

**Alignment – Ordering Your Life With God**  
**The Delusional Reality of False Teachers**  
**2 Peter 2:17-22**

**Introduction:** Reading the story of Israel in the Old Testament is somewhat like singing the song first sung in England by Harry Champion in 1910, “I’m Henery the Eighth, I Am.” When a band named Herman’s Hermits revived it in 1965, it became the fastest-selling song in U.S. history. The song’s most telling line is “second verse, same as the first,” which highlights the pattern of King Henry VIII, who got married six different times. One of his marriages ended because his wife died due to complications from childbirth. His last marriage ended because he died (lucky sixth wife!). But four of his marriages ended because he divorced them and even executed two of them! No matter how many times King Henry VIII got married, the next verse was the same as the first!

Sadly, a similar song about Israel's relationship with God could be written. A recent Netflix documentary on Moses confidently stated that the Old Testament never suggested the Israelites were supposed to believe that Yahweh is the only God, but rather that Israel was commanded to worship Yahweh alone. It’s an apparent attempt to suggest the Bible supports the idea that all religions are equal, even though an elementary reading of the Bible clearly teaches the absurdity of that position! But, as liberal theologians always do, they ignore the obvious core teachings of the Bible that establish the interpretive context for everything else and then pick and choose verses to twist as support for whatever agenda they have. For instance, **Exodus 20:3** says, **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** The liberal “Christian theologian” in the Netflix documentary used this verse to claim Yahweh clearly affirmed the existence of other gods as what people claim them to be, actual supernatural deities controlling things in the universe. As such, he claims Yahweh gave the Hebrew people a command to simply not worship those gods. However, despite the confidence by which the “scholar” on Netflix stated his assertion, the Bible, not the Netflix “Christian theologian,” is the authority on what the Bible teaches. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there are no other gods; there’s just Yahweh!

**5 I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, 6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:5-6)**

Furthermore, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that anything we treat as a god other than God is a god of our own making and, therefore, by definition, not an actual god. For instance,

**15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 16 They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; 17 they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. 18 Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them! (Psalm 135:15-18)**

Therefore, the obvious Biblical context of the command in Exodus 20 is not that “false gods” are real, but that treating anyone or anything as a god is totally unacceptable! The Bible is abundantly clear that no other deity exists. Therefore, the worship of something or someone as god other than Yahweh is not only the ultimate sin against God but also the epitome of stupidity, especially if you know the facts about the one and only true God!

Yet, like the Henry VIII song, when it came to Israel obeying God’s very straightforward teachings about His exclusive existence and His commandment to worship Him alone as the most consequential of all His commandments, they constantly found themselves in the same rinse-repeat cycle of justifying it. Every time God disciplined them for worshipping false gods (aka gods that don’t even exist), they would repent, but then, soon after that, they would wander right back into the same practice. In our teaching team meeting, Jonathan Pugh told us about an article he read on this very subject. The article contained a picture of a terracotta stand, believed to be an example of this historical trend by the Israelites to justify the worship of other gods.



(needs to be replaced with a footnoted image online)

Without going into detail, the terracotta stand in the picture above is believed to be from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century BC. At the top, archeologists feel the solar disk on the back of a calf represents Yahweh, while all the other images represent Canaanite gods and goddesses. Sadly, their conclusions do not conflict with what we read in the Bible. As clearly delusional as one would have to be to claim the Bible allows a follower of Yahweh to acknowledge the existence of other gods, much less worship them, when you read the history of Israel in the Bible, you see that they consistently found their way back justifying it. Like the Henry VIII song, the second verse always seemed to be the same as the first, as Israel would repetitively return to the proud embrace of and even immoral practices of false gods.

Now, what does this have to do with Peter’s three-part explanation of False Teachers in 2 Peter 2? Well, in 2 Peter 2:17-22, Peter demonstrates the false teachers who rise from within the church are living in the same delusional reality as the Israelites in the Old Testament who justified the worship of false Gods, that is, anyone who claims to be following Jesus while twisting up and thus rejecting what the actual Apostles of Jesus taught Jesus claimed to be, do and say, is completely delusional! Therefore, whether it’s the preachers of the past who twisted the Gospel of Jesus to justify killing people to protect the cause of Christ, or to justify the racist sinful ideologies of white supremacy, or those of the

present who like the false teachers in the first century, use it to justify materialism or sexual immorality, the reality is the same—they are totally delusional!

