

Dear Friends,

The Holy Spirit guided as He "moved" Peter to write this letter to teach us a sad, but necessary truth of faithful ministry and faithful discipleship. In this week's study verses, Peter highlights two earmarks of false teachers. 1) They over-promise. And 2) They are driven by self-serving motives, not by a passion for the Lord and His truth as revealed in Scripture. They promise their followers far more than they can deliver, and they manifest deceitful skill at rationalizing to their followers why the promised outcome seldom occurs.

I recall many years ago talking with a man who was a blind follower of a radio preacher who loudly published that he had discovered the precise date when the Lord would return. At the time of our conversation, that date was just a few months away. After we talked for some time, and the man refused to consider anything, even from Scripture, that contradicted his false teacher's ideas, I asked him the obvious question. "If you wake up the morning after the date your teacher predicted, and the Second Coming didn't occur, what will you think?" He readily replied, "Then Brother X is a false prophet." However, when the predicted date came and went, this man remained a loyal subject to the false teacher. And instead of repenting and returning to Biblical truth, the false teacher loudly proclaimed that he had discovered a hidden revelation in Scripture that pushed the date forward. The new date for his prediction was a few years still future. Naive believers manifest surprising and intentional blindness at the ideas false teachers teach them. Think about all the conspiracy ideas that abound in our day. Have any of the advocates of these ideas told you something that they assured you was verified and certain fact? But, with time, their idea proved to be utterly false? Don't be like this man who continued to follow the false teacher? God warns us in Scripture that someone who predicts something that doesn't occur is a false teacher to be immediately and wholly rejected.

As noted a few studies back. however deceitful the false teacher and however naive the false teacher's followers, the Lord knows His people, and His judgment is certain. Though He may not send judgment based our timeline, He shall send it.

Lord, please give us passionate hearts for You and for Your truth as revealed in Scripture alone. Protect us from ourselves and from false teachers. Convict us to keep our passion for You alone to be fired and made fruitful by our adding those seven pillars of fruitful faith to our daily habits.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

### **False Prophets Never Deliver What They Promise**

**These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of**

**righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.** (2 Peter 2:17-21 KJV 1900)

Scripture frequently uses water as a symbol of refreshing blessings for the tired “Thirsty” pilgrims of faith. For example.

**Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.** (Isaiah 12:3 KJV)

Study the contrast between Peter’s description of false prophets and Isaiah’s description of the Lord’s way. In the Lord’s way, you make the effort to draw water from His well, and the container comes up full of fresh water. With false prophets, those who follow their words keep hoping for that refreshing water, but the container always comes up empty. I grew up on a small farm in the Deep South region of this country. We didn’t use irrigation to water our crops. We depended on rain. Some years we got too much or too little rain, and our yield suffered. Imagine yourself “Farming” in the Lord’s field of labor. The soil is dry, and the plants are wilted. You see a dark cloud on the horizon coming your way. Hope builds, and you long for that refreshing rain for you and your crop. But the cloud passes over and not a drop of rain. How disappointing. These illustrations describe Peter’s warning against false prophets. They promise refreshing showers, but your spiritual drought continues.

One of Jesus’ first points in His Sermon on the Mount uses a similar illustration of water and spiritual health.

**Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.** (Matthew 5:6 KJV)

When we follow Jesus into His chosen place for spiritual learning, we realize the fulfillment of this blessed promise. When we chase our own ideas, we may sense our hunger and thirst, but we shall not be filled. Similar to Peter’s description of the false prophet, we deceive ourselves by our own imagination (Do we thus make ourselves our own false prophet by not following the Lord and His teaching?), and we are never filled. We never realize that deep abiding contentment which the Lord promises to His faithful followers in Scripture.

... **clouds that are carried with a tempest.** When we are thirsty and long for water, the sight of a “Cloud” raises our hope for rain. But the “Clouds” of false prophets never bring rain, only fierce damaging winds, winds that further dry our spiritual fruitfulness and leave us thirstier than ever for refreshing gospel water.

Did you ever know someone, especially someone in the ministry who seemed to be a constant magnet for controversy and divisiveness? Often these folks have an extensive list of explanations and things or people to blame. However, when time after time, the one common denominator is that person, wise and godly people should ponder 2 Peter 2. From Adam to the present time, sinful people typically prefer to blame someone else rather than confess and take responsibility for their own sins. I once read a cute quip about this problem with Adam.

I've sure learned a lot from ol' Adam.  
Concerning transgressions, he had 'em.  
But instead of repenting,  
He kept right on sinning,  
And blamed it all on the madam!

I confess to being a slow learner, but, as I grow older, I find myself increasingly distancing myself from anyone who constantly plays that "Blame game." I once heard a preacher state his sinful and biased belief, "Sometimes you must lie for the sake of the kingdom of God." I was shocked. He rationalized lying over confessing and accepting responsibility for his errors. We must break one of God's moral commandments in the interest of God's moral kingdom? No. Sadly I lived to observe him fulfill his twisted idea, and it didn't turn out well at all. The Lord will allow only so much sinful folly in His "Kingdom" before He steps into the situation and removes it.

