

*Do you remember the cartoon with Sam Sheepdog and Ralph Wolf?*

*Every morning, Sam and Ralph would report to work and meet at the time clock which was mounted on a tree. As they clocked in, they would greet each other with a courteous and respectful “Good morning Sam” and a “Good morning Ralph, and then they would go to their separate departments to begin the work day.*

*Sam, the sheep dog, went to his post on the cliff and took his position as head of the “Sheep Protection Department.” Ralph, true to his nature as a wolf, would slink away in to the forest to plan his strategy as head of the “Sheep Acquisition and Consumption Department.”*

*As the day wore on, Sam sat patiently at his post with a protective eye looking over the flock as Ralph tried one scheme after another in hopes of making his quota of sheep for the day; however, no matter how hard he tried, it seemed that poor Ralph’s plan was always prevented by Sam at the very last moment. Inevitably as the day drew to a close, just before the whistle blew, Ralph would pull out all the stops and slip into his sheep costume and meander amongst the flock with the hope of finally catching his one of his prey – only to realize his prey he had caught was in fact none other than Sam the sheep dog who had also dressed himself up as a sheep in anticipation of Ralph’s scheme. Poor Ralph never caught a break.*

Ralph’s sheep costume illustrates a tactic that is used by our enemy the devil – in fact, in **Matthew 7:15** Jesus warns us that in similar fashion, Satan will send wolves into the flock – the church, dressed in sheep’s clothing, seeking to devour those who are not careful and cautious about their false teaching. This was a significant problem in the early church, so much so, that Peter devoted more than a full chapter to this problem as he wanted believers to understand *who* these false teachers were and *how* they operate.

Last week, we finished the first chapter of **2 Peter**, where Peter laid the foundation for our faith, that being the inspired Word of God in which Jesus is the key central figure. Peter knows it’s just a matter of time before he is put to death, so he wanted his readers to stand firmly on the truth of God’s Word after he was gone. Peter explained that God’s Word is a reliable and trustworthy guide for God’s people; however, he was also aware that false teachers were out there as well, and they were a threat. So, in contrast to the godly prophets and the apostles who spoke for God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, Peter begins **Chapter 2** by contrasting them with the false teachers who have plagued God’s people with their deceptive lies and will continue to do so in the future.

So, let's pick up where we left off. Turn to **2 Peter 2**, and we will begin with the first three verses.

**<sup>1</sup>But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. <sup>2</sup>Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; <sup>3</sup>and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.**

Peter tells us, almost as a matter of fact, that just as there were false prophets who pretended to speak for God throughout the Old Testament, we can also be assured that there are false teachers within the Christian faith who will pretend to speak for God and introduce teaching that is contrary to the fundamental doctrines which we hold dear.

You know, it's easy to identify false teachers in other religions or in some of the so called "Christian" churches out there, but Peter tells us these false teachers will actually arise from within the community of believers – and Peter isn't the only one to give this warning. The Apostle Paul in the book of **Acts 20:28-30**, told the elders of the Ephesian church:

***<sup>28</sup> Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.***

Now, I need to clarify what's being said here as I don't want to give the impression that just because we might disagree on a minor doctrinal issue that one of us is a heretic. As I speak, there are thousands of Christian denominations throughout this world which are largely divided as a result of minor issues over secondary doctrinal matters. Although this unfortunate as it creates division within the body of Christ, I don't think Peter is talking about these minor doctrinal issues.

I also don't think Peter is talking about teachers with integrity who make honest mistakes in their interpretation and application of the Bible. We just finished our Wednesday night study through the book of Revelation, and there is so much going on in that book, I could easily see how a teacher could get all twisted up and

confused and say something that isn't entirely accurate – so for clarification, I don't think Peter is talking about teachers who make honest mistakes either.

The people I think Peter is talking about are those who preach and teach doctrines which are knowingly contrary to the fundamental truths of our Christian faith. These truths include the triune nature of God, the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His sacrificial payment for our sin on the cross, His bodily resurrection from the grave, His ascension into heaven, and His promise to return one day. Any teaching that is contrary to that is false teaching as far as I am concerned. In addition, we cannot waver on the essential truth of the gospel – that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, and since we were on this topic last week, we cannot and will not question the inspiration, the authority, and the inerrancy of God's Word. So, I think Peter is focused on these false teachers who are subtly introducing lies to distort the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Peter goes on to say that these false teachers work **secretly** – in other words, no false teacher ever announces himself as a false teacher and proclaims their teaching is wrong, but rather they are “smooth operators” pretending to be followers of Christ, who present ideas alongside the truth. Their teaching appears to be scriptural, it sounds good, it seems right, but it's not.

