

## ***HOW TO GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS***

### **2 Peter 2**

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When I was in college I was involved with a Christian club called the Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM). I was on the leadership council; in fact, I was the President. And before the school year started, the leadership council (about 10 of us) went on a weekend retreat to pray, and plan for the year. There were two people on the council – Peter and Melinda – they were either dating or they were already married – unbeknownst to the rest of us, were in the process of being pulled into a false religion – the Apostolics of Lafayette. On the evening of the retreat, Peter mentioned that his friend was in the Apostolic church, and we started discussing some of the differences between Orthodox Christianity and Apostolics. Apostolics deny the Trinity; you have to be baptized to be saved; you have to be baptized in the name of Jesus only; you have to speak in tongues to be saved; you have to follow all sorts of man-made rules – the men can't wear shorts, the women can't wear pants, or cut their hair, or wear make-up. By the next week, Peter and Melinda had left the faith and had joined the Apostolics.

False teaching is real. And it is dangerous. And that's why the apostle Peter devotes an entire chapter to warning his readers about false teachers.

We're studying 2 Peter 2, and rather than just going verse by verse, I've divided the chapter into four sections.

- 1) How to spot a false teacher.
- 2) The danger of false teachers.
- 3) The punishment of false teachers.
- 4) How to guard against false teachers. We're going to be drawing from all over the chapter for each of these sections.

## **THE DANGER OF FALSE TEACHERS**

**ONE: They are wolves in sheep's clothing.**

**2 Peter 2:1** “there will be false teachers among you.”

2 Peter 2:13 says that the false teachers were engaging in their deceit while they were feasting with the church, which probably refers to the Lord’s Supper. So they partook of the Lord’s Supper. That looks like they are one of us.

One of the things that makes false teachers so dangerous is that they appear to be Christians. They appear to be one of us. They appear to be innocent. Harmless. Benevolent. They use a lot of Biblical language. They say a lot of the right things. They dress the part. They play the part. So people trust them.

(Matthew Vines – Homosexuality is not a sin; Rob Bell – Hell is not eternal, eventually all go to heaven; Andy Stanley is teaching that the Law in the OT no longer applies to Christians; Harold Camping taught that Jesus was coming back in October 2011.)

**TWO: They are destructive.**

**2 Peter 2:1** “They will bring in destructive heresies.”

The Greek word for destructive is *apoleia*, which literally means “ruin.”

False teachers ruin people’s lives. They ruin marriages. They ruin families. They ruin finances. They ruin churches. They make people miserable.

Verse 3 says they exploit people.

Verse 10 says they damage the reputation of godly spiritual leaders. They are destructive.

**THREE: They lead many people astray.**

**2 Peter 2:2** “Many will follow....”

False teachers are not insignificant. They are a big problem, because they have a big following.

The Bible says that false teachers tell people what they want to hear (2 Tim 4:3-4).

But true preachers tell people the truth, no matter how offensive.

No wonder false teachers attract a large following.

#### **FOUR: They bring reproach on the truth.**

**2 Peter 2:2** "... the way of truth will be maligned because of them."

The problem with false teachers is that they claim to be Christians, and therefore unbelievers associate Christianity with them.

Why would they want to become a Christian when they see false teachers in all their greed and immorality and hypocrisy and selfishness? False teachers make Jesus look bad. They turn people off of religion.

#### **FIVE: They are springs without water.**

**2 Peter 2:17** "These people are springs without water."

In other words, they promise people refreshment; they promise to help people; they promise to heal people; they promise to have the answers to people's struggles.

But in the end, they just rob you. There's no water there. They are springs without water.

#### **SIX: They are mists driven by a storm.**

**2 Peter 2:17** "These people are springs without water, mists driven by a storm."

In a mist you can't see. Your visibility is limited. This is what false teachers do.

They confuse people. They lead people to misunderstand the Bible.

The Bible is very clear. It's not hard to understand. There are a few parts that are confusing, but on the whole, the Bible is very clear.

But false teachers confuse people. They take ignorant people and make them even more ignorant. They take confused people and make them even more confused.

