or doesn't happen at all, it may mean that I've been catechized into our culture's liturgies of tribalism.

I stick with my tribe, with people like myself, who look like me or think like me. I surround myself where I live with people who look and think like me.

I cater my Twitter feed to those that look and think like me. But the Bible presents a very different view of things. That a way to justice is through hospitality.

[ 13 : 29 ] I was once a stranger and now I've been welcomed into God's family and his household. And now I must welcome the stranger. So that's hospitality.

What about finances? Do I consider every penny that I have as belonging to God to be used according to his purposes? For his glory?

Or do I consider my money a means to my own fulfillment, security, and happiness? Our culture constantly teaches, it catechizes us to be consumers.

Don't think twice about laying down four, five, six dollars on a cup of coffee. Accumulate the best stuff. Take the best vacations. My culture catechizes me into believing that the good life comes through accumulation.

Through getting stuff. But the gospel teaches us that Jesus forsook everything. That he who was rich became poor. And that the good life is union with him.

[ 14 : 36 ] And we become radically generous with the money he's given us. What about our bodies? How do we view our bodies? Do we steward them as God would have us?

Or do I view my body or my genitals as just a means to my self-fulfillment? Or have I been catechized by the gospel which teaches me that my body exists for his purposes?

That he has a very specific design in mind when it comes to sex. And that when I live in accordance with his design, I proclaim to the world God's self-giving, sacrificial, generative love.

About politics. Do I feel perfectly at home in any one political party or ideology?

I'm not saying it's wrong to belong to a political party. Or to work for one. Or to be active on behalf of one. But the gospel tells us that if we belong to Jesus, then we belong to his kingdom first and foremost.

[ 15 : 56 ] And he says in John 18.36 that his kingdom is not of this world. So we should always expect there to be points of profound disagreement between ourselves and any earthly political party we might belong to.

Finally, let's look at anger. Are we patient with one another? Or have we been catechized, shaped, formed by our culture of outrage?

Do I find myself frustrated that other Christians just don't get it? Do I look down on my brothers and sisters who can't seem to get their act together? Who think this way or that way.

You know, I am hospitable. And I love justice. And I'm generous. And I'm chaste. And it pisses me off that other Christians aren't that way. What's wrong with them?

Or have I been catechized by the gospel? Which tells me that we are all desperately knocked about the head. Especially me.

[17:06] Especially me. I am the one in most need of patience and grace and forgiveness. And only the righteousness that I have.

And the only righteousness that I have comes from outside of myself. Given to me. Imputed to me. By the grace of God. Now for those of you who wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

Perhaps you're skeptical of the claims of Jesus. Perhaps you've been exploring his claims but have yet to jump in with both feet.

And you've thought in our time together this evening. Wait. Did he just say something about Jesus coming back and judging the world?

Like some kind of final judgment? Like doom and destruction? Like I see on all those paintings. Like in those big churches in Rome or whatever. That's a bit crazy.

[18:16] Isn't it? Well yeah. Yeah. That might sound rather fantastical to you. That there's going to be some kind of cosmic judgment day at the end of all things.

And I won't go into much detail about what that might look like. That's Tommy's job next week. But yes.

That is what we believe. That's what we believe. It's a very radically supernatural thing that Christians believe and have always believed.

Jesus himself said it would happen. And his first disciples taught it. It's embedded in our creeds. We're going to confess it in a few minutes. That Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Let me respond to your skepticism with just one suggestion to consider. I'm not going to try and attempt to change your minds on anything.

[19:16] I'd just like you to consider one thing. What do you do with the feeling that things in the world aren't the way they should be? What do you do with the things that are very wrong in this world?

What do you do when you see the news? And you see children who first get a runny nose and then tightness in the chest. And then they start to drool.

And then they lose control of their bodily functions. And they vomit. And they defecate. And they urinate. They begin to twitch. And jerk. And finally suffocate. Because some man and his regime. Regime. Excuse me. Some man didn't want to give up power. And so he gassed a village. What do you do with that? Is there any kind of justice that can be doled out sufficiently to make rights for such a heinous crime?

For such a crime on top of the other sarin gas attacks that they've committed. On top of the 70,000 barrel bombs that have been dropped in Syria over the last several years.

[20:33] What do you do with that? Is there any justice that's possible? And what do you do with all the other atrocities committed in this world in these last 104 years?

Should we do what the Epicureans suggest? That we be free of any anxiety. We're all just atoms that are going to disperse anyway.

So just don't worry and be happy. Or is that desire for justice there for a reason? Maybe it's by design that I long for things to be set to rights.

Maybe we're designed that way. Not only that we might seek justice in the here and now. But also because the one who made us has promised to fulfill that desire that each and every one of us has. A desire for justice. Now there's something else for us all to consider. If there is a final reckoning, how do I know I'm right with God?

[21:48] I mean, I haven't committed any atrocities personally. But is that the only confidence I have? I desire justice, but am I, wait, exempt from it?

I'm no Mother Teresa. I'm no John Paul II. I'm no Tim Tebow. Sorry. Is there a standard by which I and everyone else will be judged?

And what happens maybe if I don't meet that standard? Well, there's good news and there's bad news. The bad news is this, that the standard is impossibly high. You can't keep it. Neither can I. Neither can anybody. The standard is God himself. We all fall short. The good news is that there is actually one who can keep that standard and that is God himself.

And he did that for us. God can meet his own standards. And that's what the cross is for. All the justice that you and I ever deserved is satisfied on the cross.

[ 22 : 59 ] Sinless Jesus absorbs God's judgment for us and for the world. And he gives us his perfect record.

So on that final judgment day, we are rescued. And God doesn't see all the ways we fall short. He sees his son.

He sees the cross. He sees Jesus' own record, not our own. That's our only comfort in life and in death. Our only comfort isn't the pursuit of pleasure or the absence of pain.

Our comfort isn't that a final judgment doesn't take place. Our comfort isn't that we will be judged worthy in and of ourselves. As the Heidelberg Catechism states, my only comfort is that I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood is fully satisfied for all my sins and delivered me from all the power of the devil and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head.

Yes, that all things must be subservient to my salvation. And therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life and makes me sincerely willing and ready henceforth to live unto Him.

[ 24 : 31 ] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.