

Beware of False Teachers
(2 Peter 1:16-2:11)
Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Review from the Previous Lesson

- a. Peter believes he is soon to die, so this letter is like a 'Farewell Address'.
- b. The main theme of this letter (also the main subject of the present lesson) is that false teachers are coming into the church.
 - i. Therefore, we need to beware and be prepared when it happens.

II. Peter Establishes His Authority (Why All Christians Should Heed His Admonitions)

- a. Read **2 Peter 1:16-18**.
 - i. Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus. He was there at the Mountain of Transfiguration (one of only three close disciples of Jesus who were present).
 - ii. Read **Mark 9:2-8**.
 - 1. Of all the things Peter had seen in the life and ministry of Jesus (miracles, walking on water, crucifixion, resurrection, receiving the name 'Peter', being told he would be "given the keys of the kingdom", etc.), he selected *this one event* to establish his authority to speak.
 - 2. He actually saw Jesus transformed, saw Moses and Elijah appear, and heard the voice of God, the Father, speaking to Jesus from out of the cloud.
 - 3. Only three men saw this and heard the voice of the Father, identifying Jesus as His beloved Son.
 - iii. As we discussed in the prior lesson, *if the apostle Peter is not the author* of this letter (as many claim today), then the author is an abject liar, and the letter is worthless to Christians!
- b. I believe Peter is establishing his authority in such a strong way because he wants his readers to take what he is about to tell them very seriously.

III. Beware of False Teachers Who Will Come Into the Church

- a. Read **2 Peter 1:19-2:11**.
- b. The main theme of this passage (and the whole letter): false teachers are coming.
 - i. Recall that Peter says he is soon to die; this is like a 'Farewell Address' to warn and equip Christians after he is no longer with them (and us).
- c. The points Peter makes here:
 - i. Just as there were false teachers in the past (among the Jews), there will be false teachers "among you".
 1. Don't be surprised when it happens. This is nothing new.
 - ii. *Many* believers will follow them.
 - iii. They are wicked people, motivated by sinful desires, with hidden evil agendas.
 - iv. God will deal with these wicked people in the end; He will spare the righteous few. Therefore, stay faithful; do not be fearful.
 - v. The antidote: heed the word of God as a light shining in a dark place. Holy men of God gave it to us, moved by the Holy Spirit.
- d. The warning that false teachers will come – generally ignored by Christians today.
 - i. The attitude of most Christians: "Our group is different. We are led by spiritual people, so this (being infiltrated by false teachers) *could never happen to us.*"
 1. Those groups who discuss false teachers today are warning about how this has happened to *other* groups (not their own group).
 2. Also, most church leaders don't preach this to warn their people of dangers from within. They want to reassure their flock that everything will be okay if they just trust the leaders God has given them.
 3. Most Christians believe the Holy Spirit is somehow guiding the leaders of their group.
 4. When this is ever taught, then it is generally presented that these warnings only apply only to *other groups*.

- a. For example, Roman Catholics insist that their church is founded on Peter and his line of successors and cannot stray, so this applies to various heresies, including Protestantism.
 - b. Protestants and other non-Catholics will point to corruption in the Roman Catholic church.
 - c. When corruption is exposed in church leaders, it is often swept under the rug, covered up. When people find out the truth, many are disillusioned and can lose their faith in Christ altogether.
 - i. Catholic church homosexual sex and child abuse scandals among clergy here in Boston, with the cover-ups.
 - ii. Ravi Zacharias, with his RZIM worldwide Christian apologetics ministry.
 - iii. Prosperity gospel preachers who live lavish lifestyles.
 - iv. Sexual and financial scandals that pop up regularly in the Christian world (Catholic, Protestant, Anabaptist, etc.).
5. Tragically, when corruption and false teachers come to light and are exposed in Christian circles, many believers can struggle with their faith. Many have left the Christian faith altogether as a result of corruption they have seen in leaders. However, they do not realize that Jesus and the apostles *warned us directly and repeatedly about this very thing!* They all said it would happen, so we should not be surprised.
6. Jesus warned us about this.
- a. Jesus' final warning in the Sermon on the Mount was about false prophets who would come. While they would call Him 'Lord', they would be living corrupt lives.
 - i. Read **Matthew 7:13-23**.
 - ii. He said there would be *many* who would arise like this. They would be like *wolves in sheep's clothing*.

1. "Many will say to me on that day..."
- b. Read **Matthew 24:4-14**.
 - i. "Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."
 - ii. "The love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved."
7. Paul warned the first generation of his converts about this in his farewell message to the Ephesian elders.
 - a. Read **Acts 20:25-31**.
 - b. Paul said he had warned all of them for three years, day and night with tears, about false teachers who would come into their church.
 - c. Some *even from their own number* would rise up, speaking perverse things and drawing disciples away after themselves.
8. John warned about this as well, in his first letter.
 - a. Read **1 John 4:1-4**.
 - i. Many false prophets have gone into the world.
 - ii. The spirit of the Antichrist is now in the world.
 - iii. They are *of the world*.
 - iv. We know the spirit of truth *and the spirit of error*.
9. Jude also warns about false teachers in the church. That is the main theme of his short letter.
 - a. "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who *turn the grace of our God into lewdness* and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." (**Jude 4**, NKJV)
 - b. This clearly is a problem in Christian circles today, where people distort teaching on the grace of God to the point where they make excuses for living sinful, ungodly lives.

- e. Peter reminds us that this is nothing new. We saw it in the past (in the Old Testament).
- i. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will 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 Peter 2:1, NKJV)
 - ii. **Question:** Can you think of any false prophets in the Old Testament? How many can you think of, and what are we supposed to learn from them?
 1. Read **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**.
 - a. In the Law of Moses, God warned people about false prophets. We are told how to identify them:
 - i. If what they say does not come to pass, or
 - ii. If they lead people to disobey the commands of God, such as calling people to follow other ‘gods’.
 2. Read **2 Kings 22:1-28** (designated **3 Kingdoms 22:1-28** in the LXX).
 - a. Jehoshaphat and Ahab are about to enter into a battle.
 - b. Ahab, the extremely corrupt king of Israel (the northern kingdom), asks his 400 prophets whether this is a good idea.
 - c. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah (the southern kingdom), is one of the most righteous kings.
 - d. The true prophet of God, Micaiah, is despised by Ahab “because he never says anything good concerning me”.
 - i. Lesson: True prophets of God are generally unpopular with those they are preaching to.
 - ii. They tell you things you don’t want to hear.
 - iii. This reminds me of what Paul said to Timothy: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but *according to their own desires, because they have itching ears*, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4, NKJV)

- e. Miciah is treated badly (struck, placed in prison, given only bread and water).
3. Jeremiah vs. the false prophet Hananiah. Read **Jeremiah 28 (Jeremiah 35 in LXX)**.
 - a. Hananiah was ‘Mr. Good News’.
 - b. Jeremiah told them the truth, the bad news.
 - i. However, he also added some good news regarding things to follow *after an extended captivity*.
 - ii. Elsewhere, Jeremiah told the people that the captivity in Babylon would last *70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12, and 25:10)*; as opposed to only two years of captivity as predicted by the false prophet Hananiah.
 4. Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders of his day. Read **Matthew 23:27-39**.
 - a. Jesus said that while they decorate the graves of the prophets, they are the *sons of those who murdered the prophets*.
 - b. He said they are *just like their fathers*.
 - c. So many righteous men who spoke the truth were rejected, persecuted and killed. Their “righteous blood” was shed upon the earth.
- f. Peter reminds us that, in the end, God will address the false teachers.
 - i. He points to the angels who sinned, but were cast down to ‘*Tartarus*’ (the actual Greek word used here) awaiting final judgment.
 1. “For if God messengers who sinned did not spare, but with chains of thick gloom, having cast them down to *Tartarus*, did deliver them to judgment, having been reserved...” (**2 Peter 2:4, YLT**)
 - a. This is the only place in the New Testament where the Greek word ‘Tartarus’ is used.
 - b. It is not the same word as either:

