

Growing Christians Need to Beware of False Teachers

Message 2 of 3 in the series: "Growing Up"

A. Shortly before he died, Peter wrote an open letter to believers everywhere reminding us to keep growing in our faith so we can live useful and productive lives.

"This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord... **The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" 2 Peter 1:1-2 & 8 (NLT)

B. Peter warns us that false teachers will seek to lead us away from true faith in God, and many people will follow them.

"But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as **there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies** and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. **Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality.** And because of these teachers, **the way of truth will be slandered.** In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed." 2 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT)

heresy = "teachings, beliefs, or factions that deviate from established, essential Christian doctrines, causing division, strife, and destruction within the church." Logos Bible study

1. Peter had heard Jesus' warning that false prophets/teachers look like true believers, and many people will follow them because false teaching sounds great. "Watch out for false prophets. **They come to you in sheep's clothing**, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15 (NIV) "Enter through the narrow gate. For **wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.** But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)
2. The Bible is our best defense against heresy and false teachers. "**All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives.** It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

C. Peter reminds us that God has always seen what's going on, and He knows how to punish wicked people while rescuing godly people.

1. "For God did not spare even the angels who sinned. **He threw them into hell** (tartarus), in gloomy pits of darkness, where they are being held until the day of judgment."
2 Peter 2:4 (NLT) (see also *Luke 8:31, Revelation 9:1-3 & 11 regarding "the Abyss"*)
2. "And God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God's righteous judgment. So **God protected Noah when he destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood.**" 2 Peter 2:5 (NLT) (see *Genesis 6-9*)
3. "Later, **God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes.** He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people. **But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom** because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him. Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day." 2 Peter 2:6-8 (NLT) (see *Genesis 18-19*)

IMPORTANT! "So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment." 2 Peter 2:9 (NLT)

D. Peter gives us a helpful character profile of false teachers so we will be able to recognize them.

"He is especially hard on those who follow their own twisted sexual desire, and who despise authority. **These people are proud and arrogant, daring even to scoff at supernatural beings without so much as trembling.** But the angels, who are far greater in power and strength, do not dare to bring from the Lord a charge of blasphemy against those supernatural beings. These false teachers are like unthinking animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed. **They scoff at things they do not understand,** and like animals, they will be destroyed. Their destruction is their reward for the harm they have done. They love

to indulge in evil pleasures in broad daylight. They are a disgrace and a stain among you. They delight in deception even as they eat with you in your fellowship meals. **They commit adultery with their eyes, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. They lure unstable people into sin, and they are well trained in greed.** They live under God's curse. **They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong.** But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice. These people are as useless as dried-up springs or as mist blown away by the wind. They are doomed to blackest darkness. They brag about themselves with empty, foolish boasting. **With an appeal to twisted sexual desires, they lure back into sin those who have barely escaped from a lifestyle of deception.**" 2 Peter 2:10-18 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Jesus said we will be able to recognize false prophets/teachers by the way they act. **"You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act.** Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions." Matthew 7:16-20 (NLT)

1. False teachers boast about themselves, not Jesus. "As for me, **may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Galatians 6:14a (NLT)
2. False teachers claim spiritual authority they do not have and scoff at things they do not understand. "In the same way, **these people—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings.** But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels, did not dare accuse the devil of blasphemy, but simply said, 'The Lord rebuke you! ...But these people scoff at things they do not understand.'" Jude 1:8-10a (NLT)
3. Like Balaam, false teachers are motivated by greed. "**Like Balaam, they deceive people for money.**" Jude 1:11b (NLT) "But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. **He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin.**" Revelation 2:14 (NLT) (see also Numbers 22-24)
4. False teachers are filled with lust, openly engage in sexual sin, and encourage others to join them. "Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. **Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living,** or in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And **don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.**" Romans 13:13-14 (NLT)
5. False teachers make false promises that rebellion against God's commands will give us freedom, while enslaving people to sin and hardening their hearts against the truth that could save them. "**They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you. And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before.** It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: 'A dog returns to its vomit.' And another says, 'A washed pig returns to the mud.'" 2 Peter 2:19-22 (NLT) (*Proverbs 26:11*)

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Connect Group Questions:

Read 2 Peter 2 and then discuss the following questions:

1. What had Peter heard Jesus say about false teaching (heresy) and false prophets? (Matthew 7:13-27, 18:6-7, & 24:23-25) How did Jesus' words impact the tone of Peter's letter? How should Jesus' words impact us?
2. What are some false teachings that have become popular in our culture?
3. In what ways will growing in our understanding of the Bible help us stand against false teaching and false teachers? (2 Timothy 2:15 & 3:16-17)

4. Discuss the three historical examples Peter gave to illustrate his point that God knows how to punish the wicked while rescuing the righteous.
 - God has imprisoned a number of wicked fallen angels in a deep abyss until Judgment Day to keep them from harming us. (2 Peter 2:4, Luke 8:31, Revelation 9:1-3 & 11)
 - God destroyed the wicked ancient world while sparing Noah and his family. (2 Peter 2:5, Genesis 6:1-8)
 - God destroyed wicked Sodom and Gomorrah while sparing Lot and his family. (2 Peter 2:6-8, Genesis 19:1-29)
5. Discuss the following characteristics of false teachers that Peter identified in his letter (2 Peter 2:10-19):
 - False teachers boast about themselves, not Jesus. (Galatians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 1:31)
 - False teachers claim spiritual authority they do not have and scoff at things they do not understand. (Jude 1:8-10)
 - Like Balaam, false teachers are motivated by greed. (Numbers 22:1-35, Jude 1:11, Revelation 2:14)
 - False teachers are filled with lust, openly engage in sexual sin, and encourage others to join them. (Romans 13:13-14, 1 Thessalonians 4:3)
 - False teachers make false promises that rebellion against God's commands will give us freedom, while enslaving people to sin and hardening their hearts against the truth that could save them. (2 Peter 2:19-22, Proverbs 5:22-23 & 26:11)
6. Spend some time as a group praying for our church. Pray that we will always keep the Bible as our guide in all matters of faith and practice. Also, ask the Lord to give our people a hunger for His Word so we will be able to defend what we believe and stop the spread of false teaching in our families and neighborhoods.