

...they are out to get you!

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0:00] 1. 1. 1. 1.

1. sometimes it is an entirely appropriate reaction.

The disciples Peter worries about are being enticed away from the apostolic gospel and Peter will have none of it. And he's got angry about it as you can see from his writings.

But just before we dive into this polemic, let's consider just two controversial issues about the text. First one is exactly who are the glorious ones in verse 10 and frankly it's very unclear.

The word is actually *doxa* which itself just means glories and the AV actually just translates it dignities. It's only the previous sentence and the next verse which suggest these glories are some kind of heavenly or earthly authority but more than that we really can't say.

[1:58] But I don't think we need to worry too much about that. Of course clearly these people are blaspheming things they should not. So let's just leave it at that. Remember whatever it was, whatever authorities they were condemning, they certainly shouldn't have been doing it.

And we'll come back to that later. Secondly, I want us to avoid being diverted down a by-path.

Our church holds to what are called the doctrines of grace. And in particular, we believe that Christ died to save fully. Christ died for the elect.

And we believe that once saved, you will be brought to glory. Now in that context, you might find verses 1 and 20 worrying. But I would like to ask you to put that worry aside because if we follow that thread, we will miss the main point of the passage.

I'm going to take these verses to mean that they claim to have been those that the Master bought, i.e. they claim to be Christians, but they were not really. And they appeared to have escaped the defilements of the world, but actually they'd not.

[3:11] Now as one justification for that interpretation, I'll draw your attention to verse 22, where we get the image of the dog returning to its vomit and a pig returning to the mud.

You can wash a pig, but it's not really clean. It's not clean inside because it will go back to the mud. Because that's what pigs do.

And Peter is suggesting that these people may appear to have been washed, but actually they weren't, and they would just go back to the dirt that they had before.

So please, if you are worried about this, put the question on hold till later. And I'm tempted to say, go and ask Phil, but that would probably be a bit... I won't say that.

If you want to discuss these issues further, of course we can do. But I don't want to be diverted from the main thrust of this passage by that question. So what is it that Peter is really concerned about here?

[4:19] And the language is quite vehement, as I said. We might say it's alarmist. But as far as Peter's concerned, it's not alarmist when the alarm is real.

God's people in the Old Testament, these first and second generation Christians, Peter writes to, Christians down the ages and Christians now, always were, and are now, in danger from false prophets and false teachers.

These people really are out to get you. But if we're going to make use of this warning, rather than just, as we might say, be panicked or spooked by it, we actually do need to look a bit below the very vehement and angry language and say, what is it that Peter actually has to say about false teachers?

What does he want to tell us about them? How do they work? What's their motive? What's their objective? What's their mode of operation?

How do these destructive processes work out in practice? And what is the logic or the lack of logic behind it? And most importantly of all, of course, how can we avoid and escape from this?

[5:45] So I've broken the talk down into these five sections to try and do that, to look beneath the surface, as it were, and see exactly what it is that Peter has to say to us.

So first of all, what are the motives and objectives of these false teachers? What are the tools of the trade? And then as we look into the text, we say he has two sort of ways of thinking about the problem.

First of all, he talks about cycle of destruction, and then he talks about what we might call the unreasonable, the beastly nature of sin. And then, of course, we would be very foolish not to take the warning that Peter has given to us.

So we'll just sum up by saying, what is the warning that Peter is giving us? So first of all, Peter wants us to be clear about what the motives and objectives of these people are.

What are they after? What is it that makes them tick, as we say? And Peter lists several characteristics. There's good old-fashioned greed, of course.

[7:04] We find that in verse 3 and verse 14 and verse 15. People who are in the religion business. People who are in it for the money. Still plenty of those around.

And then, of course, there's equally good old-fashioned lust. He talks about that in verse 7 and verse 10 and verse 18. I don't think he just means sexual lust here.

They're all the lusts of the flesh, gluttony, excess. They just want to indulge in everything, in all kinds of lust.

But there are also more subtle motives. In verse 10, he mentions arrogance. That's actually what it is, although you might not name it that.

People who believe they know everything worth knowing. In fact, people who believe that they know better than the apostles. As Peter says, even better than the angels.

[8:15] Some people who have taken that line have been quite ascetic.

You wouldn't necessarily accuse them of greed or of lust. But there are those who curse what God has said.

And feel that they know better than the Lord Jesus. So whatever the particular motivation of these false teachers is, we can say, basically, it's a need for instant gratification, isn't it?

