

Be On Guard: False Teaching and Its Consequences

SCOTT HOEZEE

Robert F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson did not like each other; not one bit. According to Johnson biographer, Robert Caro, people used to say that when Johnson and Kennedy both entered the same room and looked at each other, it was like what you see when two very unfriendly dogs approach each other; you can see the hair on their backs starting to stand on end; and that is how we can perhaps picture what happened when the Apostle Peter approached the false teachers of his day; you could practically see the hair on his back coming up. Today on *Groundwork*, we will examine a heavy chapter from the letter of 2 Peter. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we have now, in this series...we have devoted five *Groundwork* programs to the letter of 1 Peter; and this is now the second of three programs on the three-chapter letter that we call 2 Peter; and we have said that in general, both of Peter's letters that we have in the New Testament are addressed mostly to gentile Christians who are scattered throughout Asia Minor, and who are undergoing a fierce season of persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire, and especially at the hands of that very wicked emperor, Nero.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is right, Scott; and as we approach and open up 2 Peter, Peter is getting toward the end of his life, and so, when you think about people who have lived a long life, they really want to make sure that you don't miss the most important things that they have to tell you as they come to the end of their life. If they are aware of it, they want to tell you the most important things; and these are the things that Peter wants to make sure that these persecuted Christians want to know, and it is going to get deep today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is going to get deep and it is going to get heavy. Yes, kind of a last will and testament from Peter here. Earlier in 2 Peter, in 2 Peter 1 in our previous program, Peter reminded his readers that he himself was an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, including the majestic occasion of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus was the real deal, Peter was saying, and he is now with you, too.

But now, as you just said, Darrell, we are going to move into 2 Peter Chapter 2, and there is a change in tone; and I guess, you know, we should warn our listeners up front that this really is one of the darker, more dismal chapters in the entire New Testament, because as bad as it was to receive persecution from the Romans and the like, that wasn't the only bad thing happening in Peter's day. There was also the phenomenon of a lot of false teachers.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; there were these people who continued to go around and say that the day of the Lord is not going to happen; and also that they had these alternative teachings that were starting to lead the believers astray from what they were standing up for; and so, they have the persecution that comes from Nero and the Roman Empire, but they also have the very foundations of the truth they have been holding dear, and so that is actually being under attack as well; and Peter will not have it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; Peter does not spare the horses in this chapter. He goes right after these people, whom he clearly regards as the worst of the worst in the world. So, let's hear how 2 Peter 2 opens: But there were false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

DARRELL DELANEY

I don't know if the Christians who are following the Lord in this situation are aware, but Peter is going to spend the rest of this chapter explaining and exposing these people, so that these young Christians are not ignorant of these tricks and schemes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And clearly in what we just read, Darrell, Peter is concerned for truth itself; and you know, Darrell, we live in a time when the very possibility of knowing the truth about *anything* is often brought into doubt...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In fact, the former director of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Francis Collins, has just written a book that defends the idea that truth really exists; but we live in a time when some talk about *alternative facts*, or when people say: Yes, that may be true for you but it is not true for me; but as Dr. Collins observes, if the idea in question is your claim that you think tattoos are really cool, well, then okay, that may be true for you but not for me; it is just a matter of taste and opinion. But when we have firmly established facts, you know, like $2+2=4$ and that the law of gravity is real and it is a good thing to bear in mind when you are walking along the edge of a mountain cliff, those things, and a whole lot of evidence-based things, are established facts, and they are true for everybody. As Dr. Collins said, facts don't care for how you feel about them. Truth is truth.

