

2 Peter 2 Exegetical Notes

1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

Peter begins an extended section here on the character of false prophets and teachers. He reminds his reader that throughout history there have always been false teachers among Israel. We are reminded of Balaam, the false prophets that prophesied against Micaiah (1 Kings 22), and others who confronted Jeremiah (Jeremiah 5:31; 27:15), and the other godly prophets of the Old Testament. It seems that whenever God has true prophets, Satan always has his false prophets right there alongside them to lead people astray.

Some have problems with the phrase “the Lord that bought them.” They want to use this to show that these false teachers were once true believers but had lost their salvation. However, it is best to see this as redemption in the general sense, not redemption in the particular sense. That is, Christ’s death makes it possible for men to be redeemed, but it does not insure the redemption of all men. Thus, redemption as pictured here is redemption in the potential sense, not redemption in the actual sense.

The Character of True Prophets

1. **Whatever prophesied had to come to pass or the people were to stone that prophet - Deuteronomy 13:1-4.**
2. **True prophets did not lead the people of God to serve other Gods - Deuteronomy 13:1-11.**

Prophets - Kansas City Style

In one church the KC prophets told a church that they were to disband and join another church in the city or the word “Ichabod” would be written over it. Additionally, all Christians in Kansas City were to align themselves with the prophet’s home church, the Kansas City Fellowship.

The Kansas City prophets have even said that they have prophesied falsely on occasions. One of their prophets had this explanation:

I figure if I hit two-thirds of it I’m doing pretty good. God told me that! If I release the 100% rhema right now the accountability would be awesome and you would have so much Ananias and Sapphira going on that the people wouldn’t grow, they would be too scared. If it was on-target it would kill instead of scaring the people to repentance. (Charismatic Chaos, 67).

Mike Bickle (Kansas City Fellowship Pastor) replies to the above:

Now the two-thirds, you know, when Bob first said it I said, “two-thirds?” He said, “well that’s better than it’s ever been up till now, you know. That’s the highest level it’s ever been.”

The KC prophets have garnered a world-wide following, aligning themselves with the Vineyard movement of John Wimber.

John Whyte writes the following (in *Some Said It Thundered*):

“Battles about prophets have plagued the church from time to time. Early last century it was the Irvingite controversy in London with the leading prophet having to confess after years that he had been deceived. Many of us have found that hearing from God is no easy thing, rapidly and fearfully. We could be in danger of discarding a live baby in our horror over dirty bathwater.” (Charismatic Chaos, 67).

Whyte also says a little later in defense of the KC prophets and the prophetic ministry:

“Satan fears those words that come fresh from God’s lips. Because Satan so dreads the fresh word, he will arouse controversy wherever it comes forth miraculously through the lips of a real prophet or from the lips of an evangelist aflame with the Spirit.”

In other words, when one criticizes the prophecies they are taking the side of Satan. Any such criticism is Satanic in nature.

Whyte goes further to state that the controversy over the KC prophets is evidence of the genuineness. He writes again in response to Christ’s warnings regarding false prophets:

“We are warned that it is to happen. Most scholars feel that the words of Jesus apply particularly to the last days. They may be approaching us now. How are we to discern the false from the true? For one thing, true prophets will be unpopular.”

“The only test of a true prophet is the accuracy of his prophecies” - John MacArthur

Bill Hayman, in *Charisma* magazine, believes that all prophecies are conditional. In other words, God can change any prophecy, or even cancel it, if circumstances change. (I don’t know the month this was published).

This is how Hamon says we determine if a prophecy is true:

“I have sometimes heard some people say, “I didn’t witness with that prophecy.” But after questioning them I discovered that what they really meant was that the prophecy didn’t fit their theology, personal desires, or goals, or their emotions reacted negatively to it. They fail to understand that we don’t bear witness with the soul, the mind, the emotions, or will. Our reasoning is in the mind, not the spirit. So our traditions, beliefs, and strong opinions are not true witnesses to prophetic truth. The spirit reaction originates deep within our being. Many Christians describe the physical location of its corresponding sensation as the upper abdominal area.” (Charismatic Chaos, 71).

