

2 Peter 2:17-22 False Teachers, Their Characteristics

Verse 17

Springs without water – The word for “springs” speaks of a flowing spring. It is the same word used in Revelation 17:7 and 21:6. It speaks of the *living water* that gushes up to eternal life in John 4:14. False teachers offer life but they really have nothing to offer. It is a false promise. Only Jesus offers eternal life to all who will simply believe in Him.

Mists driven by a storm – Clouds driven by a frontal line should announce the possibility of rain. These only announce that a windstorm is coming. Jude describes them as “*clouds without water, carried along by winds*”.

For whom the black darkness has been reserved – Literally, “*the darkness of the darkness*”. See Jude 6 and 13.

Verse 18

Peter gives three reasons false teachers appeal to people:

- 1 – *Speaking arrogant words of vanity* – They are eloquent promoters of their doctrines.
- 2 – *They entice by fleshy desires...* - They appeal to the base appetites of the old nature.
- 3 – *Those who barely escape...* - They appeal to young or immature believers.

Verse 19

Promising them freedom while they are slaves of corruption – Their “freedom” is a false freedom because it is based on false promises. False teachers are slaves to their flesh and their greed. They cannot deliver others from the very things by which they themselves are enslaved.

For by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved – Jesus said, “...everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” (John 8:34) Paul says, “...all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.” (1 Corinthians 6:12). Enslavement to sin can be varying in degree. We must be on guard when we see something beginning to lure us away from our devotion to Christ.

Verse 20

For if after they have escaped – The understanding of verses 20-22 hinges on the understanding of to whom “*they*” refers. Most commentators believe it is referring to the false teachers (unsaved) yet the context presents great difficulty in that interpretation. This is fueled by a theological view that says true believers cannot fall or *black slide* into a permanent state of sinfulness. Contextually there is a shift in verse 18 from the false teachers to those whom they trick or entice. The “*if*” is a 1st class conditional meaning it is assumed to be true.

Escaped the defilements of the world – This seems to be speaking of believers (note Ephesians 2:1-2 where the unbelieving state is *walking according to the course of this world*).

By the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – This is the same word for “*full knowledge*” that Peter uses in 1:2, 1:3, and 1:8. Of the 20 usages of this word in the New Testament, all are in the context of truly knowing the Lord Jesus. Whoever these people are, they have a saving knowledge of Jesus.

They are again entangled in them and are overcome – The picture is one who has started walking down the path of righteousness and then falls off to the wayside and becomes entangled again in his former lifestyle. Proverbs gives many warnings about straying from the proper path. Note Proverbs 4:26, 7:25, 10:17, etc. We also see a similar parallel in the Parable of the Soils in Luke 8:4-15.

The last state has become worse for them than the first - This is referring to the actual moral condition of such people. In moral matters, the higher one climbs, the further is the

distance one may fall. These words reproduce the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:45 and Luke 11:26. The point is that when evil is expelled from a person but it later returns, the effects are worse than they were before.

Verse 21

For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness – Note that Peter does not say it would be better for a person *not to have known Christ!* It is the way, (Greek = road or path) of righteousness they would be better off not knowing.

“...the way of righteousness is like a road that winds ever upward around the edge of a mountain towards its peak... to “fall off” this road can lead to a steeper descent than if one had remained at ground level. Better not to climb than to climb and fall!”¹

Zane Hodges

To turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them – Note that they do not turn away from Christ, rather they turn away from the holy commandment. Peter is no doubt thinking about the command he cites in 1 Peter 1:16 as a summary for Christian living. False teachers usually do not call upon their followers to renounce Christ, but instead to abandon the holy commandment that their previous spiritual teachers had delivered to them.

Verse 22

It has happened to them according to the true proverb – This is a quotation of Proverbs 26:11. Conduct is in view here, not nature. Those who fall prey to false teaching will end up behaving like disgusting animals. The New Testament writers knew the saving grace of God but they also knew the potential failures true believers could commit if they did not stay close to the Lord.

Our resource – The Word of God! 1 Pet. 1:15-16, Gal. 5:16, 1 John 1:7, Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 12:1-3, etc.

¹ Hodges, Zane C. Second Peter. GES, Denton, TX. 2015. p.85