DARRELL DELANEY

I could take it a little deeper on that, because there is a difference between facts and truth, Scott, because it is a fact that in the 1950's, it was against the law to have Blacks and whites sitting together in a cafeteria or at school.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a fact that happened, but the truth is that everybody is made in the image of God, and they decided that wasn't going to be applicable anymore. It is against the law; and now, that fact has changed...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is discrimination to do that now. So, if a fact has a circumstance connected to it, then that means that it can be changed, but truth, like you said, can never be changed; and because our truth is connected to Jesus Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today and forever, we need to understand that living under his truth is the best way to live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Peter says it is a heresy to think otherwise. Jesus said: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. So, Jesus is truth with skin on it, but the false teachers erode the very idea that there are universal truths that apply to everybody. Well then, Peter says the gospel is in danger; and instead, Peter says these people just make stuff up. They concoct what he calls fabricated stories; fiction; lies; myths. What some people call malarky; and these are the made-up claims that they are trying to make Christians believe instead of the actual truth of the gospel.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting that they want you to doubt the truth and make up your own truth and call that the truth, and that is no way to live, even though there is a plurality of things happening in this world to make other folks believe: Oh, maybe this is what is happening in the news is true; maybe this is what is happening in my life is true; but Peter wants to make sure that we come back to the Word of God and the Person of Jesus Christ and hold our hope in his truth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then Peter makes an odd statement in verse 1. He says that these people who are doing this, that they deny the Lord who bought them. Is Peter saying these people were Christians once; that the Lord bought them and that he saved them? Is it possible that the rank false teachings that Peter is just railing against here, did they arise from within the Church...from within apparent followers of Jesus? That looks like that may be true, but we will come back to that a little bit later, Darrell. But for now, you know, it looks like these people are getting away with it, but Peter says: Not really.

DARRELL DELANEY

Look what it says, beginning in verse 4: For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes— ⁹If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. ¹⁰This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, God, who is truth itself; God, who shines as the bright center of the universe; as the righteous and holy and good God; this God cannot just brush it aside when people act the way these false teachers act, the people Peter is talking about. God cannot just dismiss the wicked work they do; and Peter is saying, you know, God has done it before, and he cites a couple of Old Testament Hebrew Scripture examples of God's judgment; and Peter is saying: Look, these people...these false teachers...for now, maybe it looks like they are getting away with murder, as we sometimes say and sometimes that is literally true, too...but Peter is saying: God's got this thing. God is not going to let falsehood stand; and we can take some comfort in that, that the truth of God, not the lies of people, that is what will have the last best word in the universe.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is true; and if you think Peter is done, then we've got more for you. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

We are in the middle of the second chapter of 2 Peter, and we are seeing that Peter is in the midst of exposing these false teachers, because they are actually having the potential to destroy the very foundation of the gospel, which is what they are holding on to in the midst of this trial and these tribulations as far as persecution goes. So, Peter is going to zero right in and make sure that they are exposed, so that the truth of the gospel is not brought to bear and on that stake.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and as we just said, they attacked the very idea of truth, and they substitute falsehoods for it. It looks like they are getting away with it, but as we just saw at the end of the first part of this program, God will bring them to justice.

2 Peter 2 now, at verse 10: ^{10b}Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; ¹¹yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. ¹²But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.

And so, you know, Darrell, tongue firmly embedded in cheek, what you want to say is: Don't sugarcoat it here, Pete. Tell us what you really think. I think he did.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; Peter did not spare or mince any words here. I think he wants to... Because these people are coming across as friendly and strong and helpful, and they have a silver tongue, if you will; and Peter is saying: No; I need you to see the truth of who these people really are. I am going to expose their character to you so that you can see these are not the people who they are portraying to be to you. They actually have an evil intent that is far from what God wants for you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he calls them stupid animals, basically. They are easy to catch and punish because they are too dimwitted to come to any other end. They attack *angels*, Peter says; and for their part, even though the angels are bringing God's judgment and punishment, they are nicer than these people. The angels are kinder than these false teachers. Wow! That is amazingly strong talk here; but then, interestingly, Darrell, in verse 12 Peter says something interesting: They blaspheme in matters they don't even understand.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, blasphemy; it is really something that has been brought into a lot of different conversations. When I think of blasphemy, I think of when you take the Lord's name in vain or you say something that you know is supposed to be holy and set apart for God, and use it in common ways that are not honoring and worshipping him. They used to actually stone people for things like this. If you claim to be God...if you said things that God would say or you use God's name in vain...basically breaking the Commandment, then they actually would punish people for this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; blasphemy, as we have said before on *Groundwork*, steals sacred, holy names, symbols, and corrupts them...turns them into the opposite of what they were before. I mean, if Jesus Christ becomes a swear word for you...if that is what you say when you hit your thumb with a hammer, or you express anger or fury...well, now that name that is above all names moves from making us think about God's salvation by grace alone, and we start thinking about things that have nothing to do with salvation. Jesus Christ, the name becomes common—offensive—trivialized—profane. And Peter says these people don't even seem to be aware of what they are doing. If they invoke Jesus' name in a false context, they are blaspheming that name,

