

Know the Danger

2 Peter 2:1-3

Recently, I told my three-year old granddaughter that growing up is both fun and hard. I asked her, *“Are you looking forward to growing up?”* *“Yes!!”* she smiled. *“Why do you want to grow up?”* She quickly answered, *“Because then I can eat all the candy I want!”* Her older brother was sitting about 15 feet away at the kitchen table and when he heard her he muttered, *“Oh no.”* Slowly he came over to his sister who was sitting near me, *“Aleksi, don’t you know that eating too much candy is not good for you!”*

The Bible is our daily bread from God. It is real food that nourishes our soul. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah says, *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart,”* (Jeremiah 15:16 [ESV](#)). In his first letter, Peter urges us *“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,”* (1 Peter 2:2 [NKJV](#)). **Jesus quotes Moses when he announces (Deuteronomy 8:3), *“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”* (Matthew 4:4 ESV)**

Truth: Feasting on God’s Word is critical to our growth in godliness.

In Peter’s second letter, Peter spends much of his energy alerting us to the danger of false teachers who offer us candy only to lure us into spiritual enslavement. I think of watching that frightening children’s movie, *“Chitty Chitty Bang Bang”*. In the musical, the city of Vulgaria makes children illegal and the city’s official Child Catcher lures and entraps children into his cart by giving out free candy. He shouts, *“Come along, kiddie-winkies! Here we are children, come and get your lollipops, lollipops, come along my little ones.”* And so many children are fooled and lured by candy into his trap!! Such a scary scene!! (Perhaps only surpassed in my childhood memories by the monkeys in the Wizard of Oz!)

Like the Child Catcher, the false prophets of Peter’s day speak sweet words to *“exploit”* God’s children. God says that *“many”* in Jesus’ church *“will follow them”*. Candy is hard to resist! But the candy of false teaching brings death. Be careful what you consume!

Main Idea: The church of Jesus is always at risk of being entrapped by sweet talking false teachers. God reserves His harshest judgment on such people and urges us to keep ourselves under the influence of Gospel teachers.

If you ask people, “*What subject do you want to hear preached at your church?*” Perhaps something practical like “marriage or parenting.” Perhaps something theological like, “The atoning death of Jesus”. Perhaps something stimulating like “Prayer”. Perhaps something hopeful like, “The Second Coming of Jesus”. **I doubt if the topic of God’s warning about false teachers would appear in many people’s top ten choices.**

This topic is uncomfortable because it is by nature “negative” and “confrontational”. It might even appear “mean”, “divisive” and “petty” to some. For Peter, alerting the believers about false teachers is not about debating a point in order to be right, not about dissing other pastors who are attracting more people than him, not about increasing the followers on his X account, not about exercising his own authority to shape church culture. **For Peter, alerting believers about false teachers is about life and death . . . this is a matter that impacts people’s eternity either for the good or for the bad.**

Question: How do we know whether a person is a false teacher or not? Glad you asked! In 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter provides a “mugshot” of these folks. For a long time now, the FBI posts their 10 most wanted felons with pictures so that the public would be alert to the dangers they pose. Here Peter posts a mugshot of false teachers so that we can avoid being a victim of one.

A Mugshot of False Teachers.

1. Their Location

Where might false teachers hang out?

“But false prophets also arose **among the people** (God’s chosen people in the OT), just as there will be false teachers among you (God’s chosen people in the NT),” (2 Peter 2:1 [ESV](#))

False teachers do not avoid the church, they hunger to find ways to be embraced by the church. Paul says the same reality to the Ephesian church elders in Acts 20:

*"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. Acts 20:31 Therefore be alert," (Acts 20:29-31 [ESV](#))*

Now one huge problem is that many INSIDE the church are listening to voices OUTSIDE Jesus' church to find the answers to big problems of life. Satan has convinced many that the best answers to problems like depression, anxiety, poverty, racism, loneliness, sexual ethics, crime, unwanted pregnancies, parenting, gender confusion are best found in the many voices of the world. **Satan has deceived many inside the church that God's Word is a less relevant source for answers to modern problems than the word of man.** The devil points us to really smart and eloquent people who speak in a language that connects with our natural instincts.

Friends, here is the truth about the problems of this broken where and the source where we will find life:

"But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'""(Matthew 4:4 [ESV](#)).

"as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith.'"" (Romans 1:17 [ESV](#))

The answers given in God's Word lead us to life and joy and peace and righteousness and worship. But the answers taught by the world lead God's people deeper into darkness, resentment, frustration and despair. These answers lead God's people away from Jesus, away from God's Word, away from the truth, away from spiritual life and peace.

As your pastor, I ask you to reflect on how much time and attention you give to listening to the world's doctrines and the world's solutions to problems. I would estimate that for most of us here, we give anywhere from **20-40 hours of our week listening to the world's perspective** about everything. The world is crafty in hiding its teaching in songs, movies, blogs, fiction stories, college textbooks, late night comedy shows, morning talk shows, newspapers, news networks and art galleries.

