



“The Danger of Forsaking the Right Way”

2 Peter 2:15-19

Theme: Striving for personal gain will only bring entrapment through sensual pursuits.

I. THE DEBILITY IN FORSAKING THE RIGHT WAY – 2:15-16

A. The Contempt for Prioritizing Personal Gain – v. 15

1. There is a perception here that the decision to depart from the “right way” was a deliberate choice.
2. “*forsaking*” [χαταλείπω] – they abandoned, or “left behind,” that way in preference to another with absolutely no intention of returning.
3. Instead, “*they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam*” -
4. This other way is called the “*way of Balaam*” – an OT prophet who was so committed to personal gain that he chose to disobey God because of its allure – cp. Numbers 22-24
5. Balaam’s love was for what he could personally gain through unrighteousness – a love called out of one’s heart by the preciousness of the object being loved – cp. 2 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:15-17; Matthew 6:19-24.
6. In fact, in order to gain the treasure that he sought, Balaam counseled Balak in how to get Israel cursed by God – cp. Numbers 25:1-3.

B. The Censure for Prioritizing Personal Gain – v. 16

1. The debilitation of this commitment to personal gain is highlighted by means of the rebuke Balaam received from God – “... *but he received a rebuke for his own transgression ...*”.
2. God used a donkey to confront Balaam with the perversity of his priorities – “... *for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.*” – cp. Numbers 22:21-31
 - a) The rebuke was intensified in that God used an “*unreasoning animal*” – cp. v. 12 to do it.
 - b) In contrast, Balaam was suffering from “*madness*” [παραφρονία] – literally “beside the mind” or irrationality.

- c) He had become so irrational, that God humbled him by “*restrain[ing]*” him with a donkey! – completely turning the tables.

II. THE DECEPTION OF FORSAKING THE RIGHT WAY – 2:17

A. The Defrauding by the “Way of Balaam”

1. Peter expresses here the way that the “*way of Balaam*” deceives – it arouses desires that will not be fulfilled – “defrauding”
2. “These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm” - what looks like a gushing spring ends up possessing no water; like mirages – cp. John 4:13-14; 7:38
3. The “*mists driven by a storm*” can vitalize vegetation but only superficially – there is no depth or true nourishment, making one think that a rainstorm is imminent, but disappointing.
4. False teachers possess common traits or ministry styles:¹
 - a) They are authoritarian – ruling over people in an authoritarian style – cp. Jeremiah 5:31; 3 John 9-10.
 - b) They are anthropocentric – pandering to what they think people want to hear – Jeremiah 23:16; 2 Timothy 4:3-4
 - c) They are antagonistic toward doctrine – Jeremiah 6:16.

B. The Destruction of the “Way of Balaam”

1. In reality, to follow this way is to bring upon oneself certain doom – “*for whom the black darkness has been reserved.*”
2. The reference to “*darkness*” [σκότος] can be viewed as a reference to Hell – cp. Jude 13.
3. This is the place of God’s eternal wrath being perpetually poured out against their unrighteousness and defiance – the Lake of Fire.

III. THE DETRIMENT IN FORSAKING THE RIGHT WAY – 2:18-19

A. The Appeal of the “Way of Balaam” – v. 18

1. They paint a delightful picture through the use of extravagant expressions but which are truly vain or empty – “*For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error.*”
2. They target those who are brand new babes in Christ who are unstable in their awareness of the Truth.

¹ MacArthur – p. 103-104

3. They do this through appealing to the “*fleshly desires*” [ἐπιθυμίαις σαρκὸς] of these recently converted pagans – this is a reference to distracting them from a life of freedom in grace and ensnaring them in a carnal system of sensual fulfillment.
4. “*sensuality*” [ἀσελγεία] – the lack of self-restraint in indulging in what is socially unacceptable; “self-abandonment.”
5. Thus, they don’t promote righteousness at all, rather, they pander to the carnal, feelings-oriented instincts of anyone who will listen to them.

B. The Affect of the “Way of Balaam” – v. 19

1. These false teachers promise all kinds of things but fail to deliver – “*promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.*”
2. This results in a new type of bandage – a reversion to slavery to the fleshly desires that dominated them prior to the grace of God.
3. If our freedom becomes license, we are simply ensnared in the flesh – cp. Romans 6:12-18