**SEVEN: They lead people into slavery to sin.**

**2 Peter 2:19** "They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them."

One particular false doctrine of the false teachers that Peter was dealing with appears to be antinomianism, the belief that God doesn't require Christians to live moral lives. Since we are saved by grace through faith, and not by good behavior, then behavior is pointless. Therefore, you can do whatever you want, and God doesn't care.

Let me show you how I came to this conclusion.

**2 Peter 2:10** "especially those who follow the polluting desires of the flesh and despise authority."

The false teachers followed the polluting desires of the flesh. They did whatever they felt like doing. And they despised authority. They ignored the moral teaching of God's Word.

**2 Peter 2:18** "For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery,"

How did they seduce people? By simply telling people that if they listened to their doctrine, they could gratify their fleshly desires and live in debauchery as much as they wanted.

**2 Peter 2:21** “For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy command delivered to them.”

At one time the false teachers knew the way of righteousness, and they apparently followed it, but then they turned back from the holy command. They abandoned righteousness and holiness for a life of sin.

**2 Peter 2:19** “They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them.”

The false teachers were promising freedom from the law. Freedom from rules. Freedom from restraint. So they were teaching antinomianism, or a form of it – God doesn’t care about your moral behavior. Do whatever feels good.

But what was the result? They led people into slavery. The false teachers were enslaved to their sin – that’s why they adopted the doctrine of antinomianism. They found a way to rationalize their sin. They were enslaved, and then they enslaved others by convincing others to live in sin.

## **THE PUNISHMENT OF FALSE TEACHERS**

But here is the good news. God will hold false teachers accountable for their actions. Over and over again in this chapter Peter emphasizes the certainty and severity of their punishment. Notice seven facts about their punishment.

**ONE: Their destruction will be swift.**

**2 Peter 2:1** “and will bring swift destruction on themselves.”

This can mean two things, or both.

One: On judgment day, false teachers will be brought to the front of the line to be cast into hell first.

Two: God will move quickly to punish false teachers, even in this life.

**TWO: Their condemnation is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.**

**2 Peter 2:3** “Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.”

In other words, even when it looks like they are not being punished, God is keeping a record of every evil deed, and they will be punished accordingly.

With every day that they perpetuate their sin, God increases the severity of their punishment.

**THREE: Their punishment is certain.**

**2 Peter 2:4-10** “4 For if God didn’t spare the angels who sinned but cast them into hell and delivered them in chains of utter darkness to be kept for judgment; 5 and if he didn’t spare the ancient world, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others, when he brought the flood on the world of the ungodly; 6 and if he reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes and condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is coming to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, distressed by the depraved behavior of the immoral 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day by day, his righteous soul was tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 especially those who follow the polluting desires of the flesh and despise authority.”

Peter makes two arguments here.

On the one hand, it is certain that God will punish false teachers.

If God cast the angels who rebelled into hell, and if God destroyed all the people in the world except for Noah and his family, and if God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, then we can be certain that He will take action against false teachers.

On the other hand, Peter is making the argument that God will save the righteous.

Those who do not follow false teachers will be saved in the end. If God rescued Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and if God rescued righteous Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah, then God will rescue us in the end with eternal life.

I love Peter's statement in **verse 9** "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials." God knows how to rescue the godly. He knows how to rescue you from your present trial. So if He is keeping you in that trial, then that means that you are exactly where He wants you, and that's the best place for you. And He knows how to rescue you from the eternal trial of hell through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

**FOUR: He will keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.**

**2 Peter 2:9** "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment"

God will not wait until judgment day to punish false teachers. He will begin punishing them in this life as soon as they start teaching falsehoods.

Even when it appears like a false teacher has a trouble free life, just know that appearances can be deceiving. They are being punished right now; you just can't see it.

**FIVE: In their destruction they too will be destroyed.**

**2 Peter 2:12** “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.”

False teachers slander and destroy the good names of godly men. They destroy churches. They destroy people’s faith. They destroy the reputation of Christ.

So because they are the cause of destruction against others, God will destroy them.

**SIX: Their punishment will be more severe than others.**

**2 Peter 2:10** “9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 especially those who follow the polluting desires of the flesh and despise authority.”