and they are not even aware of how bad it is, of what they are actually doing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; like holding onto a grenade when you pulled the ring out of it already. You don't know that you are going to destroy something if you don't get rid of it; and it is interesting to see historically there are ways that holy things that have been profaned...like the Ku Klux Klan...who burned crosses in peoples' yards. The cross is supposed to be a symbol of peace and salvation. It is a sign of terror and a sign of intimidation; and these things have happened over the years to profane and make things that are supposed to be holy into common and even corrupting things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, making the cross a symbol of hate; that is blasphemy, because indeed, you corrupt the thing that gives us hope...it is supposed to.

So anyway, as we have seen, Darrell, Peter has been laying it on pretty thick, but he is not quite finished. He hasn't quite gotten it all out of his system yet. There is more.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up in verse 13, it says: They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. ¹⁴With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! ¹⁵They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, we warned our listeners: this is heavy stuff; this is not a happy chapter; and Peter is going after these people. The people are unreasoned; they are unhinged; the consequences of their denying the true things about God and Jesus makes them carnal lovers of pleasure. They party; they flirt; maybe they are doing untoward sexual things in broad daylight; they carouse; they drink. Basically, Peter is saying these people are like walking billboards for what the Church would later label the seven deadly sins; and here chiefly: Greed, gluttony, anger, lust; I mean, that is who these people are.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and it says they have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer. It is interesting that if he says that they come from among them, possibly, and how far they got off and where that even started, it boggles the mind; but it doesn't really confuse as much as we understand the sinful nature, the shadow side of our own lives, how we have to resist it and continue to turn away from it; it continues to try to woo us back to who we were and who we are trying to abstain from; and so, I believe that he wants to make sure they know that these deceptive things are happening behind their backs.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And earlier in this chapter, Peter went to the Old Testament, to the flood story with Noah; to Sodom and Gomorrah; and now he goes to one of the funnier stories, from Numbers 22. So, this Balaam guy was hired by the Midianites to curse Israel. So, he is on his way there, riding his donkey. God sends an angel to block Balaam's way, but at first only the donkey can see it. So, the donkey won't move. Finally, the donkey just lays down in the road, and Balaam just keeps beating the thing with a whip, until finally, God spoke to Balaam, through the mouth of his own donkey; and Balaam is so distracted, he doesn't even think it is *odd* that he is having a conversation with his mule! But he gets berated by his own animal here; and what Peter is saying is: Look, even as God stopped Balaam...literally got in his way...literally blocked Balaam...God is going to eventually literally block these false teachers, who are stirring up so much trouble.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the contrast is that God uses the donkey. Balaam is the one that the attitude of these deceptive people have. That is who they are acting like; and God is using the animal to rebuke him. So, not only does the evil continue to happen, but God will always raise up someone or something to stand in the way of that stuff.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there is some hope in that; but anyway, has Peter finished? Not quite; he has a bit more as he rounds out 2 Peter Chapter 2, and we will get to that in a minute; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's dig right back into 2 Peter 2, starting at verse 17: These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹They promise them freedom, which they themselves are slaves of depravity—for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Peter is trying to help people understand, even though they portray themselves as one way, this is the real deal from what is behind them. I think Jesus did this also, and Peter probably was present when he said it. He said: You see those Pharisees over there? They are whitewashed tombs. They look great on the outside...really clean...and inside they are full of darkness; and that is what Peter is doing here. He is exposing these false teachers for who they really are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they only look good...they like a spring of water, but then they turn out to be a dry well. There is no substance to them. Peter says they are as thin as a wisp of fog or mist. There is nothing to them; and then, Darrell, Peter underscores what a lot of us know to be a sad reality: These are people who entice others to sin by saying things like: Man, you know; you are so hemmed in by rules and laws, live a little! Don't you want to have some freedom; have some fun? Just say to yourself what I always say: I gotta be free to be me. So, stop being a slave to other peoples' scruples. That is what they say, but the reality is the reverse.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you only live once, right? So, you live to the fullest. It is like the essence of hedonism, which is basically doing whatever your pleasures...desires...with no boundaries; and people who are wise... I mean, Solomon could say this later in his life when he wrote Ecclesiastes: All that stuff is meaningless; chasing wealth; chasing desires; chasing passions. Freedom is not the absence of boundaries...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Freedom actually happens within a healthy set of boundaries, because if I am free to take your stuff, and you are free to take my stuff, then we've got chaos; we've got anarchy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For that reason, right? It is a completely fake freedom because Peter says: You are actually slaves to your appetites. You are slaves to these things, and it just generates bad momentum. These people drink too much;