**...to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.** In our first study of this chapter, I took note of Peter's stated purpose in this chapter, to warn godly believers of false prophets, not to give us a list of unsaved people. When believers turn from the Lord and His teachings, always taught in Scripture, they choose to imitate the wicked. A believing preacher who entangles his mind and motives in false teaching chooses to imitate the wicked by his choice. Peter's description of false teachers in this quote reads clearly like unregenerate wicked people. If a saved person acts like the wicked, we can't tell the difference. We should not be surprised to learn that an unregenerate wicked person may adopt the charade of spiritual teacher in order to control and manipulate people to his ideas and to pump his ego. In the Parable of Wheat and Tares, I understand Jesus to be cautioning us against making eternal judgments against people. Inevitably, when we presume the Lord's exclusive domain, judging the wicked, we make mistakes, and we damage nearby "Wheat" plants, children of God. We don't have sufficient knowledge to make such judgments. However, based on Scripture, this chapter especially, we do have sufficient knowledge to judge false prophets, and we should.

**For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.** A momentary thought occurs. In this behavior, false teachers are much like politicians running for office. They promise gullible voters the moon to gain their vote, but, in the end, the only thing they give is "...**great swelling words of vanity.**" The most successful of false teachers know how to appeal to the lusts, the sinful desires, and ambitions of good people. Those deceived by the false teachers Peter describes as "...**those who were**

**clean escaped**” from error. Children of God have a new nature that relates to their new spiritual, eternal life, but they also retain much of their old nature. In Colossians 3, Paul associates our nature and conduct, the “Old man” and the “New man,” with a wardrobe. Scripture rejects the idea that children of God are helpless “In my self” to resist any temptation or sin. Paul emphasizes this point. We can’t alter either of those two natures, but we can choose which “Wardrobe” we shall wear, which disposition we shall follow in our conduct. He further admonishes us to “Put off” the old man, that old, sinful wardrobe, and to put on the “New man,” the new wardrobe of grace living which honors the Lord. False teachers practice their skill at deceiving believers and appealing to their “Old man” and wardrobe, while thinking they are practicing their new nature and wearing their new wardrobe. According to Peter, this design largely explains the success of false teachers.

**While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.** Apparently, the false teachers include empty promises in much of their teaching. “If you do what I teach you, you’ll secure your salvation and earn more stars in your heavenly crown.” “Only if you do what I teach you can you ever have any real assurance of your salvation. And if you fail to do what I teach you, I can’t give you any assurance of your salvation.” The most glaring error in the false teacher’s empty promises lies in the exaggerated claims of his own ability. Scripture teaches us that the Holy Spirit gives us assurance of our good standing and fellowship with the Lord. A sound and godly teacher will never usurp the Holy Spirit’s work. Peter’s conclusion in this thought should encourage us. Take time to observe people, truly observe them. If they live under the control of the same things they tell you their teaching can deliver you from, walk away. If they promise you heaven if you follow their teaching, how secure are they of heaven? If they promise you assurance of your salvation if you follow their teaching, do they truly enjoy full assurance of their salvation?

**For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.** Commentaries struggle with the identity of “they” in this sentence. Was Peter referring to the false teachers or to children of God who succumbed to the false teachers? A reasonable grammatical case can be made for either. And my response is “Does it matter?” Children of God can fall so fully into error, and in teaching their error to others, that they lose any sense of their salvation. In 2 Peter 1:9, Peter warns us. If we fail to add the seven named traits to our faith, we become spiritually blind. We lose our spiritual sense of vision and discernment. He further warns that a believer who fails to add those seven qualities to his/her faith-life “...**has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.**” If we follow Peter’s teaching in both chapters, we learn that failure to cultivate a fruitful (Seven-fold fruit) faith, we become vulnerable to false teachers. Without question, if we so fail our faith, our “latter end” is (Far) worse than our good beginning in the faith. A new infant faith is far more desirable than a deceived and fruitless faith.

**For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.** The Lord’s righteous chastening judgment is far more severe against His children who know and forsake His way than it is toward His children who stumble and fall in ignorance. Aside from the Lord’s judgment, however the deceived child of God (And at least in some cases, also the false teacher) who retains any memory whatever of his former

blessing, the sense that his present fellowship with the Lord is less than his former fellowship and blessings must be a disturbing and haunting thing to live with. Hosea's description of the Lord's progressive chastening judgment against His "Bride," fickle and unfaithful Israel and Judah, serves as a highly instructive warning to us.

**Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness.  
For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear  
and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him.  
I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their  
affliction they will seek me early.**  
(Hosea 5:12, 14-15 KJV)

In the beginning of our error, the Lord's conviction is rather gentle, annoying, but gentle, much like an annoying moth darting in and out of a flame. He pricks our conscience with love and reminders of His ways. If we persist in our error, His conviction will be strong and ominous, like a roaring lion. Ah, but the third "Stage" of chastening may be the worst of all. The deafening sound of silence! Conviction subsides into a spiritual sense of numbness, a state in which we may soon literally forget our salvation. (2 Peter 1:9 KJV)

For those who believe in Jesus and seek His word and way from Scripture alone, Peter's teaching is both a warning and an assurance. A warning to study so that we know the difference between Biblical truth and false teaching and teachers. And assurance that the Lord knows the difference, and He is fully competent to discern and to judge both false teaching and false teachers. False teachers may deceive naïve believers, but they cannot deceive the Lord. In His time and way, He shall bring them to light and to judgment. ("...and all the churches shall know..." Revelation 2:23 KJV)

Elder Joe Holder