

Animal Wrongs

2 Peter 2:10-16 March 22, 2026

If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck. This folksy bit of common sense was probably coined by a late 19th century American poet named James Riley.¹ In the 20th century, it became a repeated warning of the dangers of communism, both domestically and internationally.

Elementary school was full of lessons on how to tell different animals apart. Is it an alligator or a crocodile? Is it a seal or a sea lion? Frog or toad? Tortoise or turtle? Moth or butterfly?

I don't really want to cross paths with an alligator or a crocodile in the wild. But sometimes we learned what might make a life or death difference between two creatures.

It was at an outdoor field trip of some sort that I learned the famous rhyme, "Red on yellow, kill a fellow. Red on black, venom lack." It helps you differentiate between coral snakes and king snakes. The colors are the same, the order is different. King snakes are considered harmless, whereas coral snakes have the most potent venom of any snake in North America. Forewarned, forearmed.

Peter has been warning us about the danger of false teachers. How they infiltrate the church. They will infiltrate Christian communities and culture. And their words are deadly venom.

He's been warning us in a general sense. Now he starts teaching us how to spot the false teachers. And Peter does not pull any punches. Frankly, he says they act like animals. They *claim* to have deeper understanding of all the most important questions of life. But Peter says, "Look how they waddle. Hear how they quack. These are not great oracles of truth. They are vipers to be avoided."

We pick up in the middle of verse 10, where Peter begins showing us how to spot them.

2 Peter 2:10b-11 - Bold, arrogant people! They are not afraid to slander the glorious ones; ¹¹ however, angels, who are greater in might and power, do not bring a slanderous charge against them before the Lord.

These verses leave us with a few questions. Who are the "glorious ones" (your version may say "dignitaries" or "celestial beings")? Who is having a slanderous charge brought against them? Scholars debate the grammar, the context, and the fact that these verses overlap with Jude.

A smaller percentage of commentators think the "glorious ones" refer to church or civil authorities. I tend to think Peter wouldn't use that title for himself or other human servants of God. The dominant view among scholars is that Peter is referring to angelic beings - either good or bad.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck_test

We don't exactly know *what* they were saying,² and that's ok. Often times, the epistles will leave texts like this somewhat broad so that we don't obsess over the specifics of the situation. The ambiguity is important.³ Peter wants us to focus on a principle, not the specific predicament.

So, we aren't told exactly what these guys were saying, but we *can* see how they were behaving. They had no respect and no restraint.⁴ They were brash and blasphemous. Peter says they were bold, arrogant people.

But wait: Aren't Christians *supposed* to be bold? Didn't Peter and the other apostles and the Christians in Jerusalem *pray* for boldness?⁵ They did. But that's *not* the boldness Peter is talking about here. In Acts, they prayed that the Lord would empower them to, "speak *His* word with all boldness." What Peter is talking about here is arrogance, and headstrong recklessness.⁶ They were self-willed. Their goal was not please God, but pleasing themselves.⁷

Peter contrasts these false teachers with the angels of heaven. Angels always show a great deal of restraint. Now, think about that for a moment: A heavenly angel has amazing power. They've got full access to God Himself. They are supernatural beings that can move between the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. They know *so much* more than we do about what God is doing. But *they* are extremely careful about what they say and do. They are *not* brash or headstrong.

Standing before God, they won't even bring a slanderous charge against the *guilty*. Whether the "them" in verse 11 is evil angels *or* if it's referring to the false teachers, either way the good angels *know* they're guilty. But they know God is in charge *and* that He is merciful. So, they do *not* act like Lucifer, who came before God to accuse Job. Jude tells us that Michael the Archangel wouldn't bring a condemning word against the devil himself. He said, "The *Lord* rebuke you."

We would do well to be more careful about the words we speak. James has a lot to say about that in his letter. Jesus Himself said that, "on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak."⁸ The angels are certainly careful. We should be, too. One way to identify these false teachers was by their rash, brutish, blasphemous speech. Arrogant and irreverent.

