

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 14 February 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Way of Balaam

2 Peter 2:13-17

In last week's message, we studied **2 Peter 2:10-12**. In these verses, we learned about one of the main characteristics of apostate teachers. Peter says that apostates despise "**government**," and speak evil of "**dignities**." However, as we looked at the context of this passage, we saw that Peter wasn't speaking about *civil* government. Rather, he was speaking about the government of the local church. Apostates hate and despise the authority of Bible-preaching, local churches. We also saw that the word "**dignities**" refers to *pastors* of local churches. God says that pastors who faithfully feed the Lord's flock should be highly esteemed and honoured for their labour of love; but apostates despise pastors, and others in church leadership.

Oftentimes, apostates are on the outside of the church, and they subtly draw people away from the Bible-preaching church, and into their fold. Sometimes false teachers sneak into Bible-preaching churches under a false profession of faith, for the express purpose of drawing people away. Still other times, apostates honestly *think* that they are saved (perhaps because they prayed a "sinner's prayer" at some point); and at first, they don't have any particular agenda. However, a time comes when they begin to see that an opportunity exists for them to promote themselves in the assembly; and they begin to devise plans. They begin to look for an opportune time either to seize the leadership of the church, or to draw as many people away from the church as possible. How do they start this rebellion? They begin by attacking the *government* of the church. Sometimes, when they feel that they have enough clout to do so, they defy the pastor to his face. Other times, they undermine the pastor behind his back—all the while smiling and speaking flattering words to his face, so that he will place them in greater positions of trust and power. But then, when distrust of the church leadership has taken root in many hearts, apostates move on to their next step, which is to introduce false teaching. Now, they may not undermine the Gospel itself; they may simply introduce teachings which appeal to the flesh, so as to attract those who are already in love with the world. In time, though, false teaching and practice always leads to a weakening, and eventual abandoning, of the Gospel itself. This is the way of apostates!

Now, in today's Scripture, we will look at another characteristic of apostates. We will look not only at apostates' *words*, but at their *practice*—the way they live their lives. We will see what motivates them, and what they really live for. I'll give you a hint: they do *not* live to serve the Lord Jesus Christ! They live for themselves. They live to fulfill the lusts of their flesh.

Some of you have not yet come to Christ for salvation, because you fear the commitment that would be involved in Christian living. If this be you, I urge you to heed the truth that you are about to hear this morning! There are plenty of false teachers out there who would love to draw you into their smooth, easy religious web; and you need to know what is at stake (namely, your soul)! Those of us who are saved need to know more about the danger of apostasy, as well, so that we will not fall prey to the pernicious teachings of apostates. The title of this message is ***The Way of Balaam***.

Read 2 Peter 2:13-17.

From this passage, I would like to point out three characteristics of apostate teachers. First of all...

I. Apostates love immorality (vv. 13-14).

At the end of last week's message, we read **verse 12**. In this verse, Peter referred to false teachers as "*natural brute beasts*." Peter didn't use this description simply because he was trying to hurl names at the apostates; rather, he is describing the kind of spiritual understanding that apostates have. The point is that they *have* no spiritual understanding! Spiritually speaking, they are like beasts, in that they operate only according to their natural and sensual drives. They know nothing of faith in God. Faith is something of which animals are incapable; and likewise, apostates have no true faith in God. Whatever "faith" they may appear to have is only empty, pretentious faith.

Apostates lack spiritual understanding. However, there is something else that they usually lack: that that is *morality*. That is what Peter especially emphasizes here in **verses 13 and 14**. Animals have no sense of morality. They roam freely from mate to mate, and fulfill their natural physical desires. Why? Because God designed them that way, in order that they might multiply, and fill the earth.

However, with men, this should not be so. God created man with an inherent sense of morality. God created man to marry one wife, and to be faithful to her, and to cherish her, and to bring up children with her for the glory of God. Yet apostates, just like animals, often roam around freely, fulfilling their lusts whenever they can get away with it. It's not that they have no inner knowledge that what they are doing is wrong; they simply are not bothered by that knowledge anymore.