It's a need. It's self-centered. The need for praise or for fulfillment in an immediate way. The need for instant gratification that we see so much of in our society nowadays.

And if we want instant gratification, then necessarily we have uncaring of any consequences. And Peter reminds us of that in verse 19.

[9:24] But it's not just themselves they're damaging. This is the trouble. They're out to exploit those same motives to get their claws into you and me.

They want followers, as we see from verse 2. Peter's no doubt that these people really are out to get you.

They want followers and they want to exploit you. And in fact, the word is translated exploit in verse 3. It actually means they want to use you as trade goods.

They want to buy you and sell you for profit. So that's what their objectives are. Their objective is to get their claws into you and me.

To make us their disciples instead of disciples of Jesus. And if they can, to make a fast buck out of us. And Peter has more to say about that.

[10:32] Don't think these guys are amateurs. They're fully trained professionals. He tells us that in verse 14, doesn't he? He said they're experts in greed.

Greed. Actually, a more literal translation is that they are trained in greed. They've done all the courses. They've practiced it. These guys are master scammers.

Scammers. So what does Peter tell us about the way they work? What are the tools of their trade? Pretty much the tools of any sort of scammers anywhere, actually.

But Peter describes them for us, doesn't he? First of all, he says they're among you in verse 1. They appear to be your friend, your companion.

They appear to be on the same wavelengths, doing the same things. But on the other hand, Peter tells us in verse 2 that they work secretly.

[11:44] Their tool is deception, verse 13. They use what one might translate as pliable words.

Verse 3, the Greek word there is the word that we get the word plastic from. So you could think of them as plastic words. Words that can be molded to mean exactly what you want them to.

Like the, how is it? It's Alice in Wonderland, isn't it? The guy sitting on the mushroom. I can't remember who it is. But he says, words mean exactly what I want them to mean.

They will make the words mean whatever they want them to mean. Half-truths and lies. And remember, this is in contrast to Peter's words, which he insists were not cleverly devised myths in chapter 1, verse 16.

Cleverly devised myths are exactly what these people are selling. And they are clever. But they're not carried along by the Holy Spirit, as the true prophets were.

[12:57] And false prophets seduce and entice. Peter makes much of that, really, doesn't he? He says things like that in verse 13 and verse 14 and verse 18.

Sex sells. Advertisers know that. And so do gluttony and excess. It all seems remarkably up-to-date, actually, doesn't it? It might have been written nearly 2,000 years ago.

But it resonates with us today, doesn't it? Hundreds of years before Peter, the writer of the Proverbs, wrote, well, I quoted that first verse, My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.

Proverbs chapter 5, verse 3 to 5, we have this. These false prophets are masters of seduction. This is the enemy's typical strategy. Worked in the garden, the garden of Eden.

[14:19] It worked then. It worked in the Old Testament times. It worked in Peter's time. It's worked throughout history, and it's working now. This is the enemy's strategy.

It ain't broke, so why would he bother to fix it? It still works today. But the Proverbs tells us that this path leads to death.

And Peter maps out the same route. So first he describes the process, and then he analyzes, in a sense, how it works. And there are cycles of words in this passage that, to some extent, are hidden, particularly in our NIV translations.

There are words that are repeated, which appear to sort of imply the cycles and the logic that leads down, like the steps of the adulteress, straight to the grave.

For example, the word that's translated shameful ways in verse 2 is actually the same Greek word, *apaleia*, *apaleia*, which means destruction.

[15:32] So in verse 1, Peter is telling us that destructive ideas invariably result in destruction. And in verse 2 and verse 3, he tells us that destructive behavior inevitably results in destruction.

And there are some other repetitions here, too. The word *krisis*, which is translated judgment, in verse 4 and verse 9, is the same word as accusation in verse 11, slander or false witness.

The judgments that these false teachers make rebound on themselves, and they find themselves judged by it. And that result, as Peter tells us, in their imprisonment.

And this idea of blasphemy is repeated as well. The slander, sorry, I should have said it's accusation in verse 11, that is the same, the word *krisis*.

The word slander in verse 10 and 11 is blasphemous. Blasphemy. And what is the result of that blasphemy? It results in bringing the truth into disrepute.

[16:46] Blasphemy. Bringing the truth into disrepute. There is a logic to it. There is almost an inevitability to it. That if you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind.

That if you sow destruction, you will reap destruction. And in verses 4 to 11, Peter goes on to illustrate this inevitable cycle by means of the creation and Genesis narratives.