We can also know them by the patterns of their personal lives. As always, a tree is known by its fruit.

2 Peter 2:12-13a - ¹² But these people, like irrational animals—creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed—slander what they do not understand, and in their destruction they too will be destroyed. ¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.

² Edwin Blum *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 12: Hebrews Through Revelation*

³ Douglas Moo *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Peter, Jude*

⁴ Blum

⁵ Acts 4:29

⁶ Richard Bauckham *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 50: Jude, 2 Peter*

⁷ D. Edmond Hiebert *Second Peter And Jude*

⁸ Matthew 12:36

Peter is not calling them names. He's exposing how these people were living life on a base level of selfish hedonism. A life of self-indulgence, driven by sinful, human urges. While *they* were raising themselves up, parading themselves as experts and gurus and keepers of secret truth. In reality, they lived like animals, not driven by morality but by desire.

Animals aren't moral. Go into the wild and you will find the coral snake does not feel bad about biting you *at all*. It's driven by animal instinct. It makes decisions based off natural urges.

When Peter says they are "creatures of instinct," he uses a word that means "belonging to nature."⁹ The *sin* nature. But friends, we're not meant to belong to the sin nature. We're meant to enjoy a *supernatural* relationship to God and man. God raises us up above the cares and the corruption of this world, with our thoughts set on the Spirit¹⁰ and the Gospel and the work of God in our lives.

The false teachers, living on this base, animal level, would reap what they sowed. They destroyed the lives of others, so *they* would be destroyed. One of the wonders of the Christian life is that we get to reap what *Christ* has sowed in us. His life. His word. His peace. His comfort. His grace.

Now, don't read verse 12 and think that these false teachers were *determined* to be evil. We read that they were, "Born to be caught and destroyed." This isn't teaching that God predestined them for Hell. Because, remember: *All of us* are *born* dead in trespasses and sins. All of us are born of the flesh and if we *live* according to the flesh, we are going to die.¹¹ This is not a verse about predestination. It is a reminder of the only prescription that can cure the disease.

Do you want to be set free and saved from destruction? Do you want a life not captive to natural urges but lived on the higher plane of God's grace? Then you need to be born *again*. And once you are born again, you no are no longer obligated to the flesh, to live according to the flesh like these false teachers. But instead you have the mind of Christ. The heart of Christ. You walk the way of Christ, *not* toward destruction, but toward life. How are we born again? Through belief.

2 Peter 2:13b-14 - They consider it a pleasure to carouse in broad daylight. They are spots and blemishes, delighting in their deceptions while they feast with you. ¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery that never stop looking for sin. They seduce unstable people and have hearts trained in greed. Children under a curse!

Here, Peter lists their mentality and activity. It's an ugly rap sheet. They slander, they carouse, they deceive, they seduce, they're full of greed.

Theirs was a habitual lifestyle of sin. Of course, *they* saw it as one big party. Not just on Saturday night, but during the workday. In fact, not *only* during the work day, but they were bringing their drunken, self-indulgence into church services, too. As God's people came together to share a meal

⁹ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*

¹⁰ Romans 8:5

¹¹ Romans 8:12-13

and to celebrate communion, here are these guys, scoping every lady as someone they wanted to seduce and looking for all the ways to get more of everything for themselves.

They were *trained* in greed. We know they wanted people's money, but the term also refers to a lust for more of *everything*.¹² In fact, Peter used a word that referred to athletic training in the gymnasium.¹³ They had chest and arms day, leg day, and *greed* day.

They *never stopped* looking for sin. But notice what form that took: It wasn't just sin in a vacuum. They indulged their appetites by exploiting and devouring the Christians around them. Unstable people were being "seduced." That's a term that refers to catching prey with bait.¹⁴

This is why back in chapter 1, Peter says, "I'm writing so you can be *established* in the truth." He wants us to be firmly anchored in the word of God, in the truth of God, so that we're *not* easy prey.