Notice the word “especially.” There is a special place in hell reserved for false teachers.

**2 Peter 2:20-22** “20 For if, having escaped the world’s impurity through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in these things and defeated, the last state is worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy command delivered to them. 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb: A dog returns to its own vomit, and, ‘A washed sow returns to wallowing in the mud.’”

This is an important passage that deserves special treatment. This is a passage that some use to argue that it is possible to lose your salvation. But as Baptists we don’t believe you can lose your salvation. We believe in once saved always saved; the eternal security of the believer; the perseverance of the saints.

So if this passage is not saying that you can lose your salvation, then what is it saying?



It is saying that false teachers who knew God's word and yet rejected it will be punished more severely than those unbelievers in hell who knew much less. God holds us each accountable for what we know. This is why spiritual knowledge is dangerous. The more you know of God's word, the more you are held accountable for.

The big idea in this passage is that the false teachers were never saved in the first place.

Verse 20 says they escaped the world's impurity through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, they learned about Christ, and professed faith in Christ, and joined the church, and started living according to the Word of God. Therefore, they escaped the impurity of the world.

Verse 21 says they knew the way of righteousness.

They knew the gospel and the holy conduct that God prescribed for His people.

However, they were never genuinely saved, and that's why they turned away from the truth.

And Peter gives two analogies. A dog returns to its own vomit. A washed sow returns to wallowing in the mud.

Why did these former disciples turn back to a life of sin and unbelief? Because they were never true disciples. They were never saved. They were never born again.

This is how it is put in **1 John 2:19** "They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us."

On the other hand, there are passages in the Bible that seem to clearly teach that you cannot lose your salvation.

**John 6:39** “This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day.”

**John 10:27-29** “27 My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

**Philippians 1:6** “I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

## **HOW TO GUARD AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS**

The last thing we need to do in this treatment of false teachers is to talk about how to guard against them. And there are some clues in this passage about what we need to do.

**ONE: Know what you believe and why.**

**2 Peter 2:14** “They seduce unstable people”

False teachers prey on the unstable – those who are unstable in the truth. They prey on people who don’t know their Bible.

To guard against false teachers, you need to know what you believe, and why you believe it. In other words, you need to know the truths of Scripture, and where to find those truths.

For example, it’s not enough to believe that homosexuality is a sin. It’s not enough to believe that abortion is wrong. It’s not enough to believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. It’s not enough to believe in the Trinity. Do you know why? Do you know where the Bible teaches those doctrines?

I can't stress it enough that you need to be reading your Bible on a daily basis.

**TWO: Grow in Christ as fast as possible.**

**2 Peter 2:18** "For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery, people who have barely escaped from those who live in error."

The second group of people that false teachers prey on are new Christians. Babies in the faith. New Christians don't know much, and they are still very susceptible to temptation. So if you are a new Christian, then you are very vulnerable.

So you need to focus on growing in Christ as fast as possible. Devour your Bible. Never miss church. Take good notes. Get in Home Group. Find a place to serve. Build some close friendships in the church. Get your hands on some good Christian literature and start reading.

**THREE: Pursue holiness.**

**2 Peter 2:18** "For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery"

False teachers seduce people by telling them what they want to hear.

So what does that mean? To guard against false teaching, you need to devote yourself to holiness so that what you most want to hear is the true Word of God.

If you are flirting with sin, then you are susceptible to false teaching. Some false teacher is going to come along and say that it's okay to get a divorce; it is okay to have sex before marriage; it is okay to be transgender; it is okay to commit suicide; it is okay to be a homosexual. They are going to tell you what your flesh wants to hear, and you will be pulled away. So to guard against that, you must devote yourself to holiness. Devote yourself to cultivating the character of God and Christ.

**1 Peter 1:15-16** “15 But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.”

**FOUR: Trust that God’s commands are a blessing and not a burden.**

False teachers lure people away from holy living by convincing them that God’s commands are burdensome; they are a drag; they will prevent you from enjoying life to the fullest.

Nothing could be further from the truth. **1 John 5:3** “For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden”