

In 2001, at age 32, Elizabeth Gilbert had a rewarding day job as a travel writer... an apartment in Manhattan... a big new house in the Hudson Valley... and a devoted husband... with whom she intended to have a child. ... But five years later... she had (what she calls) a spiritual odyssey... that all started at 3 A.M. ... with Gilbert locked in the bathroom of her home... weeping over the life she didn't want anymore... and then falling on her knees in prayer.

Those who knew her... would probably describe her as a “Cultural Christian.” She thought of herself as some sort of Christian... although she could never swallow the idea that Christ is the only path to God. ... So that night... locked in her bathroom... she addressed the divine as "God" ... although she also kept an open mind to Whoever might be listening — "The Universe"... “the Great Void”... “the Force”... “the Supreme Self”... “The Whole”... “The Creator”... “the Light”... “The Higher Power”... .... Her prayer was a simple plea: *"I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to live in this big house. I don't want to have this baby."*

At long last... according to Gilbert... someone spoke back. ... She writes:

*"It was not an Old Testament Hollywood Charlton Heston voice, nor was it a voice telling me I must build a baseball field in my backyard. It was merely my own voice, speaking from within my own self .... [And yet], this was my voice as I had never heard it before. This was my voice, but perfectly wise, calm and compassionate. This was what my voice would sound like if I'd only ever experienced love and certainty in my life. How can I describe the warmth of affection in that voice, as it gave me the answer that would forever seal my faith in the divine?"*

Fortified by this "religious conversation" ... she left the husband and the house and the plans for having kids behind... and set out into the unknown. ... Then she started her globe-trotting "spiritual quest" that led to the publishing phenomenon known as Eat, Pray, Love — a book that spent an extraordinary **187 weeks** on the New York Times bestseller list... and was turned into a movie starring Julia Roberts.

But Gilbert's voice isn't unique. Her false gospel is the same gospel preached by a cavalcade of contemporary gurus... false teachers... and would-be holy men and women." ... She... and many others want us to place our faith in a god within ourselves. Elizabeth Gilbert demonstrates this very common theme of false teachers when she writes, "God dwells within you as you yourself, exactly the way you are .... Somewhere within us all, there does exist a supreme self who is eternally at peace." According to Gilbert, her highest duty is to "honor the divinity that resides within me."

### **Oprah Video**

I have to tell you that several years ago... when I first saw that video... I was warned never to show it in church... unless I wanted to end my ministry. This warning was given to myself and several other pastors at a pastor's seminar... because Oprah is so loved... and highly revered... by so many people... in our upstanding Evangelical churches... *"If you criticize Oprah... you will start an immediate uproar..."* we were warned.

But let me express why I've decided to risk that. ... What would you think of a United States military commander... serving in Afganistan right now... who would not pass along such vital information about Al-Qaida as to their

current activities and methods...? What if he never talked about their car bombings and suicide vest bombers...? What if he treated the whole effort for himself and his troops as a game... never pausing to think about the mission...? Lets say his daily briefings... before sending his men out on the streets... were encouragements to be positive thinkers... *“Find your happy place guys... stay in it... and I’ll see you back at chow time...”* ... I would consider such a commander... beyond foolish... but more along the lines of heartless. He doesn’t care about protecting the men under his charge.

How much more then... should we consider a pastor to be heartless... if he did not warn of the present dangers... such as Oprah... I would be heartless of me... if I never said a word... because she is so well adored... I am not intending to stir up unnecessary trouble. The truth is... I want to follow the example that Peter sets for us in our passage today... and speak boldly and openly.

Many people are quick to believe such falsehood. ... They are like dry kindling that is ready for a spark. ... But have you ever asked *“Why?”* *“Why are so many people so poised and ready to pounce on false truth...?”* ... Here is what I think – in large part... because I see it in today’s passage... ... The reason multitudes are so easily misled... is so that they can go ahead and live like they want. ... They want some excuse to get away from the restraints and demands that Jesus Christ puts upon them. *“If I can ignore the objective source of Christ and His written Word... and instead focus on an inner voice of self... then I’ll be happier...”*

I think... that in this post-Christian era that we live in...people are groping after any teaching that lowers the Person of Christ. The more He is lowered... the less binding His demands are. So the false teachers of today lower Him to a subjective feeling deep within yourself... that places no demands on your life... but releases you to do whatever you want..."