But he reminds us also in those narratives that God is able to rescue. We might be slightly puzzled by his examples.

Noah and Lot. Lot is not exactly noted as a righteous man, is he, in the Old Testament? And even Noah made mistakes.

In Genesis 9, 21, we read what happened when Noah got drunk. And in Genesis 13, chapter 13, verses 10 and 11, we read that Lot made a rather selfish, and it turned out, rather foolish decision. [17:59] And because of that, it was that he found himself in Sodom. These men were not perfectly righteous men by any means.

And yet, Peter describes them as righteous. Why is that? It's because they did believe what God said. And they did respond to his warning when it came.

They believed God. And as it was said of Abraham, that was counted to them as righteousness.

They escaped because when the warning came, they believed what God had said.

That's the point, isn't it? Like them, we need to take the way of escape that God provides. Because these false teachers are trying to offer some other way of escape.

Some other way out, as it were, of the futility of our lives on this land, as it sometimes seems. But Peter wants to remind us that it's God who really understands the issues of judgment.

[19:15] And he really understands the issues of salvation. He reminds us of that in verse 9. He says that God is the one who knows how to rescue the righteous and reserve sinners for judgment.

Noah and Lot had the sense to heed the warning when it came. Those who don't offer the escape route that God provides, ultimately have only themselves to blame.

And by doing that, it says they're despising authority in verse 10. As I say, it's perhaps not entirely sure exactly what authority it is they are despising.

Perhaps it's the apostles. But ultimately, they are despising the authority of God himself. It is the lie of Satan, wasn't it, in the garden.

Did God really say that? God is the one who provides the way of escape. God is the one who is in the business of salvation and rescue.

[20:29] And if we listen to anybody else, in the end, we've only got ourselves to blame. But then, moving on, Peter develops this idea of self-destruction.

In verse 12, a different word for destruction is used, which is almost unpronounceable to us English people. I think it's something like fathora or fatora.

Very difficult word to say. But it also means destruction. It's not the same as is used in the earlier verses. And I put the ESV translation there on the screen because although it's a bit clunky in English, it does actually capture the logic and the repetition better.

Because Peter describes these people as creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, and they will also be destroyed in their destruction.

It almost sounds tautological, but what does it mean they will be destroyed in their destruction? But I think he's comparing their destruction to animals who will be destroyed.

[21:46] He said it's inevitable. This is just the way the world is. If they turn aside from that which God has presented, then they will be destroyed like animals meant for slaughter.

And actually the same word is used again in verse 19, where it's translated depravity or corruption. Corruption destroys that which it infects, doesn't it?

That's almost the point of the word. When corruption sets into a dead body, when corruption sets into a political system, it destroys it from the inside out.

It's inevitable. That's just what corruption does. That's the way it works. But I say in this latter part of the passage, a slightly different slant is developed.

The rebellious behavior these teachers display is summed up in our English word sin. I don't think Peter actually uses the word, but he certainly describes it in all its distinguishing features.

[22:57] He read it. I won't go through them all again, but he talks about carousing. He talks about thinking that they bring, doing things that they think bring freedom.

He talks about cursing things they don't know. What better description can there be of sin? These teachers think they're superior to angels, but Peter says, no, not angels, but animals.

Brute beasts, irrational animals. They're creatures of instinct. They want you to suck you into their thinking and behaving in the same way.

They're not behaving as rational creatures at all. They're behaving unreasonably, unrationally, as creatures of instinct. You can't reason with a pig to stay out of the mud.

A pig is just doing what a pig does, what a pig is. You can't reason with a pig. But then maybe, Peter thought, perhaps he thought he was being a bit unfair to the animal kingdom, because in verse 16, he points out that sometimes even a donkey has more sense.

[24:12] He remembers the donkey of Balaam, the prophet, who refused to go along the path of wickedness.

The donkey simply wouldn't go. The suggestion is that the donkey saw an angel blocking the path, if you look at the story, but Balaam couldn't see.

And so, not unreasonably, the donkey turned aside and stopped. Sometimes even a donkey has more sense than these false teachers.

Peter reminds us, there's nothing reasonable about sin. People claim that it is. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

But there's nothing reasonable about sin, because it actually turns you into a creature of instinct. People claim that sin is liberating, don't they?

[25:10] These false teachers did in those days, promising freedom. And isn't that up to date? Isn't that exactly what people tell you today?