He is saying that we are to ignore our beliefs, our theology, our reason, and wait for a feeling in our upper abdominal area so that we know if a prophecy is true. He has reduced spiritual discernment to a simple process of biofeedback.

When you ask a Charismatic person how important it is to be slain in the Spirit, some would say that it is absolutely essential. When you ask them where it says that in the Bible, they will say, “I’m not sure but it must be there somewhere.” When pressed to find it they will say, “It isn’t there, it doesn’t matter, Jesus told me to do it.”

2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

The major harm done by false prophets is to malign the true prophets. When someone claims to represent God and prophesy some stupid thing or live a life that does not reflect the character of God, unbelievers have occasion to speak evil of godly men, since they lump the good in with the bad. The most damage done by the Baker, Swaggart scandals of the past years occurred in the area of bring disrepute on the true ministers of the gospel. What these men did was bad, but what they did to the cause of Christ and the image of God is almost irreparable.

3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

If there is a single verse in the New Testament that is a commentary on 95 percent of the religious programs on television today, it is this one. Note that one of the characteristics of false teachers is that they make merchandise of the very people to whom they are supposedly ministering. Their greatest desire is to fleece the flock, not feed the flock.

Some Assorted False Prophets and Their Teachings About Money

“We are going to wash away all bad luck, sickness, misfortunes, and evil. Yes, even that evil person you want out of your life. Jesus helped a man wash blindness from his eyes, I want to help you concerning hexes, vexes, home problems, love, happiness, and joy.”

“After you wash the poverty from your hands, take out the largest bill or check you have, that \$100, \$50, or \$20 bill, hold it in your clean hands and say, “In Jesus name I dedicate this to God’s work,” and expect a miracle return of money.”
(marketing ploy by David Epply)

“Do you have a financial mountain in your life? Start talking to your money. Tell your checkbook to line up with God’s word. Talk to your business. Command customers to come into your business and spend their money there. Talk to the mountain.” (Norville Hays)

“You can have what you say. You can write your own ticket with God. And the first step in writing your own ticket with God is to say it.” (Kenneth Hagin)

“If you’ve got one dollar faith and ask for a ten-thousand dollar item, it ain’t gonna work. It won’t work. Jesus said “according to your faith” not “according to God’s will for you, in His own good time, if it is according to His will, if He can work it into His busy schedule.” He said, “according to your faith be it unto you.” Now I may want a Rolls Royce and don’t have but bicycle faith, guess what I’m gonna get, a bicycle. But guess what He’s got?” (Fredrick Price)

4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

In the next three verses Peter talks about the pending judgment of God on false teachers and prophets by arguing from the lesser to the greater. He uses three examples from the Old Testament to illustrate how God brings judgment for sin, and then makes the points, “If God did this in the past, do you think he is not going to do it in the present?”

Peter’s first illustration is the angels that sinned. Although this is a matter of great debate, I believe the best understanding of this is found in Genesis chapter 6. Apparently, before

the flood, some of the fallen angels cohabitated with human women producing a race of unredeemable demon men. This is one of the major reasons God brought the flood, it was to destroy this race of unredeemable people. Furthermore, God imprisoned these fallen angels to a place of darkness, known in the New Testament as the abyss.

The Abyss in the New Testament

Tartaros - Greek *tatarosos*

1. This word is used only one time in 2 Peter 2:4.
2. In secular Greek mythology it was the innermost of the nine compartments of hades.
3. It is used in the NT to refer to the abode of demons who "left their first estate".

The Abyss - Greek *abussos*

1. It is used in the NT to refer to the abode of demons.
2. It occurs 9 times in the NT.

Luke 8:31 ...command them to go out into the deep...

Rom 10:7 ...who shall descend into the deep...

Rev 9:1 ...the key of the bottomless pit...

Rev 9:2 ...And he opened the bottomless pit...

Rev 9:11 ...the angel of the bottomless pit...

Rev 11:7 ...that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit...

Rev 17:8 ...shall ascend out of the bottomless pit...

Rev 20:1 ...having the key of the bottomless pit...

Rev 20:5 ...cast him into the bottomless pit...

3. In Greek mythology, it was the deepest pit in hades.
4. From these references, we can conclude that the abyss is to demons what hades is to men, a place of confinement and torment until final judgment.

Three Groups of Demons

1. Bound demons

Jude 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

The first group is the permanently bound demons. Comparing Jude 1:6 with 2 Peter 2:4 and Genesis 6, we are led to believe that these permanently bound demons indulged in some great sin that caused God to permanently consign them to the abyss. Many believe that this great sin was that of cohabitation with men which produced a race of unredeemable demon-men. Because of this great sin, God placed them in chains until the day of judgment, when they will be permanently consigned to the Lake of Fire.

2. Temporarily bound demons

Revelation 9:1-3 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power. as the scorpions of the earth have power.

A second group are the temporarily bound demons. We know that these are temporarily bound, because they are release from the abyss during the Tribulation in order to torment men. These demons are not the permanently bound group since the Bible clearly says that they (the permanently bound demons) are reserved in chains until judgment.

3. Free demons

A final group is the free demons. These are the fallen angels that currently assist Satan in his work throughout the world.

5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Peter's second illustration is the destruction of the world in the days of Noah. Genesis chapter six records the great flood, brought upon the whole world in order to destroy all of the ungodly. The saddest thing of all about the great flood was that God could only find eight righteous persons in the whole world that were worth saving. The rest of mankind was destroyed.

6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;

Peter's final illustration is the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. There are over 28 references to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old and New Testaments as an illustration of the complete and total destruction of the ungodly. In fact, God so utterly destroyed these cities, that there whereabouts remain a mystery to this day. No one knows where they are although it is speculated that they may exist under the southern part of the dead sea.

7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:

8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)

9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

In verses seven to nine we have a great statement of God's preservation of the godly. Peter reminds his readers that when the judgment of God fell, God first removed his own from the arena of destruction. He delivered Noah through the ark, and delivered Lot by sending two angels to remove him from the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah before the fire of God fell.

Interestingly enough, it is here that we find that Lot was a righteous man. As we look at his record in the Old Testament, we would be led to conclude that Lot was not a very godly man at all, and in fact a compromiser. However, here we find that the sin around him vexed his soul.

10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

Having showed that the judgment of God on these false teachers is assured, Peter now continues with the character of these men. He describes them in this verse as those who walk in lust, despise authority, are presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid to blaspheme angels.

First of all, false teachers walk in uncleanness. The word here for uncleanness refers to moral depravity. If there is anything that characterizes false teachers, it is an inability to control their flesh. We are reminded of David Koresh who systematically slept with all of the women around him and then read the Bible to them after having sex with them. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to control the flesh. Although a false teacher may appear to be godly on the outside, on the inside they are wicked and evil.

Secondly, false teachers despise government, or authority. In other words, they are a law unto themselves. One good look at the religious false prophets of today show that they are without any accountability. They are a law unto themselves, and when anyone calls them on their evil they warn them about “touching the Lord’s anointed.”

False teachers are also presumptuous and self-willed. This refers to their arrogant and self-assured spirit. If you listen long to these teachers on television, they sound like they have all the answers and are God’s greatest gift to his church. Furthermore, we are told that they speak evil of dignitaries. The word used is *doxa*, and literally means “glories.” Although there is a lot of discussion about what this term means, I think the best understanding is angels. This is strengthened by the discussion Peter has following this verse about how even holy angels do not speak evil of fallen angels.