- i. *Gehenna*, the lake of fire (sometimes translated *hell*) where the wicked are cast in the end, nor
 - ii. *Hades*, the intermediate waiting place for the spirits of the dead who await final judgment (the same as *Sheol* in the Hebrew Old Testament).
- 2. While the word ‘Tartarus’ is not used by Jude, it appears he is referring to the same place in a similar discussion of angels who had sinned.
 - a. “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness* for the judgment of the great day...” (**Jude 6**, NKJV)
- 3. For more information regarding how the early Christians understood these passages from **2 Peter** and **Jude**, see articles on ‘Angels, Fallen’ and ‘Tartarus’ in the *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot.
 - a. The early Christians generally understood these references to angels abandoning their place and falling into sin as being associated with the corruption on the earth in the days of Noah.
 - b. Most early Christians understood “sons of God / daughters of men” as referring to angels who became corrupted, came to the earth, and had relations with women.
 - c. *Tartarus* is the gloomy place where these fallen angels are kept, awaiting their judgment.
- ii. Peter points to God’s judgment of the wicked in days of Noah.
 - 1. Noah “a preacher of righteousness” was saved, while all the wicked perished.
- iii. Peter also points to Lot, who was saved while Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.
 - 1. Lot described as “righteous” by Peter.
 - 2. Therefore, let us not disparage Lot for how he handled situations in his life; Peter did not!
 - 3. Also, this passage directly refutes the “no one is righteous” and “all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags” (total depravity of

all descended from Adam after the Fall) claims made by Calvinists.

- a. Those claims come from taking passages like **Romans 3:10** and **Isaiah 64:6** out of context.
- b. Also, consider what Jesus said about people before his time being 'righteous': "...that on you may come *all the righteous blood shed on the earth*, from the blood of *righteous* Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." (**Matthew 23:35**, NKJV)
 - i. **Question:** *Where is all this 'righteous blood' that Jesus refers to coming from, if everyone since the sins of Adam and Eve has been totally depraved?*
- g. According to Peter, the antidote for the problem of false teachers coming into the church is *to give full attention to the Scriptures*.
 - i. They were given through holy men of God, who were *inspired by the Holy Spirit*.
 - ii. The Scriptures provide a light for us in the midst of a dark world.
 - iii. Recently I had an extended discussion with a brother who was interested in the historic faith, but was dismayed by seeing so many different churches across the Christian landscape teaching different things. He wondered if the answer might be found in going back to the Roman Catholic church, which claimed to have been founded by Jesus through Peter (**Matthew 16:18**), as well as claiming a direct line of leaders stretching all the way back to the beginning of the church.
 1. **Question:** If we are seeking the historic faith, why not look for the oldest church, perhaps the Roman Catholic church, and follow what they are teaching today to avoid heresies and false teaching?
 2. However, Peter *did not* tell the Christians he was writing, "When in doubt, just listen to Linus and the future bishops in the city of Rome."
 3. Let us *follow what Peter actually said*, rather than be among those who decorate his tomb and honor him in name only.
 - iv. There are no shortcuts, no simple solution to avoid false teaching. Peter said it was going to come into the church. He *did not* say, "You

don't need to read the Bible; just ask the future bishops of Rome, and you will *never* be led astray."

- v. Also, consider how Peter taught (in **Acts**, **1 Peter** and **2 Peter**). Whenever he spoke or wrote, he was always pointing to the Old Testament Scriptures to back up what he said.
 1. Let us follow his lead and his wonderful example in using the Scriptures.
 2. Let us seek the true light we have, the word of God.
 3. Don't be lazy or complacent, simply trusting your local church group or denomination and assume that they cannot be led into error.
 4. There are no short-cuts to studying, knowing and following the word of God!