

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

There Will be False Teachers Among You

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2 Peter 2:1-22

Assistant Pastor Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Peter, chapter 2. You'll find that right near the end of your New Testament.

As you are turning there, I want to attempt to "set the stage" for what we are about to read. This chapter presents one of the most colourful and fierce denunciations against false teachers in all of Scripture. We will see very quickly that these are the words of an Apostle who is filled with a righteous and holy anger.

He's angry because false teachers are attempting to lead weak Christians into destruction. He's angry because these wicked men are jeopardizing the eternal souls of the people in Christ's church. Eternity is at stake. Heaven and hell are at stake. And the Apostle Peter, in today's text, launches a full-out assault on the character and ministry of these false teachers.

With that in mind, look with me now at chapter 2, verse 1. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, relevant word to us today:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because

of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸ (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard);⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,¹⁰ and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones,¹¹ whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.¹² But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction,¹³ suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you.¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,¹⁶ but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

¹⁷ These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.¹⁸ For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.¹⁹ They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.²¹ For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.²² What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2 Peter 2:1-22 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Our passage this morning is chalked full of warnings about the false teachers that will rise up in the church. Church, it is so important that we take this text seriously. We can't deceive ourselves into believing that we'll never face false teaching like this here in Orillia. Peter won't allow us to believe that, because he writes in verse 1:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as **there will be false teachers among you**, (2 Peter 2:1a ESV)

They WILL come. They WILL attempt to lead you, your children and your fellow believers into destruction. Therefore, we need to lean in and listen close to Pastor Peter's warning about false teachers:

A Warning about False Teachers

First, we are told:

1. They will be widely followed

We find that in verse 2:

And **many** will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (2 Peter 2:2 ESV)

Remember, 2 Peter is not written to discuss problems outside of the church. We're not talking about the many who will follow the teaching of Mohammed or the many who will follow the teaching of Dawkins. We're talking about people **within** the church who will follow teachers **within** the church who permit and even endorse what Peter refers to as "sensuality".

We discover elsewhere in this letter that these teachers were preaching a message that gave Christians permission to pursue the desires of their flesh. And the following they accumulated, as you would expect, was massive. Alexander Nisbet wisely said:

It is not strange to see that the most dangerous heretics have many followers; every error being a friend to some lust.¹

These teachers are effective because concoct a way to make the Bible say what we want it to say. And we discover in the text that these teachers actually targeted a particular demographic in the

¹ Quoted by Dick Lucas & Christopher Green, *The Bible Speaks Today (2 Peter & Jude)*, ed. John R. W. Stott, vol. 30. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 90.

church. Peter writes in verse 18:

For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. (2 Peter 2:18 ESV)

Those who are barely escaping – those who have just left behind the life of sin and who are desiring to walk with Christ – BABY CHRISTIANS – are actively targeted by these false teachers. This is despicable! They target immature Christians because they don't yet know the full counsel of the word of God. They don't yet know the holiness that God requires. So, these teachers swoop in and preach a message that gives new believers permission to persist in their sin while also claiming Christ as their own. And, as one might expect, this is an effective strategy.

The size of a teacher's following – the attendance of a pastor's church – says nothing about the legitimacy of the message he preaches. You will sometimes hear people argue: "How can you call X a false teacher when he/she has done so much good for the kingdom of God?" Of course, the "so much good" referenced is the number of followers that the teacher has amassed. But friends, false teachers will always amass a following!

The prosperity gospel teaches people that God wants everyone to be rich and healthy TODAY! I hope you understand that Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn and every other prosperity preacher that crops up will face no obstacles in finding an audience for that message. Because they preach a sensual message. Instead of rebuking greed they cater to it. And they profit from it.

There will also be teachers who amass a following by preaching a gospel that allows us to follow all of our sexual desires. In our own city we have churches that hang rainbow flags at the front door. Pastors across North America are realizing that they will be able to grow their churches exponentially faster if they accept wholesale everything that our culture teaches about gender and sexuality. In last week's text, Peter argued for the authority of the New Testament Apostles and the Old Testament prophets, but preachers and teachers today are making a fortune selling books on why the God of the Old Testament has been misunderstood and why we shouldn't take literally the teaching of the Apostles! The false teachers of Peter's day are in our midst, even in Orillia, and we should not be surprised when they amass a following.

Second, Peter warns us that:

2. They will despise authority

They are referred to in verse 10 as those:

who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and **despise authority**. (2 Peter 2:10a ESV)

Now, we need to ask the question: What “authority” is it that they despise? Governmental authority? Church authority? Peter’s authority? God’s authority? Which authority is Peter referring to? I think commentator Thomas Schreiner has it right when he argues:

Probably the focus is on Christ’s sovereignty and authority that is rejected by the adversaries, but by refusing to submit to Christ, they reveal their insubordination and rebelliousness in general. These people will not submit to anyone, being supremely confident of their intellectual ability.²

That seems to me to line up with what we see in the text and with what we see in the world. One of the hallmarks of false teachers is their unwillingness to be held accountable. You’ll notice that false teachers never have a team of elders to hold them accountable – the false teacher will always ensure that he has 51% of the vote. That is dangerous arrogance.

I want you to know that your elders here have put measures in place to protect you from false teachers. If I later prove to be a false teacher (and that is not my goal, to be clear), but if, God forbid, that ever happened, rest assured that I have zero voting privileges when it comes to our church’s budget. None. And even when it comes to the non-financial decisions that are made by the board, rest assured that I have one solitary vote amongst a table of 14. They could vote me out of this church tomorrow, and, believe it or not, I find so much peace in that! Church polity is important, and false teachers refuse to submit to the authority of the church.

That’s also part of the reason why the false teachers who don’t have mega churches are usually

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 345.

operating out of their basement on a YouTube channel. Unable to find a church that will tolerate their arrogance and foolishness they amass a following from the safety of their computers, and they pump out dangerous, unbiblical teaching as quickly as their mom pumps out grilled cheese sandwiches for their lunch break.

Beware of a contrarian spirit. Beware of that pride in your soul that is always pursuing novelty – always wanting to stick it to the man and always wanting to accuse others of concealing the truth. That sin has been leading people to destruction since Peter’s day. Too many people despise authority and deceive themselves into thinking that it is admirable. It is actually one of the main attributes of a false teacher.

Third:

3. They will be slaves to sin

He summarizes this irony in verse 19:

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. (2 Peter 2:19 ESV)

It deeply angers me every time a new article pops up on the internet about preacher X’s new yacht, or preacher Y’s new private jet. It angers me that the gospel is defamed by Pastor Joel, and Pastor Joyce and Pastor Creflo’s obnoxious mansions. It angers me because now, before you and I can even begin that gospel conversation with our neighbour, we have to spend who-knows-how-much-time trying to explain why the “Christians” on T.V. are no reflection of the true Christ.

And it’s not just money.

In verse 14, Peter tells us that these teachers literally have eyes that are full of adulteresses. Meaning, every woman that they look at is a potential sexual partner in their mind and they go about their business committing adultery in their hearts and minds all day long.

Can we even begin to calculate the number of people who walked away from the church disgusted and disillusioned after megachurch pastor Bill Hybels was exposed as having repeatedly sexually harassed his secretaries? This filth is rampant, and it does enormous damage.

This is why Paul wrote to his young protégé Timothy:

Keep a close watch **on yourself and on the teaching**. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16 ESV)

Keep a close watch on yourself, teacher, because there is a congregation full of people whom God loves who are keeping a close watch on you. And they're watching your marriage. And they're watching your bank account. And if your life doesn't line up with your teaching – if it comes out that your marriage is a sham or that you've been skimming money off the top – then you wreak havoc on the church.

Peter goes on in describing these teachers, saying:

4. They will underdeliver on their promises

In verse 17, he borrows language from the prophet Jeremiah. In Jeremiah, chapter 2, we read:

for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:13 ESV)

These teachers reject the true gospel and create a gospel that is an easier sell. They promise freedom but they distort and diminish the only message that has the power to break us free from our chains! They create a god that looks just like our culture and they offer a gospel that has no power – or desire – to change us!

The god that they manufacture is not able to save. He's not able to satisfy the needs of the people because he is not a god at all. Lost, weary, broken people flock to the gospel preacher longing desperately to hear from the Living God, but they go away with nothing more than the empty

musings of another miserable sinner. Their teaching is like mist driven by a storm. It leaves the listeners in darkness and confusion. One commentator writes:

Heterodoxy is all very novel in the classroom; it is extremely unsatisfying in the parish.³

Amen! When we look back on the 21st century, I believe that one of the greatest tragedies in Christendom will be the way in which the prosperity gospel spread like wildfire throughout the third world only to inoculate half of the planet against the true, saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prosperity gospel preachers are flying in their private jets to the most impoverished regions of the world claiming to bring a gospel that will make people rich and healthy. They draw enormous crowds and call it a revival. Then, they fly away on their private jets and the new “converts” go back to their huts and watch mom and dad die of AIDS. And those disillusioned “converts” resolve that they will never be duped into believing the lie of Christianity again.

Expect that false teachers will rise up in our own culture with a gospel that promises sexual liberation and freedom. It is not a surprise that the rainbow flag is waving above the United church’s front door. False teachers promise freedom – the kind of freedom that the masses desire – but they underdeliver on their promise. They leave their people enslaved to sin, and they separate them from the One who came to set the captives free.

But thanks be to God, Peter issues one final warning:

5. They will be judged

These false teachers will give an account for the destruction that they cause in the church. These fake shepherds who, instead of feeding the flock, steal from the flock in order to feed themselves, will have to stand before the true shepherd. He will expose them for the wolves that they are. Beginning in verse 4, Peter draws upon three Old Testament illustrations to bolster his warning.

³ Quoted in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 324.

First, he reminds the church that even the rebellious angels did not escape judgement. This is a greater to lesser argument. If even the ANGELIC BEINGS are held accountable for their rebellion, then how could we possibly expect that we will be given a pass? These arrogant teachers who speak arrogantly against angelic beings will suffer the same judgement as those fallen angels who are currently being kept in chains.

Second, Peter points back to the story of Noah's ark. In Noah's day, the spirit of rebellion had spread across the entire planet. There was only one righteous man left – Noah – and when he preached the coming judgement his contemporaries scoffed. Just like the false teachers of Peter's day, the rebels of Noah's day carried on as if God's judgement was nothing more than a myth. But that judgement fell in one swift blow, and the wicked were washed away in the flood.

Third, Peter points to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot found himself living in a city that was plagued with sin. The primary sin of his city was sexual sin – the kind of sin that these false teachers were happy to endorse. In response to this unrepentant sin, God turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into heaps of ash. And in verse 9 Peter summarizes the lesson that we are meant to learn from these stories:

the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:9 ESV)

Ultimately, no one gets away with anything. Those who attempt to amass a wider following by explaining away the clear teaching of the Bible about sexuality will answer to the Living God who consumed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from Heaven. Those who are using God's word to justify sin and rebellion will give an account to the God who flooded the earth for its rebellion and unrighteousness. Those who are so puffed up with pride that they refuse to surrender to the authority of God will one day face the same chains of gloomy darkness that have bound the fallen angels to this day. We would be wise to listen to this warning from the author to the Hebrews:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31 ESV)

Now, how do we respond to a warning like that?

A Word to the Faithful

Very quickly now, before we close our Bibles this morning, I want to conclude with a brief word to the faithful. If you're here and you would call yourself a faithful follower of Jesus Christ then this is for you. First of all, I think we take from this text that we should:

1. Expect to be the minority

It's hard enough when the world out there starts pushing back against our faith, but is there anything more discouraging than when fellow believers join in on the pushing too? One of the most difficult seasons in my spiritual walk came when I watched one of my closest loved ones rebel against the faith. We had grown together, prayed together, worshiped together, but suddenly, she was calling into question everything that we had come to believe.

Just recently, a worship leader that I have always admired has caused a commotion by rejecting the authority of Scripture. He still calls himself a Christian, but he has altered the gospel to fit with the culture of our day. He and his wife host "spiritual retreats" in their home where they teach their newfound "freedom". He is no different than the false teachers that Peter writes about here.

Perhaps you have witnessed this in your own circle of influence. Perhaps you have watched as the Christian friends that you grew up with have compromised in their faith. It's disheartening, isn't it? What do we do when we feel like we are a minority – not only in the world but even in the professing church?

We must plant our roots deep into the truth of God's word and we must stand for faithfulness. Noah must have felt lonely, but it didn't stop him from building the ark and from giving his life to be a preacher of righteousness. Lot was living in a city known for its wickedness and rebellion, and yet the Lord found him to be faithful.

We are not the majority. Not in the world, and not even in the professing church, so what do we do? Peter tells us to:

2. Trust that God has the power to keep you to the end

the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, (2 Peter 2:9a ESV)

Perhaps you're reading this letter and you're wondering: "If the attacks on my faith are coming from the outside and from the inside, then how will we ever make it to the finish line?" Listen, the same Peter who wrote today's chapter also referred to the faithful church as those:

who by God's power **are being guarded** through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:5 ESV)

Do you hear that, Christian? As you hide yourself in the true gospel of Jesus Christ – the gospel revealed in the Bible – the God of the universe is guarding your faith and He is going to see you to the end. Peter could make these bold claims because he listened as Jesus said:

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

Isn't that incredible? I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I am being rocked to and fro by the waves of sin and error that rush into the church. False teachers seem to pop up faster than you can rebuke them down. Now, with the rise of social media, the most dangerous teachers in the world can at any moment bring their false gospels into the living rooms of Orillia. They prey on immature believers. I often feel myself slipping into discouragement asking: "God, how will your church survive these constant barrages?" But, praise the Lord, Peter tells us here that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

And one of the ways that God keeps His people is by grabbing them by the shoulders and issuing a firm warning. That's what we have in front of us this morning. God is taking hold of us,

looking us in the eyes, and warning us that the things we so often play around with have the potential to lead us into eternal ruin. That leads to Peter's last word to us:

3. Take careful heed of this warning

Look with me at verses 20-22 as we conclude this morning:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.²¹ For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.²² What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2 Peter 2:20-22 ESV)

Church, I believe that God is primary in our salvation and that He won't lose a single one who is His. But I also believe that we are responsible for our actions. We are responsible for the teachers that we choose to listen to. We are responsible for the sin that we choose to ignore and for the twisting of Scripture that we choose to justify.

These final verses should cause every Christian who is serious about their salvation to take a careful and a fearful look at their lives. Peter tells us that people who have escaped from the defilements of the world – people who give every possible appearance to be in – will be led into destruction by these false teachers. Like a dog returning to vomit, and like a pig returning to the mud, these "believers" will make peace with the sin of the world, and they will be led there by teachers who claim to be Christians.

Those sermons that you are listening to online – those books that you are devouring that teach you to disregard the authority of the apostles and the trustworthiness of the prophets – they are leading you like a lamb to the slaughter to an eternity apart from Christ. Be careful little ears what you hear. Because to those former "Christians" – those who gave themselves to skepticism and who exchanged the God of the Bible for a god who looks exactly like our culture – Peter says:

it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2 Peter 2:21 ESV)

Church, I plead with you this morning, hold fast to the Word of God. Listen to the men that spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. For the sake of your eternal souls and for the souls of your children, refuse to give a hearing to the false teachers and their false promises of freedom. They are waterless springs. They are a mist driven by the storm. They promise freedom but they themselves are slaves to the sin of our culture. Throw their books in the garbage and read this Book! Read it, and read it again. Meditate on it. Memorize it. Talk about it with your children as you sit at home and as you walk along the road – as you lie down and as you wake up. This is the lamp that God has given to us. This exposes every error and leads the faithful home.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.