The desire for a Jesus that is much lesser than He really is... can be seen in the church. "...Jesus is my Lord and Savior... yet I am free to choose my own behaviors... If I want some spiritual growth... I might read my Bible a little more... If ministry opportunity comes along (as long as it doesn't inconvenience me too much) I can decide on my own if I will participate... or not. "... *I have no One and nothing that I need to be obedient to... except my own personal desires...*"

People who get sucked into false teaching... are lured by a sense of a lesser Christ... or no Christ at all... so that they can have... what looks like... greater freedoms.

As we open today's passage... you will notice the serious tone that Peter takes. ... Peter didn't play around when he warned us against false teachers and perils of heresy. ... He used some of the most scathing language found anywhere in the Bible... to denounce the heretics and their heresy. ... He spoke very pointedly about the effect that false teaching would have on people. ... He does this... as he especially wants us to know five things about them.

1. False teachers have always existed (v.1).
2. False teachers teach destructive heresies (v.1).
3. False teachers blaspheme the truth (v.2).
4. False teachers exploit people (v.3).
5. False teachers shall be judged and destroyed (v.3-9).

## 2 Peter 2:1-9

Let's begin with the first thing Peter wants us to be aware of... "False teachers have always existed..." In verse 1... he wrote: *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you...*"

Peter is writing to Jewish Christians, and "the people" he is talking about is Israel. "There were false prophets among the people of Israel," Peter says, "even as there shall be false teachers among you," that is, among believers, the church. There were false prophets in the Old Testament, but there are false teachers today.

The idea is this: there will always be false teachers; false teachers will fill every generation of man and they will continue to introduce their destructive heresies until the world ends. ... This means there are false teachers among us... in our fine... upstanding... evangelical churches today. (Now... I am not saying that I have identified any who are among us here at Living Water... but as Peter warns... and other Scripture passages do as well... we must be alert to what every man and woman teaches. ... This does not mean that we should be on a witch hunt; it means that we should test all preaching and teaching by the Word of God.

**Matthew 7:15 (ESV)**

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*

When the Apostle Paul said his goodbyes to the church at Ephesus... he said this...

**Acts 20:29-30 (ESV)**

*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

If God has prophets, the devil will have some, too. If God builds a church, the devil will build a counterfeit church. Wherever God is working, the devil shows up to oppose, and one of his methods of opposition is false prophets and false teachers.

Peter also has this to say about them in verse 1: “*who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...*”

Not only was their message false, but their methods were false. Instead of openly declaring what they believed, they came into the church under false colors and gave the impression that they were true to the Christian faith.

"They secretly bring in alongside" is the literal translation. ... The Greek is *pareisagō* and that is what it means - "*to bring in by the side of...*"

This is how they work. ... They twist and turn and warp the truth gradually indoctrinating people. ... They do not throw out the truth immediately; they simply lay their false teachings alongside the truth and give the impression that they believe the fundamentals of the faith. Before long, they remove

the true doctrine and leave their false doctrine in its place. ... "They secretly bring in alongside."

False teachers might have a lot of true doctrine. There is not a cult that I know of which does not have some truth in it. ... But they will deny a certain truth(s) about Christ... and secretly lay it along-side of Biblical truth. That is the one thing that makes them very dangerous... ten thousand times more dangerous than if they were 100 percent in error. These teachers generally believe some things that are true.

Peter called what they taught "destructive heresies." ... This brings us to the next major point that Peter wants us to know:

## 2. False teachers teach destructive heresies

The word *heresy* originally meant simply "*to make a choice*," but then it came to mean "a sect, a party." ... A false teacher eventually forces you to make a choice... after they win your confidence in them... between his doctrines and the doctrines of true Biblical faith.

I cannot think of a more destructive heresy than that which rejects... turns against... contradicts... the Master... Who bought us. ... Notice how Peter describes Jesus. ... Of all the ways that Peter could have chosen to call our attention to the Person of Jesus... he used the phrase - "*The Master who bought them...*"

A Master who has bought you... is someone that you must obey. Teaching that rejects this... says... that "You are your own master... or someone... or something else is..." ... "*Hey... Listen... Jesus is a light for you to see the best options from which you can decide what is best for you... He really isn't your Master... You are!*"

Jesus Christ has bought us... and He has paid the supreme price to buy us. ... He gave all that He is... and all that He has — even His life — in order to buy us out of sin and death. ... We owe our lives to Him... we owe everything to Him. ... The picture here of us... is that of a servant... He is our Master... we owe Christ our minds and hearts... our duty and service. And we all know what happens to the servant who denies his Lord and Master... swift destruction!

Though false teachers may use our terminology the fact of the matter is they want nothing to do with Christ. The so-called Jehovah's Witnesses speak of the Son of God, but their definition of the Son of God is far different from what the Bible teaches. ... Mormon's call themselves the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints... Sounds Christian... doesn't it...? But they deny the Master who bought us... and would have us follow... instead... Joseph Smith... who contradicts the words of Christ spoken in Scripture.

But even more subtle than all of this... is the fact that you can walk into almost any Christian bookstore today... or attend so-called Christian conferences... and receive lots of teaching about how you can elevate yourself... your own desires... your own selfish ways of personal fulfillment.



This sells very well. ... The emphasis is not on how to submit your own will and desires to the Master who bought you. Instead it is how to get more and more of what you want. ... Some of these teachers are not very subtle about it. False teachers... like Joel Olsteen... Benny Hinn... Kenneth Copeland... Kenneth Hagin... Fred Price... Robert Schuler... Robert Tilton... Rodney Howard Brown... or any other "Word of Faith" ... "Name it and claim it" ... Faith Prosperity... Health and wealth... gospel preachers... deny the Master who bought them... by tickling the ears of their followers... declaring God wants them healthy and wealthy... and all they have to do is name it and claim it.

If you watch any of these people on television... you will see what Peter writes in verse 2...

## **2 Peter 2:2**

Notice that **many**, not a few, but **many follow** them. The word **follow** means *"to conform to and imitate."* These followers make gods of their false teachers. It is not so surprising that these false teachers have so many followers. They are peddling an easy chair religion that many are looking for. ... Their propagation of sensuality makes the message of false teachers popular... for their lifestyle appeals to the flesh. It is a Bingo and beer-tent religion.

Now we understand why they deny the truths of the Christian faith. ... They want to satisfy their own lusts... and do it under the guise of Biblical Christianity.

*"...and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed..."*

Peter's third main point is that false teachers blaspheme the truth.

False teachers bring reproach upon the name of Christ. ... They cause people to speak evil of God... Christ... the Church... and Christians. ... One of the reactions folks have when you invite them to Church is the old excuse, "*The church is full of hypocrites.*" Well it probably is not full of hypocrites... but our passage today speaks the truth that Satan makes sure there are enough to keep people away.

Those who follow false teaching get caught up in sensuality... pleasing their own selves... But what is the motivation for these false teachers? I tell you, Simon Peter puts it right out in the open here: (Look now at verse 3...) "*And in their greed...*" ... They do it because they are greedy. ...

Sometimes it may be that they are greedy for a position... for a name... for popularity. ... Many of them are greedy of money. ... So... Peter's 4<sup>th</sup> point: False teachers exploit people.

In verse 3 Peter pointed out that the false teachers exploit by using "false words." The Greek word is *plastos*. Now what does that sound like...? It is the same word from which we get our English word *plastic*. They use plastic words! These are words that can be twisted to mean anything you

want them to mean! ...The false teachers use our vocabulary... but they do not use our dictionary. ... They talk about "salvation," "inspiration," and the great words of the Christian faith... but they do not mean what we mean. Immature and untaught believers hear these preachers... or read their books and think that these men are sound in the faith... because maybe they cited some Scripture... but... let me tell you... it is very easy for them to twist... distort... and misquote Bible verses. Simply quoting a verse does not make the teaching Biblical. It has to be used right – start with what the human author meant by what he wrote. Pay attention the verses around those that are quoted. ... Look at the situation (the context) in which those verses were written. And if you have access to some of the cultural and grammar understanding about the passage – what the original readers were facing how they would understand what was written to them... it will help you to see if those Scriptures are being used right.

Let me say this again – “Simply quoting verses from the Bible does not make the teaching Biblical. Those verses have to be used properly!” ... False teachers explain Bible verses with plastic words. Satan is a liar and his ministers are liars. They use the Bible, not to enlighten, but to deliberately deceive.

So let me now make an important distinction. I should never call someone a false teacher... if they don't happen to agree with me... on the timing of Christ's return. ... I should never call someone a “false teacher” if they don't agree with me on the issue of spiritual gifting ... or how communion should be served... what version of the Bible should be used... baptism by immersion or by sprinkling... whether women can teach men... ... People

who disagree with me on these... and a host of other issues... as long as they have a sincere belief that their positions are what the Bible teaches... I should not... and neither should you... think of them as “False Teachers.”

Verse three gives us an important distinction. A false teacher uses plastic words... to purposely twist the truth... to agree with their own desires.

There is no sense of *“What does God mean by His Word...? Let me carefully try to understand His message in it... I need to be an approved workman who rightly divides the Word...”*

We don't always agree as teachers and proclaimers of God's Word... But whenever there is a serious effort on the part of someone with whom I don't agree... to carefully understand what God's word really means... I don't dare think of them as a “false teacher.” False teachers are engaged in deliberate deception. They don't really care to get at God's intended meaning. Scripture to them is only a tool to twist to their own greedy and sensual desires.

We have already seen another clear mark of a “false teacher”... and that is they minimize... or ignore Jesus as our rightful Master. ... They make you and your wishes Master.

Now... the rest of our passage... the last part of verse 3... through verse nine... depict Peter's 5<sup>th</sup> and final major emphasis... False teachers **WILL BE** judged and destroyed.

Turn on the television... observe the big crowds listening to them... observe how happy they seem in all the wealth they acquire... see how they seem to have all that you've ever wanted... and soon the thought occurs to you... *“Why in the world does God allow them to get away with it...? If their message is so destructive... why does God allow them to appear to be so successful...? Why doesn't He show everyone what miserable failures they really are...?”* The answer is... God most certainly will! It is coming. They are not getting away with it. God has it all under control... and He always has!

### **2 Peter 2:3b-9**

Judgment for the religious phonies is promised in Scriptures. One does not do what these religious charlatans do and escape Divine retribution.

We are assured that God has the last word on the matter. Throughout history God has condemned and promised judgment on those who distort His truth. The judgment is certain. Sometimes it seems like false religious leaders go on and on without Divine arrestment, but that does not minimize the certainty of judgment; it only maximizes the greatness of the punishment. ... It may look like God is slumbering; it may look like God is taking a nap. He may not seem to be doing very much about these false teachers, but He is, my friend. Habakkuk wondered whether God would do anything about the enemies of Israel, but he found out that in reality God was moving much too fast for him... He was not slumbering at all. You and I should know that God is in reality moving too fast for us... as well!

Also... please take special notice... that Peter obviously would have nothing to do with the kinds of statements that we often hear today... like... "God will save all people... because He is so loving..." ... Don't be so foolish as to think that God will cancel His judgment. Don't ever minimize the certainty of God's judgment on those who rebel against Him.

God judges rebellion and will not spare those who reject His will. ... If God judged the angels... who in many respects are higher than men... then certainly He will judge rebellious men.

Verse 5 mentions Noah. ... Nobody believed Noah's message! Jesus made it clear that people were enjoying their normal lives up to the very day that Noah and his family entered the ark! (Luke 17:26-27) No doubt there were plenty of "experts" who laughed at Noah and assured the people that a rainstorm was out of the question. Had anybody ever seen one? The apostates in Peter's day used that same argument to "prove" that the Day of the Lord would not come (We will see this when we come to chapter 3... in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter.)

When you compare our world with Noah's world, you see some frightening parallels. The population was multiplying (Gen. 6:1), and the world was filled with wickedness (Gen. 6:5) and violence (Gen. 6:11, 13). Isn't that quite a bit like what we are experiencing...? ... Lawlessness abounded! True believers were a minority, and nobody paid any attention to them! ... But the Flood came and the entire population of the world was destroyed. God does indeed judge those who reject His truth.

Even after God's decision to destroy the earth, He gave wicked man one hundred and twenty years longer to repent. But stubborn and prideful man repented not. He chose his sin over the salvation. Because of man's wickedness, God destroyed every person and every land animal (except for Noah and his family) in His judgment. He covered the entire earth with water—even the tops of the highest mountains. (Genesis 7:19-20)

We are seeing a repeat of this kind of wickedness in our day. Jesus said we would.

**Matthew 24:37-39 (ESV)**

*For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

Just as God rescued Lot from Sodom, so he is able to rescue us from the temptations and trials we face in a wicked world. Lot was not sinless, but he put his trust in God and was spared when Sodom was destroyed. God will punish those who cause the temptations and trials, so we need never worry about justice being done.

These words of Peter were comforting to his original readers... and continue to be comforting to believers today. The Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials. Noah and Lot had stood the “trial,” staying true to God alone while surrounded by sin and hatred. The early Christians also lived in a hostile environment, often facing persecution. If they could stand firm, they would be rescued.

The examples cited above also show that God knows how to punish the wicked right up until the day of judgment.

I am very thankful that the Deliverance of the righteous is as certain as the Destruction of the wicked. The child of God has no part in the judgment of the wicked.

So let me ask... are you certain that you are a Child of God... and will escape this judgment of the wicked. ... The Bible says that you can... and should know for certain...

**1 John 5:11-13**