One of the fastest movements today is the spiritual warfare movement, headed for the most part by those who advocate that we have complete control and power over demons. We are told that we can order Satan around, break generational curses, and even bind Satan and his demons. This kind of teaching flies in the face of this verse here. Although it is true that Satan is a defeated foe, we are naive to think that we are more powerful than Satan. To hear Morris Ceurillo on television one would think that we can smack Satan around at will. This only shows the true character of these so-called spiritual warfare experts.

Spiritual Warfare or Spiritual Stupidity?

The Spiritual Warfare movement is spreading like wildfire throughout the Christian church. Fueled by books by Frank Peretti, everyone is thinking of demons. Listed below are what we are being told by the new “Generals” in this movement.

- 1. Satan is the major cause of all physical disease and lack of blessings for believers. In many circles the path to healing is taught to be the process of identifying and casting out the demons of disease (although many would just say that one of the major causes of disease is demonic oppression).**

The Hunters [Charles and Frances] provides a case in point: “When a doctor says there is no cure, our spiritual antennas pick up the fact that it is a spirit.” They have concluded that all incurable diseases are caused by evil spirits. Demons inhabit not only people, but also homes, cars, and other mechanical devices. This produces great consternation for the believer who wants to experience blessings promised to him (Ken L. Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 [Oct.-Dec. 1986]:336, 344-45).

2. **The world is under the control of territorial demons. Each nation, region, city, and town has its own demon in charge of demonic activity in that area. It is not possible to successfully fight these demons unless one knows of their existence and name (Dean Sherman, *Spiritual Warfare for Every Christian*. pp. 87ff).**

Under the militant banner of “spiritual warfare,” growing numbers of evangelical and charismatic Christian leaders are preparing broad assaults on what they call the cosmic powers of darkness.

Fascinated with the notion that Satan commands a hierarchy of territorial demons, some mission agencies and big-church pastors are devising strategies for “breaking the strongholds” of those evil spirits alleged to be controlling cities and countries.

Some proponents in the fledgling movement already maintain that focused prayer meetings have ended the curse of the Bermuda triangle, led to the 1987 downfall in Oregon of the free-love guru Bhagwan Shree Rahneesh, and for the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, produced a two-week drop in the crime rate, a friendly atmosphere and unclogged freeways.

This is not the cinematic story line for a religious sequel to “Ghostbusters II,” yet the developing scenario does have a fictional influence: interest in spiritual warfare has been heightened by two best-selling novels in Christian bookstores. “This Present Darkness” by Frank Peretti, describes the religious fight against “territorial spirits mobilized to dominate a small town.” A second Peretti novel has a similar premise.

Fuller Seminary Prof. C. Peter Wagner, who has written extensively on the subject, led a “summit” meeting on cosmic-level spiritual warfare Monday in Pasadena with two dozen men and women, including a Texas couple heading a group called the “Generals of Intercession” and an Oregon man who conducts “spiritual warfare bootcamps” (John Dart, “Evangelicals, Charismatics Prepare for Spiritual Warfare,” 17 February 1990, F16).

3. **The way to overcome Satan is by power encounters. These are miraculous and often spectacular encounters between good and evil, God and Satan. Some say that without these power encounters the gospel message itself is ineffective in leading men to salvation. Note the following quote taken from the *Los Angeles Times*:**

Mark Bubeck, an evangelical writer relates this experience:

I often found myself crying out to God for revival during extended sessions of prayer. In the midst of one such prayer session an unusual, strong spiritual awareness suddenly overwhelmed me. I don't know how else to describe it. Although I did not hear a voice, there was a powerful communication to my spirit: *Before a revival like the one for which you are praying can come, there will have to be a strong encounter with Satan* (Mark Bubeck, *The Satanic Revival* [San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life, 1991], p. 11).