Do whatever feels good. Indulge in sex, or overeating, or drugs, or arrogance, or viciousness. It's freedom, isn't it? Freedom to do whatever you like. But no, Peter says, they offer freedom, but the result is slavery, because it's addictive.

It's not just heroin that's addictive. All forms of sin are addictive. They enslave you. They take you over. You think that they're giving you pleasure, don't you?

You think that they're giving you a connection to the world. You think that they're living life to the full, as it were. But actually, says Peter, it's not making you solid at all.

[26:24] It's not embedding you in this world, and making you solid in this world. In fact, he says, it's making you dried up, and withered, and insubstantial.

Verse 17, like a mist. It's there one minute, and the sun comes out, and the wind blows, and it's just gone. Sin makes you, not solid, but insubstantial.

I think C.S. Lewis understood that rather well in his book, *The Great Divorce*.

And he says, the problem with hell is that it's too small, that it's insubstantial. The reality is in heaven. Heaven. So, let's heed this warning.

Beware of the scammers. We're always being warned that nowadays, aren't we? Beware of the fishies in your email. Don't click onto the website that's going to download a Trojan onto your software.

[27:45] They all work the same way, don't they? They seem to be offering something valuable, but actually, they're out to exploit you. They're out to get you, body and soul, and money as well, usually.

They may turn up in a smart suit in a Mercedes. They may be offering prosperity and power instead of poverty of spirit, which is what Jesus says is truly blessed.

Or they may wear an academic gown with lots of name, letters after their name and degrees and learned papers. And they may say, no reasonable person can believe that anymore.

Here's my updated version of the gospel. They may even pose as preachers, elders of the churches as they do seem to have been doing in that church that Peter was writing to.

They may offer some path through the Christian life which is different from the godliness which Peter has described in chapter one. They may offer salvation from something else that is not the wrath of God.

[29:08] Isn't it strange how preachers today often downgrade the wrath of God because they don't want to think about destruction and judgment.

But you can't get away from it. It's in the scripture. If you downgrade the wrath of God then most of the gospel makes no sense at all. They'll preach a subtly rewritten a subtly edited Jesus won't they with pliable words with plastic words that can be moulded into the into the form that they want into the form that is more amenable as they say it to the ideas of this world and this society.

There's nothing plastic about the gospel. There's nothing plastic about the Jesus that's presented in the gospels.

He cannot be edited to suit one's own message. It was said once that people who write biographies of Jesus usually land up telling you more about themselves than they do about Jesus.

And there's truth in that I think. everybody wants to interpret Jesus to fit themselves. But actually that's declaring themselves isn't it to be the true Messiah the true king.

[30:45] But the true Jesus cannot be tamed as again quotes C.S. Lewis it's not as if he's a tame lion. However these men turn up whether it's say a smart suit and a Mercedes whether it's an academic gown or whether it's a preacher's garb I can guarantee you one thing they'll appear attractive and they'll appear reasonable and they'll be really nice after all these guys Peter tells us are experts they've trained in it they've practiced in it but don't be taken in don't turn aside remember what Jesus said no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God notice what he actually says there I think this is probably the correct meaning he's fit for service in the kingdom of God

I think some earlier translation said fit for the kingdom of God but that's what he's saying isn't it who wants a plough boy who's always looking over his shoulder he's useless he's never going to plough a straight furrow he's simply unfit for the job and so Peter reminds those who start on the path to life in verse 21 but then turn aside worse off than if they'd never started to do so is to be driven by instinct so take the warning of Balaam's donkey Balaam's donkey refused to follow the road his master set out on eventually Balaam had to listen although in the end regrettably he didn't take the warning in the end because we know he went on to try and spread corruption among the Israelites so although he did take the warning immediately and later on he turned aside again and even the donkey couldn't restrain him so listen to the warning even if the warning does seem to come from a donkey from somebody who's not like some of these super apostles listen to the warning that God gives because if you don't you will share in that destruction that Peter describes here they will secretly introduce destructive heresies even denying the sovereign lord who bought them bringing swift destruction on themselves says Peter but clearly he means not just on themselves but on those who follow them as well but we need not despair because God does provide the way of escape as he did for

Noah and as he did for Lot and what is the way of escape the way of escape is the Lord Jesus Christ the pioneer the one who has been through the gate of death and pioneered the way to the promised land the better leader than Moses there is a way of escape in following the Lord Jesus but let us not be seduced by the false prophets so let's say so let's say go to go to the time to go to the!