So, let me walk you through the passage and show you how Peter describes the delusional reality of the false teachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Proposition: 2 Peter 2:17-22 gives four descriptions of the delusional reality of the false teachers.**

**The first description of the delusional reality of the false teachers is that,**

- (1) They claim to bring something refreshing and restorative but, instead, bring gloom and darkness. (2:17)**
  - A. 17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.**
  - B.** A spring in the desert offers so much hope and promise. But imagine you are a weary desert traveler who thinks he sees an oasis on the horizon only to arrive at dead palm trees and a waterless spring!
  - C.** Likewise, imagine you're a farmer whose crops are barely hanging on to life because of drought. You know if you don't get any rain, you are doomed. But then, one day, you see what appears to be a storm cloud coming. The word translated as "storm" specifically references a violent storm with winds strong enough to toss things all over the place. Huge dark clouds rise into the air, and a violent wind begins to blow. Everything is pointing to abundant rain on the way. However, it just ends up being a mist that barely even dampens the soil's surface. The hot sun soon reappears, and the devastation becomes inevitable.
  - D.** Peter uses these two metaphors to describe the delusional reality of the false teachers. In their world, they are springs of life and clouds of rain that refresh souls and restore life, when in fact, they are a total delusion to themselves and all they influence.
  - E.** Even worse, instead of leaving a person with nothing more than they had prior, Peter implies that if people follow these false teachers, they are following them right into the "gloom of utter darkness" reserved for the false teachers! 1 John 1:5 tells us God is light, so if "utter darkness" is their future, then Peter is saying God's abiding presence, and all that He is, is nowhere to be found where the teachers are headed!
  - F.** D.R. Helm noted, **"These preachers were promising water, the refreshment of the Holy Spirit with all his good gifts and assurance. What they delivered instead was a deposit from an empty well. They lowered their buckets into the wellspring of their own self-delusion and pulled it back up in the**

presence of the people. And when they poured it out before God's thirsty flock, nothing except dry, gritty sand fell uselessly to the ground—no true refreshment and no soul satisfaction or invigorating relationship with God."<sup>1</sup>

- G. By contrast, Jesus said,
- H. **"14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)**

**The second description of the delusional reality of the false teachers is that,**

**(2) They claim to be people of depth, but they only appeal to those who are shallow in their faith. (2:18)**

- A. **18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.**
- B. "The term *words* has two descriptive adjectives in this translation. The first one, "empty," relates to the content of the words that are uttered. They are futile, void of any meaning, without purpose. The second adjective, "boastful," refers to the form and the sound of these words. These are puffed-up, haughty, and exaggerated utterances. They are meaningless because they lack every semblance of truth and integrity. ... Peter's habit of redundancy is evident once again. He literally writes, "They entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality" (NASB).<sup>42</sup> The Greek expression *lustful desires* is strengthened by the term *sensuality*, which signifies the indecent conduct and sexual excess that prevailed in Sodom and Gomorrah. c. "They entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error." Like carnivorous animals that prey on the weakest members of a herd, so the false teachers focus their attention on recent converts. Believers who have not had sufficient time to grow in grace and understanding of the Christian faith now have to endure the enticements of apostates. Peter adds the word *just*, which means "barely." Another translation of this section of the verse is this: "They allure ... the ones who have *actually* escaped from those who live in error" (NKJV, italics added; based on a variant reading). However, the point of Peter's message appears to be that the false teachers are more likely to be successful in enticing new converts than seasoned Christians who in the past escaped from an evil way of life. Furthermore, a present participle in leading Greek manuscripts indicates that the act of escaping was recent. Peter is referring to a minority in the Christian community, not the entire church. His concern is for the new Christians who still have not had, sufficient training in the

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<sup>1</sup> Helm, D. R. (2008). [1 & 2 Peter and Jude: sharing christ's sufferings](#) (p. 236). Crossway Books.

faith to oppose the evil one. In general, novices in the Christian faith readily can be lured back to the ways of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