4. **Christians are to take the offensive against Satan. We should seek out and engage the enemy face to face. Just as Christ delivered men from the power of Satan, so should we deliver men from demonic oppression. (James Robison, *Winning The Real War*, pp. 115ff).**

5. **Homes that we move into may be infested with demons because of some occult activity years and years before. The sensitive believer can recognize**

and exorcise these demons through the power of the Word and Christ (Thomas B. White, *The Believers Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, pp. 90ff).

- 6. We may be the victims of generational curses. Sins that our forefathers engaged in may be specifically energized by Satan. This means that it is possible for us to be victimized by demonic forces in many areas of our lives without our knowledge or permission (Thomas B. White, *The Believers Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, pp. 81ff).**
- 7. Christians can be “forced” to sin by demonic oppression. Jimmy Swaggart was exorcised of the demons of lust by Oral Roberts over the phone. This removes the responsibility for sin from us and places it on demons.**
- 8. Specific sins are energized by demons who specialize in that area. For example, we are introduced to the demons of lust, greed, homosexuality, hate, murder, stealing, and every other vice that victimizes men by many leaders in the spiritual warfare movement.**

Who needs deliverance? Anyone in the lineage of Adam has inherited the iniquity (ungodly desire) of his father (Ex. 20:5, 6). Without deliverance by Truth this person is in bondage, unreality, deception, negativity, foolishness, sickness, and evil, and he doesn't even know it...

In deliverance we are released from the spirits and desires that twist our heart and deceive our mind. What is a “spirit?” Anger is a spirit. Irritation and self-pity are spirits. Hatred, jealousy, illness, worry, deception, arrogance, fear, rebellion, resentment, phobia, shyness, conceit, confusion, smugness, sadness, accusation, addiction, pride, cruelty, legalism, homosexuality, religiosity, complaining, lying are all names of spirits.

Every word in the dictionary that describes any kind of evil, wicked intent, or sin against God is the name of a demon or evil spirit...If at any time in your life you have ever expressed any such spirit or desire, then you still have it hidden inside, unless you have been delivered from it (*The Truth In Deliverance* [Austin, Texas: Alpha-Omega Energies, n.d.], pp. 3-4).

- 9. Believers have the power to bind Satan and pray hedges of protection about themselves and loved ones. In many places this has become a common method of dealing with sins. Instead of repenting of fornication we are told to bind the demon of lust. Again, this removes the responsibility of sin from us and pins it on a demon.**
- 10. We are encouraged to learn prayers of deliverance specifically designed to combat Satan and demons. In fact, there are whole books given over to specific prayers that one can “fill in the blanks” and use (Thomas B. White, *The Believers Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, pp. 113ff).**

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of His blood, I pull down all levels of the stronghold of _____. [Choose items from the following list of areas of Satan's strongholds that you desire to pull down and smash. You may think of other things—the list is suggestive, not exhaustive.] (Mark Bubeck, *The Satanic Revival* [San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1991], pp. 182-84).

**The Spiritual Warfare Movement
A Biblical Critique**

1. **The Spiritual Warfare movement places too much emphasis on Satan as the cause for personal sin and too little emphasis on the flesh.**

Although we are told in the Bible that our three major enemies are the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, we must understand that without the Flesh, Satan would not be able to tempt us to sin as many think he does. Without the Flesh, the World would lose its power over the believer. Our major enemy as a Christian is our own fallenness
2. **The Spiritual Warfare movement encourages believers to become familiar with Satanism and the occult, a practice clearly forbidden by the Bible.**
3. **The Spiritual Warfare movement falls to a mystical form of Christianity when it teaches that we can pray hedges and bind Satan.**
4. **The Spiritual Warfare movement incorrectly seeks out encounters with Satan when it assumes that we have unlimited authority over Satan through the power of Christ.**
5. **The Spiritual Warfare movement attributes many results of the fall, such as death, disease, and natural disasters, to the direct work of Satan.**
6. **Nowhere does the Bible indicate the existence of territorial demons.**