they do drugs too much; they become addicted to alcohol or heroin or sexual pleasures; they get addicted to gambling. I mean, if they think that is what freedom looks like, they are sadly, sadly mistaken. That is not free at all. But, Darrell, as Peter brings this section to a conclusion, he has a little bit more to say; and again, like the rest of the chapter, it isn't pretty.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up at verse 20, it says: If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, then to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²²Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Lovely images there, Peter; thank you. Again, the third time now in this chapter, Peter indicates that these false ones were people who had once known Jesus Christ, and how he can make us truly free; and instead, now they have become slaves to their passions and desires in a corrupt world. And he says, interestingly too, Darrell: Once upon a time, they had tasted the goodness of Jesus apparently; and that makes their situation more tragic than if they had never known Jesus in the first place.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if you are a believer and you had a relationship with Christ, you have known that he saved you by grace through faith, and then you return back to the old ways that you had before, then it is worse. In Hebrews, they pick this up as well. We've only got one sacrifice. We don't take him back and put him back on the cross again every time we do something; and so, this is where different believers and different faiths and denominations have differences, because some of them believe that you can lose your salvation this way. That is not what the Reformed tradition teaches or believes. We believe that once we are saved, we are always saved, and no one can snatch us out of the Father's hand; however, this is where some of that doctrine comes from.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, I was raised in the Reformed tradition to say that we don't believe what some call *backsliding*, right? Once saved, always saved; preservation of the saints, you know, one of the points of Calvinism. So, is Peter saying that the Reformed tradition, among others that believe in the preservation of the saints, that we are wrong? We should have read 2 Peter 2 a little more carefully? I don't know. It is a tough one; but here is what we *do* know, Darrell: I think probably we all know people, and hurtfully, sometimes they are members of our extended family; sometimes they are members of our immediate family; people who once upon a time sure seemed all in on the gospel and on church and on worship, but now they have soured on the whole thing. They don't have to maybe go the complete opposite way, as with the people Peter is dealing with, but certainly, they don't pray anymore, they don't attend church anymore, and they don't care what the Bible has to say on any subject anymore. And that is always a heartbreaking thing to see.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and I am sure that there have been many people listening who have had these things happen in their own families, or people they have known; and I think we get into trouble when we try to determine what their eternal state is. I think it is more important for us to be a light and encouragement to them, praying for them. Let's just be honest. We have some struggles in our faith, where we went the opposite way that we knew that we were supposed to go. We said yes to the things we shouldn't have said yes to, and we needed to come back in repentance. And so, even in those moments, the enemy tries to pull us astray. He just never stops trying to get us away from the Lord and the truth. It is really challenging to be in those situations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, I think the bottom line for this episode of *Groundwork*, on this rather dark and gloomy chapter of judgment as such is we need to be on our guard. In the Bible, the devil is referred to as the father of all lies. So, the devil and his hosts will never grow weary of promoting falsehoods. So, we have to be on guard. We have to lean into Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We have to lean into our God, who is himself Truth, at the center of the cosmos; and we have to just be very, very wary of these people who try to flip everything on its head; deny the truth; substitute false stories; live in raucous ways that they claim is freedom, but that is actually slavery. We have to be on our guard.

DARRELL DELANEY

I also believe that we should pray for discernment.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

The Holy Spirit can help us distinguish. That is the actual definition of the gift of discernment, so that you can see the truth from the lies, and be able to distinguish the two; and so, we pray for discernment so that we can be on our guard; and we pray that the Holy Spirit would lead us with the scriptures to show us how to rightly divide that truth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Peter says these people, you know, they departed from the straight way of righteousness. We need to pray for the Holy Spirit to keep us on that straight way of righteousness. Truth is under attack today. We see it on social media; we see it all over. Truth is under attack; and so, what can we do but pray to the Savior who told us he is the Way, the Truth and the Life; and pray that he will keep us close; and thanks be to God, Jesus can and will do that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee; and we hope you will join us again next time as we conclude our study of 2 Peter with Chapter 3.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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