- C. “‘Speak’ is *phtheggomai* (φθεγγομαι), the same word used when Balaam’s beast of burden was uttering sounds. It denotes sound in relation to the hearer rather than the cause. From this we judge that the inspired apostle used this distinctive word to indicate that “the great swelling words” were spoken with an oratorical flare that would impress the hearers.”<sup>3</sup>
- D. When you first start reading verse 17, it might seem like Peter is pointing us to the adage that the loudest person in the room is the one who influences the room. However, that’s not the case. Peter’s picture here is that these False Teachers stand up in the room as the loudest people even though what they are shouting is utter foolishness.
- E. These are arrogant men who proudly present their ridiculous opinions as facts but, interestingly, are also only typically successful at influencing those who are not truly grounded in the truth of who Jesus is, what He taught, what He did, and what He’s going to do! So ironically, as they strut around the room trying to dominate the conversation and drown out the truth, the only people they truly affect are those who have never grown roots in the soil of the truth.
- F. It’s important to note that Peter isn’t writing this to say something bad about those being led astray but to demonstrate the delusional reality these false teachers live in. They act as if they are men of great depth when, in fact, all they do is take advantage of people who are easily taken advantage of, then feel accomplished for doing it! They brag about misleading people who are just starting to turn to the Jesus of the Bible but don’t yet really know who He is or genuinely believe in Him.
- G. These false teachers are like those who claim to be giants of mathematics who can’t fool the math students at MIT, so they mislead kindergarteners. They are like an adult competing in children’s sports who see themselves as a great champion for winning. They are like biological male athletes who compete in sports leagues specifically created for biological females but nonetheless hold the trophy high when they beat genetic females, who, by their genetics, are physically incapable of achieving the speed and strength a biological male can achieve.
- H. Again, the point is that the reality these false teachers live in is of itself delusional!

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<sup>2</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). [\*Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude\*](#) (Vol. 16, pp. 307–309). Baker Book House.

<sup>3</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [\*Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader\*](#) (Vol. 12, pp. 59–60). Eerdmans.

**The third description of the delusional reality of the false teachers is that,**

**(3) They promise freedom but are only capable of offering slavery! (2:19)**

- A. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.**
- B.** Have you ever heard the phrase, “Never trust a skinny chef”? If his food tastes that good, then how could he be skinny? It’s a similar concept to what Peter is saying in verse 19. These delusional teachers are telling people to follow them into freedom while they themselves are living as total slaves to sin!
- C.** John Calvin noted, “**Hence, where lusts reign, and therefore where the flesh rules, there the liberty of Christ has no place whatever. The Apostle then declares this to all the godly, that they might not desire any other liberty but that which leads those, who are set free from sin, to a willing obedience to righteousness.**”<sup>4</sup>
- D.** Similarly, Paul wrote something that we’ve looked at numerous times, but it is worth looking at again here. In Romans 6, we read,
- E. 15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. (Romans 6:15-22)**
- F.** The measure of the delusional reality of the false teachers Peter is confronting in 2 Peter 2 is astounding! They are literally preaching freedom while leading people right into the most horrifying slave master you could ever have—sin! It was like those who eagerly fought to create communist governments in places like Russia and China. They unfortunately later found themselves starving to

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [\*Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles\*](#) (pp. 408–410). Logos Bible Software.

death by the millions because they were slaves to a Government that had no concern for them as individuals, only for the survival and prosperity of the state and those who governed it.

- G. These false teachers are enticing people by telling them the Gospel of Jesus makes the way for them to live in submission to their desires for sexual gratification and wealth! You don't have to be a Christian to understand the disastrous end of treating sex or money as a god. So how could it ever make sense that Christ died for us to be led by something as unstable and irrational as our sexual desires or something as dangerously narcissistic as money? Neither sex nor money are evil, but a life of serving them is! A life surrendered to either is a life of "corruption" because it is a life serving that which is NOT God. However, to add insult to injury, the delusion of these false teachers is to lead people into living their lives in pursuit of one or both of these with the false assurance that it is God's will for them to do so and that this destruction is somehow true freedom!

**The fourth description of the delusional reality of the false teachers is that,**

**(4) Despite their claims, they actually are not, nor have they ever been, legitimate followers of Jesus. (2:20-22)**

- A. **20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."**
- B. A worthwhile side note is to notice that Peter and the other New Testament writers constantly refer to those who have been born again and adopted into the household of God as "we" and "us." However, Peter never refers to the false teachers or those who follow them with "we" and "us," only "they" and "them." "They" and "them" are not a part of the body of Christ; "they" are, by the very pronoun Peter describes them with, outsiders who try to claim the label of being insiders while rejecting the Christ who is Himself the inside! The "we" and "us" are so because "we" are in CHRIST. But you can't very well be in Christ if you reject HIM by forming your own version of Him or of what He taught.
- C. However, the more significant point in these final three verses of chapter two is the reality of the false teachers and those who follow them. They have all come up within the church, so they very likely seemed to be true believers at some point. However, as much as true believers in Jesus will still battle sin and even fall into it, they will never return to it as their god (as that which they are



submitted to), especially with the rationalization that Christ died to facilitate and empower such idolatry!

