

CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

A Study of 2 Peter

STUDY SIX

Disobedience Gone to Seed

2 Peter 2:12–19

Respect the promptings of your heart. If you feel reluctant about a teacher or leader, honor that. It's the Spirit's way of tapping you and saying, "Watch out. Be careful."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE who believe everything they hear and follow any smooth talker who comes along are like ships that plow full speed ahead at night without a compass. Disaster awaits. They are like airplanes attempting to land without any instruments in a dense fog. They fly blind.

What's needed is discernment—skill and accuracy in reading character, as well as the perception to detect and identify the truth. Discernment helps us steer clear of error whenever it appears and live safely within the arms of truth. It's our internal umpire that blows the whistle when someone steps over the line. It's the ability to see beneath the surface, between the lines, and to correctly size up the situation. *So important.*

The letter of 2 Peter reminds us in vivid terms that false teachers are ready and waiting for anyone who lacks discernment. The moment these charlatans find a chink in someone's armor, especially that of a naïve Christian, their hidden blade of heresy will strike. So, Peter helps us to be discerning by describing these abusive authority figures as they really are.¹



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2 Peter 2:12–19



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul prayed for his readers: “that your love may overflow more and more in real knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9 NASB). *Love, knowledge, and discernment*—three spiritual stabilizers. Pray for these qualities for yourself and those you love as you open God’s Word.

Father, only You can meet my deepest needs for love and acceptance. Fill me with Your love and stir my love for You in return. Give me knowledge of Your truth and bless me with discernment to perceive genuine love from false, and truth from error. In Christ’s name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Peter had already accused the false teachers of indulging in the flesh, despising authority, and arrogantly scoffing at angelic majesties “without so much as trembling” (2 Peter 2:10). But Peter wasn’t done unmasking these arrogant abusers. Layer by layer, he peeled away their façade to expose even uglier sin.

Reading Peter’s account of their treachery is like wading into a putrid swamp filled with the worst forms of depravity. “There is nothing quite like it elsewhere in the entire book. The misery and desolation of it are unrelieved,” wrote commentator J. H. Jowett.² Let’s progress slowly through this murky section, taking in a little at a time.



Observation: Depravity on Display

Read [2 Peter 2:12](#) and write down your *observations*. Observing a text is the first step toward discovering its meaning. What figure of speech did Peter use to describe how far the false teachers had fallen? How was it possible they sank so low?



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According to [2 Peter 2:13](#), what reprehensible behaviors did the false teachers love doing and delight in? What wages did their wrongs earn them?

How did Peter describe their predatorial urges in [2:14](#)? Who was most vulnerable?

These men envision an opportunity for sin in every encounter. They prey on women who are naïve, who are lonely and who misinterpret lust for love and a caress as a genuine embrace. They entice “unstable souls” (2:14). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

These reprobates used to walk God’s way, but what happened, according to [2 Peter 2:15–16](#)? In whose footsteps did they follow? How were the false teachers like their predecessor? For the backstory, read [Numbers 22:21–33](#).



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Peter called Balaam’s sin against God a “mad course” (2 Peter 2:16) or “insanity” (NASB). How is a depraved mind-set similar to a mental psychosis?

Those who abandon the right way long enough and far enough move into the territory of temporary insanity. There’s no limit to their sin at that point. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What word pictures did Peter use to describe the emptiness of the false teachers’ character and promises in 2 Peter 2:17?

What narcissistic traits did Peter describe in 2:18–19? Entanglement with this type of false spiritual authority will inevitably lead to what end?



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They are springs, but they have no water. Spiritual mirages. They seem like the real thing, but they are not. Reprobates are empty people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Principles to Live By

Peter hoped this disturbing journey through the swamp of sin would make a lasting impression on his readers. Let's *interpret* the passage by listing key lessons.

In 2 Peter 2:12–14, Peter said the false teachers were like “unthinking animals,” driven by their depraved appetites. Write down a principle or two about the consequences of disobedience gone to seed. What happens to the will of the person at this level of sin? What damage can he or she cause? Who gets hurt the most?

Peter traced the false teachers' moral corruption to its origin when they “wandered off the right road” (2 Peter 2:15). What principle can you draw from 2:15–16?



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These narcissistic teachers talked a good talk, but their words were “mist” (2 Peter 2:17); they “[bragged] about themselves” (2:18); they enticed others with their “twisted sexual desires” (2:18); and the freedom they flaunted was enslavement in disguise (2:19). List the principles that Peter was teaching about the signs of controlling, narcissistic people in [2:17–19](#).

Keep these principles handy. They are necessary tools in your bag of knowledge to help you discern truth from error and trustworthy people from predators. Another apostle who encouraged believers to be discerning was John. Let’s see what we can learn from him.



Correlation: Love Guided by Truth

In his second epistle to the churches, John addressed “the chosen lady” (2 John 1:1), who was possibly an actual woman in the church. This gracious lady opened her home for the sake of ministry. Her river of hospitality flowed freely to those who came to her door, including traveling teachers.

It was not uncommon for wicked men to exploit trusting Christians. John’s message to this woman, and to us, was this: *show love but be discerning*.

John advised his readers to live in what, according to [1:3](#)?



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Why are both qualities necessary, not just one or the other?

What practical guideline did John give in 2 John 1:10–11?

John's advice applied to Peter's readers as well. They should have slammed the door on the rogue teachers who denied Christ, but, instead, they rolled out the red carpet. Tragically, their lack of discernment caused them to become "partner[s] in the evil work" (2 John 1:11). They were enabling the false teachers' sinful behavior. How can we protect our churches against being lured into a false teacher's swamp? How can we guard ourselves against controlling, narcissistic people? Let's look at some helpful guidelines.



Application: Living in the Truth

The answer is to stabilize our spiritual foundation with the attributes we prayed for earlier: *love*, *knowledge*, and *discernment*. Here are three action steps based on these qualities.

First, *walk closely with God*. Love the Lord with your whole heart. Talk with Him daily about your fears, your burdens, and your hopes. Fellowship with Him through praise and worship. Filling your heart with love for God helps guard you from smooth-talking counterfeits.



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Second, *heed the counsel of His Word*. Know the Word. Look to the Scriptures as your source of truth, and listen only to those teachers who align with that source, especially about Christ.

Third, *respect the promptings of your heart*. Pay attention to God's still, small voice. As you walk closely with God and take His Word seriously, His Spirit will help you discern whether a certain person is trustworthy. If you feel reluctant, then honor that feeling and hold back. Learn to respect the Holy Spirit's restraint.

Are you navigating a stressful relationship with a person or leader whose disobedience has gone to seed? How can a balance of love, knowledge, and discernment stabilize you?

If you're having difficulty discerning what's right or wrong, true or false, seek counsel from a trustworthy Christian. Who can you talk to? What are the main issues you'd like to talk about?



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Spend a few moments communing with the Lord. Open your heart to His words from Scripture and seek His counsel. What truth from this study stands out as the most important guiding principle for you moving forward?

Peter hoped his journey through the false teachers' swamp of sin would open his readers' eyes to the dangers in front of them. Has it opened yours?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for patiently walking with me through my disobedience. You have shown me the truth when I was tempted to follow error. You have watched over me even when I've run the wrong way. You have taught me the way I should go. Now, give me discernment to keep me on Your path and protect me from hurtful people. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Adapted from material originally published as "Think with Discernment" in Charles R. Swindoll, *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 18–19.
2. J. H. Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Peter* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), 279–80.