Peter describes their teaching as **destructive heresies**, and let me explain what that means. Heresy conveys the idea of *making a choice*, and that's what false teachers offer believers who are not careful and cautious – a choice, an alternative to the truth – an alternative that comes alongside the truth so it appears Scriptural.

Now, let's be honest. I will admit, that intellectually and emotionally, there are some truths in the Bible that are hard to understand and even harder to accept. There are some uncomfortable and unpopular truths in the Bible that are difficult to swallow, so these false teachers offer up something that is more appetizing and more appealing – an alternative, a more progressive, a more tolerant and popular way looking at Jesus, His claims, and His teaching.

Peter says they have **denied the Master who bought them**, meaning they have rejected Christ and the salvation that He offers. These false teachers may know about Jesus – they may know the right facts about Him, but they reject the truth – they deny Christ's claim that He is Way, the Truth, and the Life, and they replace the truth of God with a lie, even suggesting there are other ways to heaven. They are lost.

Now, **verse 2** is troubling – not surprising, but troubling in that Peter tells us **many will follow** their destructive and shameful ways, and keep in mind that the **many** who follow are not pagans – these are followers from the church. This reminds us that false preachers and teachers may be very popular, they may have a large following of church folk, but just because something attracts a crowd – doesn't mean it's of God.

Peter says people will follow their **sensuality**, which I take to mean that these false teachers will cater to the desires of the flesh. They will not call sin a sin, they do not talk about judgment, and they surely don't mention anything about a real hell. They avoid these troubling truths – explaining them away, and instead make excuses for immoral living and sexual freedom – **I mean God is love right?** – and many people listen to them because, quite frankly, this is what people want to hear. No one wants to hear, “*Thou shalt not,*” instead they want to hear “*Do what thou wilt.*” They would rather hear what makes them feel good and ultimately lets them do what they want to do.

Paul talked about this very problem in **2 Timothy 4:3**, where he said,

***<sup>3</sup>For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, <sup>4</sup>and they will turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.***

So, according to Paul, the listeners in the last days – and we are in the last days, will have “**itching ears**” and Peter makes it clear that these false teachers will be more than happy to scratch those itching ears with their “**false words.**” The Greek word for **false** is *plastos*, from which we get our word *plastic*. Plastic words are words that can be twisted to mean anything you want them to mean. The false teachers use our vocabulary – they use the same words we use, but their words do not mean what we mean, and when they do mean what we mean, they are often taken out of context. So, when someone says they believe in Jesus – **what does “believe” mean to them, and in regard to Jesus, is this the Jesus accurately portrayed in the Bible or their version of Jesus?**

Peter continues and tells us that their motivation is personal gain – it's **greed**. Greed is the sin of always wanting more, whether it be more things, more pleasures or more money, and it's typically at the expense of others. These false teachers are interested only in using religion for their personal gain. For them, religion is used as a method for extortion, and with their doctrine, they fleece the sheep. Be very

Careful and cautious with preachers and teachers who place an overwhelming emphasis on getting your money so you can receive a miracle of health and wealth and well-being from God.

*A New York City couple received through the mail two tickets to a smash Broadway hit. Oddly, the gift arrived without a note, and they wondered who had sent it. But they still attended the show and enjoyed it immensely. Returning to their apartment, they discovered that their bedroom had been ransacked. Valuable furs and jewels were missing, and on the pillow was this simple note: "Now you know."*

Like that nameless thief, a false teacher knows what people want and he appeals to their desires. He claims he can enrich their lives, but in the end, those who follow him often learn, at a high cost, that they have been deceived.

So, having described the tactics of these false teachers, Peter then turns to God's view of their activities. Let's read **verses 4-10**, which is one really long sentence.

**<sup>4</sup>For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; <sup>5</sup>and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; <sup>6</sup>and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; <sup>7</sup>and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men <sup>8</sup>(for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), <sup>9</sup>then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, <sup>10</sup>and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.**

Okay, let's stop there. In this long passage, which reads like an *if – then* statement, Peter gives three examples to prove that God has an established a pattern of reserving judgment for the wicked, and therefore, we can be confident that at the right time – in His time, God will judge these false teachers.

Now, there are a couple of things I want to point out from this passage. If you notice, these three examples gradually reduce in scale, from *beyond this world*, when God judged some of the angels who were doing what they weren't supposed

to be doing, and so He confined them in the pit, then to *worldwide* when God judged humanity through the flood – drowning the whole world except for eight people, and then *locally* when God completely destroyed the cities in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. Only three people were eventually saved in that region, and if you go the New Testament, Sodom and Gomorrah is repeatedly held up as an illustration of what happens to people who reject the truth for a lie.

If God did all of this, why would anyone think that God would not judge the false teachers?

No one is exempt from God's judgment, not even the angels, who in many respects are higher than man – and although not stated here, maybe the false teachers had claimed, among other things, that they were beyond God's judgment or maybe they taught there is no judgment and hell is not real. I think Peter's point here is that judgment of the wicked – judgment of these false teachers, although delayed at times, is still very real and it's certain to come.

There's something else I want to point out from this passage. It's possible that these three examples were given to Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because the characteristics of those judged in the past happen to be similar to the characteristics of these false teachers. For example, it was *pride* that caused the angels to rebel and fall. In Noah's day, the people were *corrupt* and *carnal*, and for the men of Sodom, it was their *sensuality* – which when put together, seem to be the same characteristics of these false teachers.

They will be judged, and although God is loving and gracious and merciful, we must never forget that He is also holy and just. That's a part of God's character the false teachers would just as soon forget; however, that does not change God's character one bit. God is holy and just, and therefore, He must punish sin.

Now, there's one more thing I want to point out from this passage. Not only are we assured that God will judge sin, as seen in the examples of the judgment against the angels, against the wicked during the flood, and against the sexually immoral in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter also tells us God will rescue His own people.

Although God's judgment against sin is a sure thing, by God's grace and mercy, His rescue of the righteous is also sure. In the flood, God protected righteous Noah and those who believed his message, and before the destruction of Sodom and

Gomorrah, God rescued righteous **Lot** and his two daughters, and let's talk about Lot for a moment because this deserves some clarification.

Do you remember when I said that there are some truths in the Bible that are hard to understand? This is one of those occasions, because in our passage, the word **righteous** was used three times to describe Lot. This may seem surprising, because if you recall Old Testament history, it was Lot who chose to live in Sodom, and it was Lot who missed out on the "father of the year" award when he was prepared to offer his two virgin daughters to the sexual desires of the men of Sodom so as to save his two angelic guests from homosexual rape.

It's a head scratcher, but apparently, God knew something about Lot's heart not recorded in the Old Testament – which God later revealed to Peter. We are told by Peter, that while Lot lived in Sodom, he endured a daily struggle in his heart against the evil he was witnessing. He was worn down by the filth he saw every day to the point that he was **tormented** by it. The word tormented can also be translated "*tortured*." Such was the heart of Lot, to the point that he is now remembered for being "righteous."

If God knew how to save Noah and seven others from the flood, and if He knew how to save Lot and his two daughters from wrath, then surely **the Lord knows how** to save those who belong to Him. God knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and He is able to keep the righteous – upright when living in an unrighteous culture. We have absolutely nothing to fear. God graciously saves those who are His. God loves us, He desires the best for us; therefore, we should stand firm in following Him, we should be diligent to know His word, and we should be careful and cautious so we don't fall for the deceptive and subtle doctrines of false teachers, for as you may know, big differences often start with small and subtle beginnings.

*Consider this. If you're going somewhere and you are off course by just one degree, after one foot, you'll miss your target by 2/10s of an inch. That's trivial, right? That's nothing. But what about as you get farther out?*

- *After 100 yards, you'll be off by 5.2 feet. Not huge, but it's noticeable.*
- *After a mile, you'll be off by 92.2 feet. One degree is starting to make a difference.*
- *Traveling around the globe, you'd be off by nearly 500 miles.*
- *In a rocket going to the moon, you'd be 4,169 miles off.*
- *Going to the sun, you'd miss it by over 1.6 million miles.*

- *Traveling to the nearest star, you'd be off course by over 441 billion miles.*

All of this, over time, from a mere one-degree error in course. It makes a difference in distance and it also makes a difference in doctrine. A little bit of error can have a big impact, so beware of false teachers, and be careful and cautious about what you read and what you watch and what you hear.

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude – Max Anders, David Walls  
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible – David Brown, A.R. Fausset, Bobby Jamieson  
James, 1, 2 Peter & Jude, The Randall House Bible Commentary – Robert E. Picirilli & Paul V. Harrison  
Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter – R. E. Picirilli  
Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter – Charles R. Swindoll  
Beware of False Teachers – Steven J. Cole  
Divine Judgment of False Teachers, Part 2 – John MacArthur  
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe  
Faithlife Study Bible - Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Bomar, D.  
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck  
Enduring Word – David Guzik