

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## For the False Prophet, Things Get Worse

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:20–22, KJV 1900)*

This world's pollutions come in many forms. We often think of behaviors that match this description in terms of the gross sins and twisted appetites of the body. True, these transgressions do fit the mold of this world's pollutions. However, many other attitudes and behaviors also fall under this classification. Though they may not be as obnoxious to us, they are just as despicable to our righteous God as the sins of the body, if not more so. Consider Jesus' reaction to various people throughout the four gospels. His strongest judgment always focused against the religious people who pretended a righteousness that they did not practice in life.

It is admittedly difficult to think through the mental processes of a person such as those whom Peter describes in our study lesson. We should fear if thinking as they think ever became comfortable for us. We need not twist our study passage to force it to fit our favorite doctrinal preconception. Read it and believe it for what it says. If it contradicts a favorite doctrine that we have adopted, we would be wise to abandon the doctrine in favor of Scripture. Scripture never contradicts itself, and the doctrines that Scripture affirms fully harmonize with each other. We might misunderstand Scripture, interpreting it wrongly, but the intended meaning of Scripture is never wrong. Our goal is ever to prayerfully and studiously seek that right interpretation and the resultant harmony of all Scripture and all Biblical doctrines.

This passage confronts a common belief of naïve believers, false teachers, and those who follow them. "I may be wrong, but Jesus loves me too much to judge me severely." What this sentiment often intends by the comment is that the person believes that Jesus will not judge His erring child at all. In a day when relativism and sentimental beliefs are often more accepted (And, sadly, acceptable) than Scripture, we must beware the idea that sincerity trumps Scripture in judging our conduct. Supposedly, if you are sincere, you can say or do just about anything you wish, but Jesus only judges your sincerity. Surely, as the belief goes, He will not judge or chasten His child who acts in sincerity. Authentic sincerity in the truth

is a good thing, a mindset that Scripture commends. However, we should be keenly aware. Scripture never—ever—so much as implies that God regards our sincerity over His truth and His commandments. If I sincerely ignore and violate His truth or His commandments, Scripture warns me that judgment shall surely come. Paul was no doubt sincere when he persecuted and murdered Christians before his transformation by grace. He didn't justify or rationalize those sins later based on sincerity. He rather confessed and grieved them. For Paul, sincerity meant nothing unless he understood Jesus and His commandments—and obeyed them. Jesus warned His disciples that a time would come when their persecutors would actually think that they did God a service by putting the believers to death. (John 16:2) Paul refutes the idea that sincerity alone pleases God.

*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:2-3)*

According to Paul, sincere zeal based on ignorance and not knowledge is something from which God's children need to be delivered, not something to be commended.

Scripture rejects any attitude that minimizes the consequences of sin in any way. For a child of God, sin does not dissolve God's love or their final entrance into His glory, but sin ravages the soul of a child of grace in this life. Not only does Scripture warn of the Lord's chastening judgment, but Scripture also warns that His temporal judgments can be severe. (Romans 11:22) No believer in Christ should expect any peace or meaningful joy in life so long as they pursue a course of sin or contradiction to the Lord and to His gracious truth.

Consider one simple example. In today's world of me-first self-gratification, where twisted believers rationalize their sin with "God wants me to be happy, and I can't be happy with..." this lesson

needs to be trumpeted from pulpits everywhere. Scripture depicts true spiritual happiness almost as a by-product of faithful obedience, not as an end in itself. And Scripture affirms that God “wants” (More correctly, He commands) His children to be holy. (1 Peter 1:14-16) The person who makes happiness the ultimate objective of his/her life never finds lasting happiness. However, the believer who makes holiness his/her goal, living a life dedicated to God and to His people through faithful obedience to His commandments in Scripture, shall discover more peaceful joy and true happiness than he/she ever could have imagined. To devalue Biblical truth and godly obedience to the Lord and to His commandments revealed in Scripture is a matter of grave concern to our God. Scripture repeatedly warns us of the consequences of this sinful conduct. (Ecclesiastes 12:13; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 4:1)