Scripture implies that Satan's hordes are highly regimented (cf. Eph 6:12), but nowhere does the Bible say that Satan has assigned them to every geographical unit. Nowhere does the Bible give an example of a believer confronting or rebuking geographical demons. Nowhere does God's Word say that we are to command demons to give up any territory. In fact, nothing in Scripture offers any instructions for territorial warfare. No self-styled "expert" in the practice can legitimately claim to have gained his knowledge or skills from the Bible. (John MacArthur, *How To Meet The Enemy*, p. 43)
7. **Nowhere in the Scriptures are we told to confront Satan in "power encounters."**

11 Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

12 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

Why are these men so castigated by Peter. It is because even the holy angels do not speak evil of the fallen angels. In Jude we read that even Michael did not bring a railing accusation against Satan, but rather said, "the Lord rebuke thee."

When finite men take it upon themselves to speak evil of Satan they are acting like brute beasts whose only purpose is to be killed and provide food for a predator in the food chain. They do not know what they are talking about, and will perish in their own corruption, a corruption that cannot be checked with human effort.

13 And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

Peter continues his characterization of false teachers by describing their conduct. He states that these men riot in the daytime. This refers to one who has such a party lifestyle that they become drunk during the day, something that was socially unacceptable in the New Testament times. They are also characterized as spots and blemishes. The words used refer to seeping scabs on the body of lepers. Peter is actually calling them vile scabs which ooze corruption and disease.

They also sport around with their own deceptions while feasting with the believers. This may have the idea of the communion table, or it just may be a reference to the fact that while the false teacher appears to feast, they are in actuality thinking about how they can indulge themselves even further. This is born out in the next verse which says that the eyes of the false teacher are full of adulteries. That is, they see every woman as a potential candidate for seduction. They also exercise themselves with coveteousness, wanting more and more for themselves. They are cursed children.

15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

Peter likens the character of these men to Balaam. The account of Balaam is found in Numbers 22. Balak, the king of Moab, wanted to curse Israel so he sent for Balaam in order to have him prophesy a curse. However, God would not allow Balaam to prophesy a curse, but instead made him prophesy a blessing. However, Balaam was so coveteous of the reward offered by Barak that he told Barak to just have the Israelites intermarry with the Moabites thus causing Israel to sin. Instead of needing to destroy Israel himself, Balak could sit back and watch God judge Israel for idolatry.

The point Peter is making is that Balaam was a prophet for hire, going to the highest bidder. Even so, the false teachers that will arise are prophets for hire, speaking the very things that people want to hear.

17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

Two of the most precious things in the Middle East were wells and clouds. Wells were filled with life-giving water, and clouds spoke of cool, refreshing rains. The worst thing to have is a well that is dry, and a cloud that produces no rain.

Even so, false teachers promise a lot. They look like a cloud full of life-giving water, or a well full of thirst-quenching water, only to be in reality dry clouds and empty wells. They talk a

good talk, but their talk is worthless as it is void of the power of God. They lure unsuspecting people in promising blessing, health, and wealth, only to teach error in the end. Some of the most eloquent and persuasive teachers on television today speak error after error, yet they garner a large following because they are saying the very things people want to hear.

19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

The problem with these false teachers is that they promise deliverance. Unfortunately, they cannot deliver anyone from sin as they themselves are in bondage to the very thing they seek to release others from. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to live a godly life. Instead of freeing people from sin's grip, they make that grip even stronger.

20 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.

21 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.

22 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.

The real problem with the false teachers is that when they are done with people, the state of those they supposedly minister to is worse than when they started. For a time they escaped the corruption of the world, but eventually they were dragged back into sin because they never knew the true way of righteousness and were never truly saved. Because of that, it would have been better for them never to have heard the truth, than after they heard the truth turn back into error. In fact, they are like dogs that return and lap up their vomit or pigs that return to the mud after being washed. Their true nature and character cannot be erased, and eventually the corruption that is within them will surface for all to see.