

II Peter Study 4: The Description and Judgment of False Teachers, II Peter 2:1-9

Introduction: if the world ever needed a warning, it needs to be warned against false teachers. Why? Because false teachers lead a person to doom himself quicker than any other single thing. Too many people are too quick to believe a lie. Why? So they can go ahead and live like they want. They want some excuse to get away from the restraints and demands that Jesus Christ puts upon them. Therefore, they follow any teaching that lowers the Person of Christ. The more He is lowered, the less binding His demands are. But note: there is one major problem with false teaching. It is a lie; it is not the truth. A person dooms himself to an eternal hell if he follows false teaching. This particular passage describes false teachers for us.

"There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. " (2:1)

1. False teachers and false prophets have always existed. They have always carried on their destructive work. The false prophets were at work while God was giving His Word to men. Imagine! Even while God was speaking and giving His Word to men there were some who were denying His Word and teaching destructive heresies and misleading people. There were false prophets all throughout the Old Testament period. They were the people who were denying God and His Word. But note: false teachers did not only exist throughout the Old Testament period. Scripture declares plainly: "there shall be false teachers among you." The idea is this: there will always be false teachers; false teachers will fill every generation of man and they will continue to introduce their destructive heresies until the world ends.

This means there are false teachers among us. We must, therefore, be alert to what every man and woman teaches. This does not mean that we should be on a witch hunt; it means that we should test all preaching and teaching by the Word of God.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

2. False teachers secretly teach destructive heresies. Scripture says that false teachers secretly introduce or bring in destructive heresies. They teach destructive heresies, but they do not do it openly. They do it deceptively, quietly, secretly, slipping in false doctrine here and there.

Note where false teachers teach their destructive heresies. In the church, right among believers. The false teachers are not out in the world, but they are within the church. They have joined the church and they have been outstanding members long enough to become teachers and preachers within the church. They hold leadership positions from which they can teach their destructive heresies. Note that the word "heresies" is plural. What are the heresies being referred to? Any teaching that goes contrary to the Word of God or Bible.

The point is this: any teaching that is contrary to God's Word is a destructive heresy. It destroys God's purpose for the church, and it destroys the lives of people within the church. Teachings that are contrary to God's Word are destructive and there is no escaping the fact. No matter how personable a person may be, no matter how much we may like him, if he is teaching a destructive heresy, he is destroying the church and the lives of people.

William Barclay states it well: *"A heretic [is]...a man who believes what he wishes to believe instead of accepting the truth of God which he must believe. "What was happening in the case of Peter's people was that certain men, who claimed to be prophets, were insidiously persuading men to believe the things they wished to be true rather than the things which God has revealed as true. They did not set themselves up as opponents of Christianity. Far from it. Rather they set themselves up as the finest fruits of Christian thinking. Insidiously, unconsciously, imperceptible, so gradually and so subtly that they did not even notice it, people were being lured away from God's truth to men's private opinions, for that is what heresy is" (The Letters of James and Peter, p.374).*

1. The most tragic heresy is the heresy that denies the Lord who bought us. Jesus Christ has bought us, and He has paid the supreme price to buy us. He gave all that He is and all that He has—even His life—in order to buy us out of sin and death. We owe our lives to Him; we owe everything to Him. The picture is that of a servant: we owe Christ our minds and hearts, our duty and service. Therefore, to deny Him is to deny our Lord and Master. What does it mean to deny Christ? It means...

- to deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God: that He left heaven above and came to earth as Man (the God-Man) to reveal God's great love for man.
- to deny that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world: that He lived a perfect and sinless life and secured the perfect righteousness for man.
- to deny that Jesus Christ died *for man*: that He took man's sin upon Himself and bore the judgment and condemnation and punishment for man.
- to deny that Jesus Christ arose from the dead and conquered death for man.
- to deny that Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God to receive all the worship and glory and honor and praise of the universe.
- to deny any teaching of Scripture about Christ is to deny Christ.

2. False teachers shall be destroyed swiftly. Note that they bring destruction upon themselves. They are responsible for their own actions. They do not have to teach false doctrine; they make the choice to teach it. They could teach the truth [the Holy Scriptures], but they make a deliberate choice to teach contrary to what God has said. Therefore, they shall bring swift destruction upon themselves. The idea of swift is both certain and quick. When the judgment comes, there will be no discussion about the matter—no questioning, no leniency, no mercy, no love. There will be pure justice: swift, immediate judgment and destruction.

3. “And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.” (2:2) False teachers mislead many people. False teachers do two terrible things.

1. False teachers encourage people to live immoral and licentious lives. This is what is meant by *pernicious ways*. *Pernicious* means destructive ways, the ways of immorality and of the flesh. How do false teachers lead men to live worldly and fleshly lives?

a. False teachers say this: Christ is not the Son of God and/or the Bible is not the Word of God. But note this: if this is so, then there is no Lord over our lives and God has not told us how to live. There is no absolute authority over us, no absolute Word telling us how to live and how to get to God. The only authority that we have is the best thinking we as men can do. This teaching, of course, leads to worldly and fleshly living, for man cannot lead men above what he himself is. And man by nature is worldly and fleshly. If there is no absolute truth, no instructions telling us how to live, then we are free to live pretty much as we want just so we turn to some idea of God—some idea that we have of what He is like—just so we turn to Him every now and then. And if God has not instructed us how to live—clearly instructed us—then He cannot hold us accountable if we mess up here and there. As stated, this kind of teaching lends itself to worldly and fleshly living.

b. False teachers take the love of God and twist it. They say that God is so loving that He would never condemn man to an eternity of hell. They say that a man must believe in Christ and follow Him, but if he fails, God still loves him and will forgive him and will never condemn or punish him.

Of course, the consequence of this teaching is devastating. For if a man is not to be judged and punished for his sin, he can go ahead and live like he wants. He will never be condemned or punished for his sin.

c. False teachers take the grace of God and faith and pervert them. They say that a person must believe in Jesus Christ. This, of course, is true: we are saved by believing in Jesus Christ; we are saved by grace through faith. But false teachers add that once we believe, we are okay forever and ever even if we do return to the world and live in sin. False teachers say that God accepts us even if we live like the devil and live after the world and flesh—just so we believe in Jesus Christ. False teachers say that God's love and grace are so inexhaustible that a man is free to sin just so he believes in Jesus Christ. The result of this teaching, of course, is the indulgence and license to sin. A man never has to worry about being rejected by God. He can live like he wants and sin as much as he wants just so he believes in Jesus Christ, for God's grace will forgive him and still make him acceptable.

2. False teachers cause the name of Christ to be abused. They cause people to speak evil of God, Christ, the church, believers, and the Scriptures. The very name of God is blasphemed because of hypocritical living and false profession. How often we hear comments such as "those hypocrites." Note that the blame lies at the feet of the false teachers. It is they who mislead people.

" You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." (Rom. 2:23-24).

4. " By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words;" (2:3a) False teachers exploit people. They use people just like they use merchandise, for their own ends. They are in the church ministering and teaching, but they are covetous, full of greed and lust. What is it that they are coveting?

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| ⇒ popularity, recognition | ⇒ attention, success |
| ⇒ a large church | ⇒ money |
| ⇒ livelihood, security | ⇒ increased salaries |
| ⇒ position, leadership | ⇒ fame |

A false teacher is often more interested in being popular and having the people accept him and his idea than he is in ministering to them. He is more concerned with a people following him, thinking he is a good teacher or preacher than he is in ministering to them. False ministers exploit people for their own ends.

"For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake [personal gain, livelihood]" (Titus 1:10-11).

5. "for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." (2:3b) False teachers shall be judged and destroyed. 2 Peter 2:3 is descriptive language. Upon earth it may seem that false teaching goes on and on forever without ever being corrected or handled by God. But no matter how successful or prosperous a false teacher may seem to be, judgment does not linger; it is not idle. The damnation of false teachers has not fallen asleep. The day is coming when all false teachers will pay for teaching destructive heresies. They will be damned, that is, destroyed, because they did not teach the truth of Christ and of God's Word.

Now, how do we know that false teachers will be judged and destroyed? Because God is God, which means that He is not only love but He is also *just*. He has the power not only to love people with a perfect love, but He also has the power to judge people with a perfect justice. Note four clear facts.

1. God did not spare the angels who sinned **" For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;" (2:4).** He cast them down to hell (tartarus). Eons ago in the distant past, Satan was apparently the highest created being ever created by God. At that time his name was Lucifer. But he did what so many people have done: he chose to go his own way; he rebelled against God. And he led a host of angels to rebel with him. Therefore, God judged him and cast him from his exalted position into hell. From what we can glean from Scripture, this is how Satan and the angels fell and became antagonists of God.

The point is this: even angels were cast down to hell and chained with darkness. And God is *reserving them for eternal judgment*. If God judged such glorious beings as Lucifer and the angels, how much more will He judge men, especially if they teach false doctrine and mislead people?

2. God did not spare the old world. **"and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;" (2:5)**

The world had become totally wicked; wickedness prevailed in every mind, heart, and life.

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

He destroyed the whole world of the ungodly by a flood. God had no choice; His righteousness demanded that He judge the world of the ungodly. And this He did. God sent a flood of water to cover the world, and all the ungodly were destroyed. There was one family saved—a preacher and his family. The preacher's name was Noah, and note what he preached: the righteousness of God. All the other preachers and priests of that day perished with all the other ungodly. But not Noah; he was saved, and the reason he was saved was because he was faithful to God and His righteousness. He lived and preached the truth of God and His Word. The point is this: if God judged and destroyed the *whole world of the ungodly*, He will certainly judge and destroy a false teacher.

3. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (cp. Genesis 19:1f). **“and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)” (2:6-8)**

God caused fire to fall upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Note the facts of the outline:

- a. The cities were turned into ashes.
- b. The cities were made an example to all who live ungodly lives.
- c. The reason for the judgment and destruction was twofold:
 - ⇒ The citizens were living filthy, immoral, and unjust lives.
 - ⇒ The sin and shame of the citizens were disturbing the heart of Lot. There was so much sin and shame that Lot's heart was distressed and tortured to see the law of God violated so much.

Note what happened: everyone in the city was judged and destroyed except one man, Lot. And note why he was saved—because he was righteous. (A study of Lot's life shows a selfish and carnal man; nevertheless, Lot believed God and when the time came, he separated from the ungodly and the world. He obeyed God.)

The point is this: if God judged and destroyed two great cities and all the people in them, He will certainly judge and destroy a false teacher.

4. God knows how to deliver the godly and reserve the unjust until the day of judgment to be punished. **“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,” (2:9)** This verse completes the sentence begun in 2 Peter 2:4. Note what it is that God delivers the godly from: temptations and trials; all the temptations and trials of life. There is no excuse for a false teacher preaching or teaching false doctrine—no excuse for him to fear other preachers or teachers or other men within his church nor to shy away from the truth—for God knows how to meet the needs of the man.

God knows how to deliver the man from every obstacle and through every difficulty, no matter how great a trial or temptation. No matter who opposes the teacher, God knows how to deliver him. He delivered Noah and Lot both through the most trying opposition and ungodliness. But note this: God also knows how to keep the ungodly until the day of judgment and doom. All false teachers shall be judged and doomed to punishment.

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7).

FALSE TEACHERS TODAY

Peter warned against false teachers. Many powerful speakers claim to have important ideas for Christians to hear. These speakers range from political reactionaries to extreme environmentalists. Add to the list those who present special angles on church doctrine coming from big denominations and small — and you have a dazzling array of choices. How do we separate the good (teaching that leads to Christ), the bad (off-center but benign ideas tacked onto the gospel), and the ugly (false teaching, much to be avoided)?

It's a complicated problem, but the following safeguards will help along the way:

- Use condemnation sparingly. An off-center idea may be way out but is not necessarily heresy. A sincere but misguided teacher may not be a "false" teacher. None of us understands God perfectly, so we must be generous and helpful long before we condemn and cast someone out.
- Pay attention to the teacher's ethical and moral behavior. The Bible stresses that false teachers will have immorality in their lives. Watch how they treat people and money. Don't excuse or cover up bad behavior.
- Choose your church carefully. Is the living Christ at the center of your church's ministry? Do leaders pray? Is the Bible honored and taught? Is God at work there? "False" churches may be very busy, but their teaching reveals the void when Christ and the Bible are pushed to the side. If that is the case, go somewhere else.

IDENTIFYING FALSE TEACHERS

Peter gives three warning signs for identifying false teachers:

1. Immorality — Do their lives contain or condone immoral practices? Does the group listening to the false teachers have a lot of immoral sexual relationships?

2. Greed — Teachers have a right to financial support (1 Cor 9:1-14; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18), but is money the teacher's or group's prime motivation? Before you send money to any cause, evaluate it carefully. Is the teacher or preacher clearly serving God or promoting his/her own interests? Will the person or organization use the money to promote valid ministry, or will it merely finance further promotions?

3. Lying — Is the leader offended when you ask for the scriptural backing behind his or her statements? Does he or she fudge on the facts when asked for evidence?