...the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. We could wrap this “Blanket” over every attitude and action of sin in Scripture. You can’t violate your marriage covenant with God (Malachi 2:16) and expect to find joy or blessing. You can’t devalue God’s commandment not to forsake your assembling with His people in worship (Hebrews 10:25) and expect to avoid the severe judgments of the Lord against willful sin. (Hebrews 10:26-27) And, more to the point of Peter’s emphasis in our study passage, a man can’t shift from knowledge of the truth of the gospel into error and expect that his life shall in any way be better than when he believed and submitted to God. We occasionally use a cliché, “It can’t get any better than this.” Well, based on Scripture, if we choose the path of self and sin over God, “It can get worse than this, and it shall certainly become worse.” As I have studied and reflected on this chapter, a recurring thought came to further light. The false prophet is highly skilled at deceiving unlearned sheep into believing his error, but he cannot deceive God. In the end, God shall judge the false prophets rightly and, I believe that Scripture teaches, severely. Whether He judges them by final, eternal separation, as in the case of the unregenerate false prophet (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), or severe judgments in time, as with a child of grace who follows the fruitless course that refuses to add the seven godly traits that Peter names to their faith (2 Peter 1:9), God shall judge false prophets. And His judgment shall be based on fact and His truth, not on the false prophets’ rationalized and often self-deceived pride.

*The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.* Periodically in our study of this chapter, we have mentioned a common red herring logical fallacy among Bible students who study this chapter. Is the false prophet a child of God, or is he an unregenerate wicked person? “Red herring” refers presumably to a challenging strategy used by people who train hunting dogs. You train the dog to discover and track the scent of the prey. Part of

that training includes conditioning the dog to stay on the scent of the prey, not to be distracted by any other scent. Supposedly, one tactic of the trainer is to drag a dead, smelly herring across the trail of the prey. Given the powerful scent of decaying fish, the dog could easily be enticed to abandon the scent of his prey and follow the scent of the red herring. In logical thinking, the analogy follows. Any time we allow questions or ideas that are not the main point of a lesson to distract us away from the lesson’s main point we have followed the “Red herring” logical fallacy. Peter stated his purpose at the beginning of the chapter. And that stated purpose is to deal with false prophets, not put every informed believer in the role of judge, deciding who is and who is not a child of God. To chase the child-of-God-not-a-child-of-God question in this chapter is to chase the scent of the red herring, not stay on Peter’s theme of the existence, character, and work of false prophets.

Every regenerate (Born again) child of God faces the daily struggle of controlling his/her sinful, fleshly inclinations and appetites or giving in to them. Given Peter’s stated objective in 2 Peter 2:1, I suggest that we should view this dog-pig analogy as referring to the true motive of every false prophet, child of grace or child of the devil. (John 8:44) Whatever the man’s spiritual future may be, if he presently promotes and defends major error from Biblical truth, he is following his lower, sinful disposition. Period. No man ever promotes himself or error by following the Holy Spirit’s leadership and his born-again disposition. And no man ever receives a “Revelation” from God to believe or to teach error. The Holy Spirit only guides us into God’s truth. Pseudo-revelation claims earmark many a false prophet. Scripture, not private claims of revelation, reveals God’s truth.

Another central point that Peter makes in concluding his analysis of false prophets appears in this passage. Just as the dog and the pig are primarily motivated by their immediate appetite for personal gain or comfort, so go the false prophets. In Christian circles, the false prophet typically will go to great lengths to hide any appearance of self-centeredness, but watch the outcome of the man’s work. If he consistently does and says things that, in the end, promote him and his ideas, beware. Even as the false prophet uses subtle tactics to cover his self-centeredness, his actions are liable to reveal his true goal. If he claims that “God has revealed” to him certain ideas that God has apparently chosen not to reveal to anyone else, beware. God never hides His truth from His family while revealing it to one solitary man. This “God has revealed to me” attitude should be viewed as a dead-give-away to reveal the false prophet.

Frances Schaeffer often referred to the obvious, that we live in a broken world full of broken people, ourselves included. Sadly, false prophets demonstrate incredible brokenness, not a belief or behavior that we should follow.

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