

False Teachers; Destructive Heresies – 2 Peter 2:1

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

The Second Epistle of Peter was written by Simon Peter, an apostle of Christ, who also penned First Peter (see 2 Peter 3:1). The principal design of this letter was to “stir” Christian minds to a greater level of spirituality and to fortify them against the danger of certain false teachers who threatened their faith.

A looming heresy involved a denial of Christ (2:1) and ridiculed the promise of his return (3:3-4). Certain teachers were consumed with fleshly lusts and despised divine authority. They were rebels—sneaky, reckless, and bold in their opposition to truth. They lived more on the animal level than as godly human beings (2:1, 10-12). These peddlers of error delighted in seducing and taking captive ignorant souls, all the while promising them freedom to live independently of the will of God (2:14, 18-19). They were church outlaws!

A key verse within this larger context is chapter two, verse one:

But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Let us carefully consider the sacred words of this brief and ominous prophecy.

The text begins with “but” (*de*, an adversative particle), intended to distinguish what follows from a previous affirmation. The apostle had just alluded to men who “spoke from God” and were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (1:20-21). He then described those of a different character, “false teachers,” who would be reflections of certain “false prophets” who were “among” God’s people in the Old Testament era (e.g., Balaam [v. 15]).

“False teachers” derives from the compound Greek *pseudo-didaskalos*. *Pseudo* suggests the idea of deception—that which is not true, hence deceives. It is an assault against the “God of truth” (Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16). A false teacher is disingenuous in character and in the composition of his message.

The apostle declares that these false teachers will arise “among you” (*en humin*), i.e., “in your midst.” Some suggest that the future tense is rhetorical, and that these teachers were among them already (Davids 2006, 218).

A key issue among religious scholars is whether these teachers were church members who were **genuine** in their conversion initially, or whether they were mere pretenders who never embraced the gospel. Baptist scholar, A. T. Robertson, who endorsed the Calvinistic theory of the impossibility of apostasy, contended that they were simply “professing Christians” (1933, 160). This allegation, however, contradicts the explicit testimony of the text.

False Teachers—Bought but Lost

There are a number of traits the serious student must consider regarding these teachers.

First, Peter declares that these teachers will “deny the Master that bought them.” The term “bought” (*agorazo* [found thirty times in the New Testament]) literally means to buy or purchase something (cf. Matthew 27:7), but the term is employed metaphorically on several occasions “to describe the redemption of Christians,” as in this text (Mounce 2006, 94; Field 1975, 268). Jesus bought his people with his blood (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; Revelation 5:9; 14:3-4; cf. also Acts 20:28 though a different verb is employed). There is no reason, apart from a sectarian predisposition, to assign some exotic significance to “brought” in this passage.

Professor Edwin Blum of the Dallas Theological Seminary admitted that this term raises “questions about the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (i.e., eternal security).” However he attempted to wiggle around it by suggesting that though Christ had bought them, the price had not been “applied” to these teachers by means of the “regeneration” process (1981, 276). That is some maneuvering!

Clearly the most natural meaning is to see the language in the same contextual sense as his affirmation in the preceding epistle, namely that Christians are the ones “redeemed” or “bought” with the “precious blood” of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). As Professor Davids observed: “[T]hese people did belong to Christ and had been purchased by him and thus owed him obedience” (221).

Moreover, the denial was of their “Master,” which implies the Master-Servant relationship and clearly signifies that at one time they had submitted to Christ as their Lord. Thayer comments that the term “deny” (*arneomai*) is here “used of those who by cherishing and disseminating pernicious opinions and immorality are adjudged to have **apostatized** from God and Christ” (1958, 74; emphasis added).

Second, near the conclusion of chapter two, Peter described the false teachers as previously having: (a) **escaped** “the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”; (b) **known** “the way of righteousness; and, **turned** from the holy commandment delivered unto them (vv. 20-21).

If language means anything at all, one simply cannot avoid the conclusion that these perverters of truth earlier had been right with God, but had abandoned their commitment. In spite of this perfectly clear testimony, those enslaved to the Calvinistic dogma cannot accept it. A recent writer says that the false teachers “claimed to be ‘redeemed’ and ‘saved’ because they were part of the church, but their apostasy showed that they were not truly believers.” This statement is entirely contradictory. Had they not been true believers at some point, they could not have apostatized! Observe another conflicting statement regarding vv. 20-22 by the same writer:

It would have been better for these false teachers never to have escaped the world in the first place, than to follow in the path of the knowledge of . . . Christ only to abandon that path and return to a life of sin and darkness (Oss 2008, 2420-2421).

Ultimate Accountability

The inspired apostle concludes his statement by emphasizing the danger inherent in the doctrine these heretics taught—a threat both to their converts and to themselves. The nature of the teaching is described as “destructive heresies” (*haireseis apoleias*). The first term denotes an aberrant doctrine that one chooses which tends to polarize and thus produce a distinctive “sect” (cf. Acts 5:17; 15:5). The teaching stands in opposition to “the way of truth” (v. 2). Note the singular number of the word “way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).











Such divisiveness or partisan activity was strongly condemned (Galatians 5:20), and those who initiated such, or who yielded to the ungodly influence, were to be “refused,” which means disfellowshipped (Titus 3:10). In view of this, how can the modern community of sectarianism possibly be right with God?

“Destruction” (*apoleia* [found 18x in the New Testament]) refers to the definitive and everlasting punishment of all who embrace not a love for God’s truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10); thus choose the “wide gate” and travel the “broad way” (Matthew 7:13), the final destination of those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18) and are “ungodly” (2 Peter 3:7). These will receive the punishment they justly deserve (Romans 9:22). It is the “destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life” and the bestowment of “eternal misery” or “perdition” (Thayer, 71). The word “does not mean extinction but ruination, not loss of being but loss of well-being” (Hiebert 1989, 89; cf. Kittel 1964, 397). These teachers are like suicide terrorists—they destroy others and themselves in the process!

Apostate teachers are held accountable for the destruction of their victims and will reap the same consequence, “bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” The destruction will come swiftly, likely as they die. What a vivid commentary this text is on Christ’s warning: “Take heed what you hear” (Mark 4:24) and “how you hear” (Luke 8:18).

Conclusion

One would be hard pressed to find a clearer modern example of those who “twist [the Scriptures] to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16) than advocates of the Calvinistic persuasion who torture this passage into conformity with their teaching of the impossibility of apostasy. A single breath of honest exegesis would forever demolish this deceptive and destructive theory.

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Scripture References

1 Peter 3:1; Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16; Matthew 27:7; 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23; Revelation 5:9, 14:3-4; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Acts 5:17, 15:5; Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 22; Galatians 5:20; Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; Matthew 7:13; Philippians 3:18; 2 Peter 3:7; Romans 9:22; Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18; 2 Peter 3:16

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