

HOW TO SPOT A FALSE TEACHER

2 Peter 2

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When we first started Church Acadiana, a close friend of mine joined the church and helped us get it off the ground. But after about two years, his parents who were previously irreligious, got pulled in to a false religion – the Apostolics of Lafayette. They teach a number of false doctrines. They deny the Trinity. They teach that you must be baptized in the name of Jesus only to be saved. They teach that you have to speak in tongues to be saved. They have all sorts of man-made rules that their followers are required to follow – the women can't cut their hair, or wear makeup, or wear short sleeves, or wear pants or shorts. The men can't wear shorts or short sleeve shirts. At first my friend was very upset about it. But then one day he told me that he was leaving our church to join the Apostolics. Eventually his parents wore him down and pulled him in to the cult.

This is why I approach the topic of false teachers very seriously. I have lived it. I have experienced. I have several friends who have been pulled into cults. I have several friends who have left the faith altogether because of false teaching.

For two Sundays we are going to learn how to guard ourselves from false teachers. This is the subject of the entire chapter of 2 Peter 2.

Rather than teaching this chapter verse by verse, I have divided it 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.

Let's begin by reading the first half of the chapter, and next week we will begin by reading the second half of the chapter. **2 Peter 2:1-10a**

1 There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on

themselves. 2 Many will follow their depraved ways, and the way of truth will be maligned because of them. 3 They will exploit you in their greed with made-up stories. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.

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.

HOW TO SPOT A FALSE TEACHER

In 2 Peter 2 we find a number of traits of false teachers. Not all false teachers possess all of these traits. But when you see these characteristics in someone, then red flags should go up. They just might be a false teacher.

ONE: They are in the church.

2 Peter 2:1 "There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves."

There is a clue that indicates that the false teachers referred to were at one time members of the church. Peter says the false teachers were "among" them.

Here's the point. Just because someone is a member of the church, or claims to be a Christian, or claims to believe in the Bible, that doesn't mean that they aren't a false teacher. Just because someone claims to love Jesus, and just because they use a lot of the same terminology as you, that doesn't mean they aren't a false teacher.

Mormons, apostolics, and Jehovah's Witnesses all claim to love Jesus and believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

The Bible says that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

TWO: They teach heresy.

2 Peter 2:1 "... They will bring in destructive heresies...."

This is the most obvious way to spot a false teacher. They are not teaching Biblical truth. They are teaching what is false. They are teaching heresy.

The Greek word for "heresy" literally means "choosing one's own ideas." They aren't teaching the Bible. They are teaching their own ideas and claiming that they found them in the Bible.

They are either teaching things that contradict the Bible, or they are taking Scripture and twisting it – interpreting it in a way that God didn't intend.

The main heresy challenging Peter's readers is called antinomianism, which means against law. Antinomianism is the idea that God's moral law doesn't matter; it is no longer applicable. God doesn't care about what we do with our physical bodies. What used to be sin is no longer sin because the moral law is now irrelevant.

Today the church faces many heresies. The prosperity gospel says that if you have enough faith God will make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous.

The charismatics say that if you don't speak in tongues then you aren't filled with the Holy Spirit and you aren't as spiritual as those who do.

The Word of Faith preachers teach that you have the power to speak things into existence; the power of positive confession; name it claim; believe it, speak it, and receive it.

Others teach that the book of Genesis is all mythology; that mankind is the product of Darwinian evolution.

Matthew Vines is one of the false teachers claiming that the Bible is not against homosexuality; it is only against male prostitution and pedophilia.

THREE: They teach false ideas about Jesus.

2 Peter 2:1 "There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them...."

False teachers either teach something that is untrue about Jesus, or they distract people from Jesus.

The first few centuries of Christianity faced the challenge of six major heresies concerning the person of Christ.

- Ebionism (the first century) denied the deity of Christ.
- Arianism (fourth century) denied the fullness of the deity of Christ. Christ is a god, but not God almighty. He is the first of created beings.
- Docetism (second century) denied the humanity of Christ.
- Apollinarianism (fourth century) denied the full humanity of Christ.
- Nestorianism denied the unity of the natures of Christ in one person.
- Eutychianism denied the distinction of the divine and human natures of Christ.

Eventually the leaders of the church gathered in AD 451 in Chalcedon (modern day Istanbul) and wrote a creed (The Chalcedonian Creed) affirming Christ's full humanity, His full deity, and with His two natures united in one person. All six of the heresies were rejected.

Today we still face many false teachings about Jesus.

- Some claim that Jesus was not God; He was just a good teacher.
- Some claim that Jesus was a homosexual.
- Some claim that Jesus had a sexual relationship with Mary Magdalen.
- Muslims claim that Jesus didn't die on the cross; and He didn't claim to be God.
- Some claim that Jesus isn't the only God.
- Some claim that Jesus is the only Savior, but that you don't need to believe in Him in order to be saved.
- Some claim that Jesus was a false prophet; that He made mistakes, for example, when He predicted that "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place," and they assume Jesus was speaking of His return.

Other false teachers point people away from Jesus. They distract people from Jesus. Their danger is not necessarily that they teach false ideas about Jesus, but that they distract people from following Jesus.

Some false teachers only talk about prosperity. Their entire ministry is about persuading people to sow a big financial seed so that they can reap a gigantic financial harvest. Their sermons are motivational pep-talks rather than calls to discipleship. Very little is said about Jesus.

Other false teachers focus almost exclusively on the Holy Spirit. It's all about experiencing the Holy Spirit, and listening to the Holy Spirit, and praying to the Holy Spirit, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, and being baptized with the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit, and being slain in the Spirit, and praying in the

Spirit. Very little is about Jesus, even though the Bible says in John 16:14 that the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus.

Other false teachers focus all of their time on Bible prophecy; they aren't pointing people to Jesus; they are pointing people to speculations about the future. Their heresy is not preaching falsehood about Jesus, but distracting people from Jesus.

FOUR: They have a large following.

2 Peter 2:2 "Many will follow their depraved ways, and the way of truth will be maligned because of them."

A big following is not confirmation of a teacher's doctrine.

Islam has 1.8 billion followers. That does not mean that it is true.

Don't forget that the majority of Jews in the first century followed the Pharisees and rejected Jesus.

Satan has more followers than Christ. Satan took a third of the angels with him when he rebelled against God and left heaven.

Matthew 7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it."

The only confirmation of a teacher's doctrine is the Word of God.

FIVE: They are morally corrupt.

2 Peter 2:2 "Many will follow their depraved ways...."

Depraved simply means morally corrupt; wicked (Google).

The Greek word (*aselgeia*) means "a lack of self-constraint, abandonment to immoral behavior."

This is not always the case, but often false teachers will be morally corrupt. They live very sinful lives. Sometimes they try to hide it, but you can only hide your true character for so long. Eventually the truth will come out.

Peter emphasizes the moral corruption of false teachers over and over again in this chapter.

- In verse 9 he calls them “unrighteous.”
- In verse 10 he says that they follow the polluting desires of the flesh and despise authority.
- In verse 12 he calls them “irrational animals – creatures of instinct.” In other words, they are ruled by their feelings and emotions and fleshly desires, rather than the Spirit and the Word of God.
- Verse 13 says, “They consider it a pleasure to carouse in broad daylight.” To carouse is to “drink plentiful amounts of alcohol and enjoy oneself with others in a noisy, lively way (Google).”
- Verse 13 says that “they are spots and blemishes.” In 2 Peter 3:14, Peter instructs believers to “make every effort to be found without spot or blemish in his sight....” So not only do false teachers have sin, but Peter says they are the very embodiment of sin – they are spots and blemishes.
- Verse 13 says that they delight in their deceptions. Not only do they deceive people, but they enjoy it; they love it; they take great delight in deceiving people.
- Verse 14 says, “They have eyes full of adultery that never stop looking for sin.” In other words, they look at every woman as a sexual object, and they desire to have sex with every woman they see.
- Verse 18 says that “they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery....” Debauchery is excessive indulgence in sensual pleasure (Google).

When you encounter a new teacher/preacher, do not be distracted by the size of the crowd, or by the eloquence of the speaker. Do not be impressed with how many books he has written, or with his elite education. Examine his character. Does his life reflect the Ten Commandments and the fruit of the Spirit?

SIX: They are selfish.

2 Peter 2:3 “They will exploit you in their greed....”

To exploit someone is to hurt them for your own benefit. It is to use someone for your own benefit, even if it destroys them.

False teachers do not care about their followers. They do not have the love of Christ in their hearts. They just want more followers; they want more money; they want more fame, and they will do and say anything to get it.

The prosperity preachers are the worst. They tell poor people to give their last penny to the church, because the more they give, the richer God will make them. But the Bible says that the fruit of the Spirit includes virtues like love, patience, kindness, and goodness.

SEVEN: They are greedy.

2 Peter 2:3 “They will exploit you in their greed....”

2 Peter 2:14 says they “have hearts trained in greed.”

And then **2 Peter 2:15-16** compares false teachers to Balaam. “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.”

In the book of Numbers, as Moses was leading the Israelites to the plains of Moab, the king of the Moabites bribed Balaam, a sorcerer, to place a curse on the Israelites. False teachers are like Balaam in that they are willing to say what God doesn’t want them to say for profit.

A common characteristic of false teachers is greed; a love for money. This is their primary motive; their driving ambition – to get richer.

Some of them don't even hide it. They brag that they live in a mansion, and drive a Rolls Royce, and fly around in a private jet, and wear a different \$3,000 suit every Sunday of the year.

It is not a sin to be rich. But it is obvious when someone is rich, and when someone is greedy. It is obvious when someone is gifted at accumulating money, and when someone loves money.

There are many people who are very rich but their lifestyle is very humble, very normal, especially when you consider how much they have.

But greedy false teachers seek lives of extravagance and luxury. It's not enough to have a nice home, it must be a mansion. It is not enough to own a nice car, it must be something head-turning and jaw-dropping.

To spot a false teacher, keep your eyes open for someone who is materialistic. Someone who uses money to impress; someone who uses money for happiness.

EIGHT: They base their claims on unsubstantiated stories.

2 Peter 2:3 "They will exploit you in their greed with made-up stories."

The founder of Mormonism based his religion on an unsubstantiated story.

The founder of Islam based his religion on an unsubstantiated story.

I have heard preachers tell the most fantastic stories about visions, and miracles, and encounters – all unsubstantiated.

Why do they tell these stories? Because stories are entertaining and impressive. Stories are hard to argue with. It's your word against theirs.

Don't be impressed with amazing stories. Don't believe someone just because they had a dream, a vision, or heard a voice. Measure everything you hear with the word of God.

For example, many people have made a lot of money off their near-death experiences. They claim to have gone to heaven or hell for a little while, and then they write books to describe it. And the books fly off the shelf. The problem is that in many cases these visions of heaven and hell contradict what the Bible teaches about heaven and hell.

NINE: They are prideful.

2 Peter 2:18 "For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce...."

False teachers are often prideful. Boastful. Arrogant. They don't seek advice or listen to counsel or constructive criticism. They don't admit their mistakes. They don't apologize. They are closer to God than everyone else. They know the Bible better than everyone else. God loves them more than everyone else. They are holier than everyone else. It's not possible that they are wrong; they are right and everyone who disagrees is wrong. They are not the false teacher; everyone else is a false teacher.

One of the ways that this pride is displayed is that they do not humble themselves under the authority of God's word.

One time I was listening to an interview of Joel Osteen, and the interviewer asked him why he doesn't preach on tough subjects like hell, and sin, etc. Joel Osteen replied that he just stayed in his lane, which is to encourage.

The problem is that the Bible says that preachers aren't supposed to just encourage. 2 Timothy 4:2 says that preachers must rebuke, correct, and encourage.

The problem is that in order to only preach encouraging messages, you have to avoid much of Scripture.

Acts 20:27 says that preachers must not avoid declaring the whole plan of God.

Even Jesus Himself didn't just preach encouraging messages. Jesus preached about hell. He preached about sin. He preached about lust. He preached about adultery and sexual immorality. He preached about divorce. He preached about repentance, and self-denial, and taking up your cross.

But apparently Joel Osteen doesn't care about that; he knows better than that. That's pride.

TEN: They slander godly spiritual leaders.

2 Peter 2:10 "Bold, arrogant people! They are not afraid to slander the glorious ones; however, angels, who are greater in might and power, do not bring a slanderous charge against them before the Lord. 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 are not afraid to slander the glorious ones. The glorious ones refers to godly spiritual leaders – at that time the apostles and prophets.

- False teachers were going around telling people not to listen to Peter, and Paul, and John. They were trying to damage their reputation.
- The Pharisees were constantly spreading lies about Jesus, trying to persuade people to ignore Him.
- Elymas the sorcerer slandered Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:8).
- The Jews in Antioch slandered Paul and Barnabas and had them expelled from the city (Acts 13:50).

This is how false teachers get a following. They try to discredit godly men. This is why the Bible says not to "accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19)."

CONCLUSION

How do you spot a false teacher? You need to compare their character and their teaching to the Word of God.

I heard it said that the way that the government trains their people recognize counterfeit money is not by showing them counterfeit money, but by making them study the real deal.

It's the same way with false teachers. There's no way we can study all the false teachings that exist today, because there are too many, and new heresies are always being invented. The best way to spot a false teacher is to focus on the true teacher – Jesus Christ. Study His character. Study His word. And then when a false teacher comes along you will be able to spot them right away.

Let's close by reading **Colossians 2:8-10** "8 Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ. 9 For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ, 10 and you have been filled by him, who is the head over every ruler and authority."

DISCUSSION

1. Read 2 Peter 2:1-10. What is your key takeaway?
2. Why is it important to be on guard against false teachers?
3. Who are some of the prominent false teachers today?
4. What are some of the prominent false teachings today?
5. Refer back to 2 Peter 2:1-10. What are some of the characteristics of false teachers?
6. Today there are false teachers who teach lies about Jesus, as well as those who distract people from Jesus. What is the difference between these two kinds of false teachers?
7. 2 Peter 2:2 says that false teachers can have large followings. Why is this important to remember as we guard ourselves from false teachers?

8. 2 Peter 2:2 says that false teachers are often depraved; they are corrupt and immoral in their character. What are some behavioral red-flags that signal a false teacher?
9. 2 Peter 2:3 says that false teachers are often greedy – lovers of money. It is not a sin to be rich, so how can you tell the difference between greed and wealth?
10. 2 Peter 2:3 says that false teachers often deceive people with made-up stories. Why are stories so powerful? How can we avoid being deceived by made-up stories?