You see, even lost people have a God-given conscience; and their conscience does often restrain them from evil. The problem with apostates is that their consciences have usually been seared through their constant rejection of God. Just as a person who has been branded with a hot iron no longer feels pain in that part of his body, because the nerves have been destroyed, so many apostates have passed the point of feeling guilt over their sin. They have chosen to ignore their own consciences, as well as the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God; and they have become insensitive to the truth. Paul described this to Timothy in **1 Timothy chapter 4**.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-4.

In this passage, Peter is giving us a "heads up" about the kind of things that apostates would teach their followers in the "*latter times*." He says that there would come a day when marrying would be forbidden, and when eating meat would be forbidden. Now, it's not hard to see how this prophecy has unfolded. For one thing, the Gnostic teachers of Paul's day were already mixing such teachings with Christianity. Picking up where the Gnostics left off, the Catholic Church has, for centuries, taught such things, as well. They have forbidden their priests to marry (a practice, by the way, which has led to awful, shameful immorality among their priests, and incalculable pain and damage to people's lives). Just like the ancient pagan Gnostics, the Catholic Church has also forbidden people to eat meat on certain days of the week, and during certain seasons of the year. They teach that refraining from eating meat at certain times somehow makes people "spiritual" (even though God has lifted all restrictions on

meat). The New Age, environmental cultists of our day are now telling us that we shouldn't eat meat, as well. The only thing that has changed is the *reason* for not eating meat. They say that we shouldn't eat meat because we are harming the ozone layer and "mother earth" by doing so. Listen, there's nothing new about apostasy, folks! Apostate teachings have a way of popping up again and again. The only thing that changes is the *packaging*.

Now, Peter makes several points about the morality of false teachers in **verses 13 and 14**. First, Peter points out that apostates have a "**reward**." Now, at first glance, this may seem like a strange idea. Do those who live unrighteously receive a "**reward**" for their unrighteousness? Yes, they do! For one thing, they have an *eternal* reward coming their way. Their eternal reward is death—eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire. The Bible says, "**For the wages of sin is death.**"

However, there is another kind of "**reward**" that apostates receive *in this lifetime*. Let's see what that reward is. (**Read 2 Peter 2:13 again.**) What is the apostate's reward in this lifetime? It is the very thing that he desires to have! It is the very thing he seeks after. According to Peter, the apostate likes to "**riot**." This means that he loves to indulge in physical pleasure. He likes debauchery. Since that is what he desires, that is his reward. He wants it; and he's got it! **However**, this is the *only* reward that he'll get (other than his *eternal* reward of the Lake of Fire). It's just like what Jesus said about the Pharisees. He said that "**they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward**" (**Matthew 6:5**). Apostates want praise and recognition? They've got it! Satan will make sure they get plenty of it. But that's all they're going to get. They want lustful pleasure? They've got it! But that's all they're going to get. By the way, they'll continue to have their *lustful desires* in hell, for all eternity. The only problem is that they will have no way to fulfill their desires in hell. They will have no comfort or rest; and they will never see the beautiful gates of the New Jerusalem. They wanted an earthly reward; and an earthly reward is all that they will get.

How else does Peter describe apostates? Let's look again. (**Read verse 13 again.**) Peter describes apostates as "**spots**" and "**blemishes**." What does this mean? Well, in Scripture, "spots" and "blemishes" are pictures of sin. Saved people have had *their* spots and blemishes washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ is like a Lamb without blemish, and without spot; and all who believe on Him have their sinful blemishes washed away. Judicially, God no longer sees the believer's sin. Apostates, on the other hand, have no covering for their sin. What's more, they don't care. The apostate's sin is like a "sport" to him. It's like a game.

Now, not all apostates have yet reached the point of not being bothered by their conscience. Many apostates sincerely *think* that they are doing right. Praise God, some apostates eventually respond to the Gospel, and get saved! However, many apostate teachers *have* reached the point of not being bothered by their sin. To them, it is an amusing "sport" to deceive people.

One apostate teacher who was in his "heyday" of popularity a couple decades ago was a man named **Morris Cerullo**. He was a so-called "faith healer" preacher. I once saw a 1992 BBC interview in which a reporter was pressing Mars to explain why every known case of so-called "healings" in his meetings turned out to be totally bogus. People were not being healed at all. (Of course, they *wouldn't* be healed, because God is no longer giving people the gift of

healing. Paul prophesied that these gifts would pass away when the Scripture was complete. Preachers today who claim to “heal” are phonies.)

Now, apparently, at least two people—an epilepsy victim, and a 4-year-old cancer patient—had actually *died* not long after Cerullo had “healed” them. The little girl died of her cancer of the bones; and the epileptic lady died by drowning in her own bathtub. (She had thrown out her medicine after she came home from Mars’ “healing” service.) These were serious charges! They were absolutely true, and substantiated. Yet, Mars was not daunted. He smugly smiled, and said, “You’re talking to the wrong person. Go talk to the people who make the claims. You’ve got to understand....*Mars does not make the claims. The people claim they are healed, not Mars.*” It was obvious that in Mars’ mind, this was all a jolly “sport.” Mars knew that to his faithful followers, his answer was acceptable. He knew that his followers were so emotionally caught up in the hype, and in the loud, hypnotic music, and in the repetitive, hypnotic chants, that they were totally able to believe that the stage hypnotism they were seeing was for real.

To apostate teachers, this is all a game. Oftentimes, they brazenly go on the telly and brag to their followers about their wealth. They virtually mock their followers to their face. They know that they can get away with this arrogance, because they have convinced their followers that if they will just send in a big cheque to their ministry, they will be healed, and will be prosperous, and will have boatloads of money. Of course, the only ones making money are the apostate preacher and his cronies. They can make up all kinds of ridiculous lies, and they know that their followers will believe it.

Another characteristic of apostates is that they have ***“eyes full of adultery.”*** (Read **2 Peter 2:14** again.) Apostates cannot do otherwise than to follow their fleshly desires. They literally cannot stop sinning. Not having the new nature that Christ imparts, they are utterly controlled by their sensual passions. What’s more, Peter says that they ***“beguile”*** (or “trick”) ***“unstable souls.”*** These ***“unstable souls”*** are other lost people who do not have the Holy Spirit, and who have no foundation for their lives. (Sadly, in some cases, ***“unstable souls”*** can even be Christians who do not know God’s Word very well, and who have been caught up in an apostate’s web of lies.) False teachers know exactly how to use phony religious talk to get their unstable victims to join them in sinning. Oftentimes, they actually convince their victims that what they are doing is somehow holy! (For example, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, convinced each of the dozens of women whom he seduced and took from their husbands that she was his “spiritual” bride!) This is the way of apostates. It doesn’t matter what kind of religious background they may come from. They can arise in conservative Baptist churches, as well as in any other religion (and, sadly, they often do). When a one-time Bible-preaching congregation departs from the truth, and has a “name” that it lives, but is spiritually dead, and allows itself to be led by worldly, sensual men, there is no depth of wickedness to which the leaders and the people in the pew cannot sink.

Judgment Day is coming for apostate teachers; and their judgment will be great! Apostates often fall into even greater sin than the average person, because their out-of-control pride (which is fuelled by their earthly wealth) makes them even bolder, and more daring, in their sin. Since many apostates have seared their consciences, they know no restraint on their lusts. They have no feeling of remorse for the wicked things that they do in secret, nor for the way they deceive, use, and hurt people. Apostates love the reward of unrighteousness. They love immorality.

II. Apostates love money (the “way of Balaam”)

(Read verses 14-16 again.) In these verses, we see another characteristic of apostate teachers: namely, they love money. They are covetous and greedy. Peter says that they have forsaken the right way, and have followed the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Balaam is a classic apostate--a sort of “textbook case” of a false teacher. Let’s go back to the Old Testament and see what we can learn about Balaam.

Read Numbers 22:1-12 / 22:21-35 / 24:1-17.

Who was this Balaam? Balaam was a Gentile (a Syrian) who knew *about* the true God, and who knew how to perform Jehovah’s sacrifices and rituals of worship. He was from the region where Abraham had lived before he moved to Canaan; and, apparently, there was still some knowledge of Jehovah in that region. Balaam had inherited some *knowledge* of the true God; but he did not personally *know* God. He was a lost man.

Now, Balaam was what we call a “hireling prophet.” He would hire his spiritual services to anyone who paid him enough money. He was a sorcerer who knew all the pagan magic and divinations of the day. He was often hired by kings to curse their countries’ enemies. He was renowned for the effectiveness of his curses, too. His curses were effective because they were empowered by powerful demons.

However, in this case, Balaam totally failed to curse Israel. Balak, the king of Moab, figured that if Balaam would only curse Israel in the name of their *own God*, using *Jehovah’s own rituals*, then God would be forced to turn against His people. Apparently, Balaam thought it would work, too. This goes to show the lack of spiritual understanding of both Balak *and* Balaam. The true God is not manipulated by rituals--even if they be rituals that *God Himself* has instituted. Also, God never contradicts His word. God had made an eternal covenant with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. God promised to bless those who bless Abraham’s descendants, and to curse those who curse his descendants. No matter how unfaithful Israel may be to their God, God will *not* cast them away forever. God cannot break His word.

Balaam tried to curse Israel; but God wouldn’t let him. Now, as you can see, Balaam *was* rather shaken up when he saw the angel with the sword in his hand. After seeing the angel, Balaam was so afraid of what God might do to him if he continued to try to curse Israel, that he actually ended up *blessing* Israel instead of cursing them. With all his heart, he coveted that earthly reward from the king of Moab; but he couldn’t get his mouth to say the words of cursing. God forcibly *took control of Balaam’s tongue*, and gave a genuine prophecy of the coming Messiah! Balaam was a false prophet; but on this one, unique occasion, God used this lost man to give a true prophecy.

Yet, did Balaam ever repent? No, he didn’t. This rebuke from God did not make a lasting impression on Balaam. Later, in **Numbers 31**, we find out that Balaam came up with *another* scheme to try to get God to turn against Israel. Balaam advised the king of Midian to use the women of his country to entice the men of Israel to commit adultery, so that they would join in the worship of their gods. Sadly, thousands of Israelite men fell into this sin. The Lord smote all the Israelite men who committed this sin; yet, He did not destroy Israel. Balaam figured that if they could entice Israel to do something evil enough, then God *must* curse Israel, and abandon them. Balaam did not understand that God had blessed Israel, and that nothing could

change that. Balaam was spiritually blind; and he was blinded even further by his covetousness. He was a “son of the flesh.”

By the way, that is exactly why Peter called him “*Balaam the son of Bosor.*” The actual name of Balaam’s father was “Beor”; but Peter called him “Bosor.” Why? He was using a play on words. You see, *bosor* is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *basar*--which means “flesh.” Peter’s memory wasn’t slipping when he called Balaam “the son of Bosor”: he was making a theological point! The point is that Balaam was a “son of the flesh.” He did not know God. He always followed his fleshly desires.

So, what about the times we are living in? Is there an application here? Yes, there is! The New Testament warns us repeatedly that apostate teachers will become more and more numerous as the church age draws to a close. Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when people would not endure sound doctrine, but would heap to themselves false teachers, who would tickle their ears with smooth, easy, and false doctrines. Just like Balaam, modern apostate teachers *know about* the true God; and they use enough biblical language, and speak just enough biblical truth, to fool their followers into thinking that they are godly. Just like Balaam, they do all this for the purpose of personal gain. Let’s take a look at one of these warnings.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-8 / 4:1-10.

Paul warned Timothy that apostasy was on the way, and that it would get much worse at time went on. The fact is, apostasy was *already* rampant in Paul’s day. By the end of the first century, there were already many false cults, which combined Christian ideas with the teachings of paganism. Many cults denied that Jesus is God Almighty; or, that Jesus is sinless; or, that He is a flesh-and-blood man; or, that He truly rose bodily from the dead. Yet, these apostate cults usually arose *from within Bible-preaching churches*. Even some of the closest associates of the Apostles turned out to be apostates in the end. Take a look again at what Paul says in **verse 10. (Read again.)**

One of Paul’s own co-workers—a man named Demas—forsook Paul, and went back to the world. Demas was *not* a genuine Christian who had become faint-hearted in his service to God. He was not a believer who simply swerved from his duty (such as John Mark did for a time). Demas was an apostate. According to Hippolytus (a 2nd-century Christian historian), Demas ended up becoming a priest in an idol-worshipping cult!

Demas’ seeming service to God while he was with Paul was never real. He was never saved. In his heart, there had been no true turning from sin. In Demas’ heart, there was always a secret love of the world; and in time, under the right circumstances, it became evident that he was not a real Christian. When persecution of Christianity began to heat up in Rome, Demas said, “I’m outta here,” and went back to the old life of idolatry. What’s more, he became a *priest* in this apostate religion. No longer did he desire to stay with a poverty-stricken jailbird like Paul, who was obviously destined to be executed by Nero one day. He judged only by the outward appearance. He did not see that there was an eternity of bliss for Paul on the other side of the chop block. Demas was interested only in the “good life” in this world; and he got what he wanted.

Apostates love money! They always have, and always will. This characteristic is always linked with another characteristic of apostates, as well. Namely:

III. Apostates do not teach God's Word (verse 17).

In **verse 17**, Peter gives us two interesting descriptions of apostates. Let's look closely at them. (**Read verse 17 again.**)

The first description that Peter uses for apostates is "*wells without water.*" Now, what is a well *supposed* to have? Water! A fountain should produce clear, life-giving water. Likewise, the pastors and teachers in a church should be like wells of water, always pouring out the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ. (In fact, *every* Christian should be like a well of water!) Now, pastors and teachers are not the *water*. They are not the *source* of life. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God are the "water" that brings spiritual life. Pastors and teachers are merely *dispensers* of the life-giving water of salvation.

But not so with apostates. An apostate teacher is like a *dry* well. He may cherry-pick certain Scriptures, and twist their meaning in order to serve his own ends; but he does not dispense the true Gospel. The apostate teacher's message, though it may sound pretty, is spiritually as dry as dust. It can produce no spiritual life.

Now, let's look at the second description. Peter says that apostates are like clouds driven by wind. What does Peter mean? Let's compare this verse to a verse in **Jude**.

Read Jude 11-12.

Like Peter, Jude uses the "cloud" analogy for apostates. Not only are apostates like clouds driven by wind; they are like clouds that produce *no rain*. What good is a cloud that produces no rain? It isn't! Likewise, false teachers fail to "rain" the true teachings of God's Word upon their followers. Why? Because they are "*twice dead.*" They are dead to God, and are bound for the second death, in the Lake of Fire. In contrast, *true* men of God are spiritually alive; and they rain God's life-giving Word upon others.

In **Isaiah 55**, God compares His Word to the rain that "*watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud.*" Just as rain brings life to the earth, so the Word that goes forth from God's mouth will not return to Him void, but will accomplish that which He pleases. And who dispenses God's Word? God's people! In **Deuteronomy 32**, Moses wrote, "*My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass, because I will publish the name of the LORD.*"

Unlike Moses, apostates do *not* bring down "showers of blessing" from God's Word. They do *not* preach the life-giving message of salvation. They are like clouds that produce no rain. Furthermore, as clouds, they are driven by the "*wind*" of doctrine. They preach whatever false doctrine people want to hear at the moment—anything that will keep them in their position of power, wealth, and prestige. God's true pastors and teachers, on the other hand, teach sound doctrine, so that the church body may become rooted and grounded in love, and not driven about by the winds of false doctrine.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16.

True teachers freely teach God's Word, and give it its true sense and meaning. And what is the result? Changed lives! People are saved, and lives and families are restored, and made whole. Christ comes into people's lives, and they begin to produce spiritual fruit, and become a blessing to everyone around them. They become like "trees of life," planted by the rivers of

water. They bring forth spiritual fruit; their leaf does not wither; and whatever they do for God prospers.

Conclusion: All over the world, churches that were once sound in the faith are slipping into apostasy. Churches are giving heed to doctrines of demons—things like “Christian” yoga, and contemplative mysticism, and theistic evolution (mixing of evolution with the Bible). Churches that were once sound in faith now teach humanistic psychology, which soothes the conscience, and puts worthless “plasters” on the deadly wounds of sin. They play “Christian” rock music, and dress like the world. They engage in dialogue with false religions; and the false religions pull them even farther from the truth. They teach that not *all* of God’s Word was preserved, and that we have an imperfect Bible. Many churches have become completely apostate, and are forsaken by God.

Brethren, we who know Christ must be on the lookout for apostates. We’ve seen their characteristics. They inwardly love immorality; they love money; and they do not teach God’s Word. They teach the philosophies of men. They teach things that are trendy and popular, and which serve to increase their following; but their message is void of spiritual life.

There are some of you who may have never truly received the gift of eternal life. If so, I urge you to come to the Lord Jesus Christ! Repent of your sins and place your faith in Him today!