- D. K.O. Gangel explained it this way, **“The first proverb, A dog returns to its vomit, is taken from Proverbs 26:11. The second proverb, A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud, was presumably commonly known by Jews in the first century. The underlying principle of both is the same: these apostates (whether false teachers, their victims, or both) never were what they seemed to be and returned to what they had been all along. Dogs and pigs can be scrubbed but not kept clean, for it is in their very nature to return to unclean living.”**<sup>5</sup>
- E. Similarly, Jesus shared an interesting parable about the masses of people following Him because of His miracles but never genuinely surrendered their lives to Him. Jesus said,
- F. **43 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. 44 Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation." (Matthew 12:43-44)**
- G. The imagery of the parable is of a person who hears about God and cleans their life up, but because they are never changed (they are still the home of the demon), the demon of their past eventually returns to his home. However, when the demon returns, he ultimately brings others with him to the nice, religiously cleaned-up house, and they take it further down the road of destruction than the person could have ever imagined.
- H. The most extreme example of this was Judas Iscariot. You could not have followed Jesus more closely or betrayed Him more clearly. For three years, Judas tirelessly served Jesus. They had no homes and were traveling from town to town, having to scrounge whatever they could to meet their needs. As he served Jesus, Judas heard all He taught and was even sent out by Him with the rest of the disciples to preach the Good News and perform miracles! He communed with Jesus, had his feet washed by Jesus, and ate the Last Supper with Jesus, but yet still betrayed Jesus.
- I. Interestingly, like the parable Jesus told, John later realized that Judas had actually never changed. He was an unethical thief who never stopped being one; he just learned not to act like one for a while. Ironically, however, while fooling

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<sup>5</sup> Gangel, K. O. (1985). [2 Peter](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 874). Victor Books.



everybody around him to think he was sincerely following Jesus, he was using the ministry of Jesus to serve his desire for purpose and fulfillment, which John later realized included stealing money from the ministry. John 12:6 tells us Judas gladly embraced the job of being the ministry's treasurer because he was also helping himself to the money along the way! He could do great things for God and feel super good about himself, all while helping himself to the money given to the Lord! The point is that when Judas finally accepted money to help arrange the death of Jesus, the dog was just returning to his vomit; the pig was going back to wallow in the mud. Judas was never a different man; he had just acted differently for a while. His demons still had a home with him because his home had never become Christ.

- J. You say, but didn't Peter eventually deny knowing Jesus? Yes, he did, but Judas intentionally helped arrange Christ's death! We all have faithless moments where we deny Him, some longer than others, but as those who are in Him, we feel the conviction and even shame of doing so, and we eventually find ourselves repenting. That is not at all what Judas did. Judas, with full intention and justification in his mind, sold Jesus out after having spent three years watching Him do all the miracles he had done, hearing Jesus teach, and, more importantly, being a firsthand witness of the sincere and holy love Jesus poured out on Judas and all those who came in contact with Him. This is why Jesus said it would have been better for Judas if he had never existed (Matthew 26:24) because his eternal future was hell, all while after spending three years following and serving Jesus. Knowing what heaven could be, he instead submitted to the god of greed. He chose to hope for a different Messiah to fulfill those desires rather than the promised Messiah that God sent, not to provide earthly financial prosperity but something far more valuable—eternal life!

So, the question then is this,

**Challenge: Are you living in Christ or a delusion of being in Him? Only one has eternal life as their present and future. (Matthew 7:21-13, John 3:3; 12:25)**

I'm sure you've heard this passage many times, but I can't think of a more appropriate time to read it. Jesus said,

**21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-13)**

The Gospel of John clarifies what distinguishes an eternal relationship with God from a delusional one.

**3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)**

If you want to be born again and permanently adopted as one of His children with the promise that He will never leave you or forsake you, with the promise He will finish His work of salvation in you even if you die before His return, with the promise to be absent from the body is to be present with Him; with the promise of access to eternal life now no matter how dark your days become with the trials of this world; then you have to repent of your allegiance to this world and this life and surrender yourself to HIM! This is why Jesus said to let the dead bury the dead; it's why He said to sell all you have; it's why He never told anybody to say a prayer and write down the date when you said it so you knew you said it, but instead, he said FOLLOW ME! You don't need a date in a Bible to assure you that you belong to Him if your life is in HIM!

**25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:25)**