You've watched nature shows. *Planet Earth*. *Wild America*. When the lions want to grab a gazelle, who do they target? The strong? The alert? No. It's the weak ones straggling behind the herd.

Getting grounded in the word of God is *not* just about knowing more things. The Bible explains that this is the way we *anchor* our lives on Christ so *that* when the storms come, when the winds blow, when our enemy comes - who is a prowling lion seeking someone to devour - we will be strong. We will be secure. We will *not* be knocked down and destroyed, but continue growing and thriving in the love of God and the protection of His truth. Being established in the truth shields us and sets us free. It directs us and fortifies our lives.

2 Peter 2:15-16 - ¹⁵ They have gone astray by abandoning the straight path and have followed the path of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of wickedness ¹⁶ but received a rebuke for his lawlessness: A speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Peter uses an Old Testament character as an example of what these false teachers were doing. Balaam's story is an interesting one. He pops up more than we realize. He's referenced in Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Nehemiah, Micah, 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation.

Balaam was this guy who you could pay to do divination. The Moabites wanted to curse the Israelites, so they hired Balaam. God told him, "Don't take the job," but Balaam *really* wanted the money. He ended up going. On the way, an angel of the Lord stood in the path to kill him. But the donkey he was riding could see the angel, and she turned away to try to help Balaam. He got really angry, started beating the donkey, and the Lord miraculously opened the donkey's mouth and allowed her to say, "Why are you beating me? I'm trying to save you!"

¹² Moo

¹³ Blum

¹⁴ Hiebert

Now Balaam *still* doesn't get the hint, he wants the money, so he tries to curse Israel. But every time he opens his mouth, God makes a blessing come out instead. Remember: the Lord knows how to rescue the Godly from their troubles.

After *all* that, Balaam is *still* greedy for the money. So he tells the Moabites, "Look, I can't curse them. But we might be able to *convince* them to commit sin themselves, which will bring *God's* judgment on them."¹⁵ And that's exactly what happens.

Balaam *kept* following this path of sin and greed, and in the end he was destroyed. Along the way, God *kept* giving him a chance to turn back. Pitstops of mercy and choice. It was like God put all these signs in which said, "Dead end. *Not* a through road." The same is true for any sinner today. God doesn't *want* you to perish, but for you to repent. To *turn around* and walk on the straight path - the path of righteousness. It's *madness* to continue on a road you know ends in death.

But you have to choose whether you're going to walk in the light or stay in the dark. Sadly, many people love darkness rather than light. But as Peter is so quick to remind us: The end of the path of unrighteousness *is* death. Destruction. Judgment. Hell.

These false teachers seemed like they were having a good time. They were telling people that they knew more than angels, more than apostles. In reality, they lived like animals. They were spots and blemishes in the church of God.

In the last chapter, Peter is going to bring that image back when he tells us to not be led away by these false teachers and to make every effort to be found without spot or blemish in Christ's sight. How? By walking with *Him*, not *them*. By making progress on the path of righteousness. By *not* living an animal life of sin, but the Christian life of purity, grace, power, and truth. Looking at my life in the mirror, is there any spot cleaning I need to do?

Peter's warning is that there are Balaam's out there who want to bring curse and ruin into our lives. God knows and is keeping an account. He will deal with them for the harm they cause. But our part is to watch out for their venom. Now, we should be aware but we don't need to be afraid. Consider the example of Balaam: Balaam couldn't do *anything* to Israel, no matter how hard he tried! The trouble only came when they decided to *follow* his advice. *That's* when ruin came.

In the mean time, we're not donkeys with human words. We're sheep with the Lord's word on our lips. We can not only keep ourselves from being seduced by the lies of the false teachers, but we can warn others of the coming judgment. *And* we can warn those false teachers themselves when we run into them. God extended mercy to Balaam. He didn't take it, but he *could* have. God has mercy for you and me and those around us today. Keep to the path of mercy, the path of righteousness. It is the path that leads to life, to glory, to all we need to enjoy the supernatural plans God has for us.

¹⁵ Numbers 31:16, Revelation 2:14