I am not advocating ignorance of the world's philosophies. **I AM advocating listening far more to God's Word than you listen to the world. I AM advocating listening to the world's answers with guarded suspicion and listening to scripture with implicit trust.** In pride we like to think that we are not effected by listening so much to the world and so little to scripture . . . but we are. This is why God warns us so often about listening to false teachers.

“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24 [ESV](#))

How much time do you give your mind and heart to hearing what the world has to say about life? Is it any wonder that you find yourself depressed, angry, worried, troubled, filled with hatred toward people who disagree with you and lonely?

Truth: We will be deeply influenced by the voices to whom we give our ear.

So I urge you to refrain from giving your minds over to people who hate God and who reject His Gospel. **Our pride rolls its eye’s at this warning. Pride makes us think, “I am really smart and discerning. No false teacher is going to fool me!” But Peter warns us because he knows that** every disciple of Jesus is susceptible to being deceived. He himself had become influenced by Judaizers. Paul tells this story in his letter to the Galatians:

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”” (Galatians 2:11-14 [ESV](#))

Think about what a first century teenager would have to do to give his/her mind over to false teaching. He/she would have to leave their home . . . no books, no magazines, no radio, no TV, no computers, no Internet. He/she would have to decide to gather at a place where false teachers were selling their lies. He/she would have to have personal conversations with people who listened to false teachers. **In previous centuries, access to false teaching was limited and generally required effort. Today, the opposite is true. It is very difficult to live in the modern world without false ideas about God chasing you down and catching you.** This context makes Peter’s warning more relevant!

So false teaching OUTSIDE the church is a real danger to God’s people. But here, Peter’s concern is upon false teachers INSIDE the church.

“But false prophets also arose **among the people** (God’s chosen people in the OT), just as there will be false teachers among you (God’s chosen people in the NT),” (2 Peter 2:1 [ESV](#))

Truth: The devil loves to work inside the church. Within the body of Christ, the devil finds us a playground with lots of fun slides and swings to use.

To the churches in Galatia, Paul gives this word to turn them back to the Gospel.

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-9 [ESV](#))

False teachers in the first century were INSIDE the church and turning her away from the Gospel! We would be foolish not to be concerned about this happening in our day.

2. Their Sneakiness

“who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,” (2 Peter 2:1 [ESV](#))

*“For certain **people have crept in unnoticed** who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:4 [ESV](#))*

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you **in sheep’s clothing** but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7:15 [ESV](#))*

How are false teachers sneaky?

- 1. They often hide the fulness of what they really believe so that their new doctrines will be digested small bite by small bite without distress. That is sneaky.**
- 2. They often use emotionally pleasing means to teach false doctrine (music, stories, emotional appeals). That is sneaky.**
- 3. They often slip the rotten meat of false doctrine in between two slices of wholesome bread. That is sneaky.**
- 4. They often intentionally avoid the God-given authority of elders so as not to be held accountable or confronted by them. That is sneaky.**

5. They often leverage relationships through sympathetic stories of the pain in their lives in order to gain loyalties inside the church. That is sneaky.
6. They often target the most emotionally or spiritually vulnerable in the church body, making them feel understood, in order to gain a foothold in the church. That is sneaky.

Ignatius of Antioch around 107 AD on false teachers, *“Some people make a habit of **going about bearing the Name, but with evil deceit**: They do things that are unworthy of God. You must turn from these as you would turn from wild beasts, for they are ravenous dogs that bite secretly. You must be on guard against them; they are almost incurable. There is one physician: He is both flesh and spirit; He is born and unborn; He is God in man; He is true life in death; his from Mary. And from God; he first suffered and then was beyond suffering; He is Jesus Christ our Lord.*

I love that quote because Ignatius places Jesus at the center of orthodoxy . . . sound doctrine.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1 [ESV](#))

God places a responsibility upon every believer discern the biblical validity of the teachers that they listen to.

Question: What do we do when we discover a false teacher? In the OT, the disaster that they brought to God’s community was so serious, God said to put them to death. **Today, the NT tells us to confirm that they are false teachers, and if they are teaching that which is contrary to sound doctrine to reject their teaching, to warn them of the judgment of God and to avoid them.**

This discernment regarding false prophets is a responsibility of every church member, but a very important responsibility of the elders in the church.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28 [ESV](#))

Principle: Just as the church is not to be a safe place for people who would harm children so the church is not to be a safe place for false teachers. A church

is healthy when it is a church that will courageously confront false teachers in love.

3. Their Denials

“even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.”
(2 Peter 2:1-2 [ESV](#))

Peter does not write an exhaustive book unveiling all the ways that the false teachers of his day erred in their teaching. But he notes two denials that they make. These two are still very prominent aspects of many false teachers today.

Denial #1: False teachers often deny the Person and work of Jesus in some significant way.

Denial #2: False teachers often deny the necessity of practical holiness.

Both of these key doctrines run contrary to our flesh. The doctrine of Jesus denounces our pride and self-importance. The doctrine of practical holiness denounces all that our flesh yearns after.

Denial #1: False teachers often deny Jesus in some significant way.

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.” (1 John 4:2–3 [ESV](#))

Here is the measuring tape: assess the teacher’s confession of Jesus Christ. “What is the person’s real confession regarding Jesus?” This is the central question.

Three key doctrines regarding Jesus are in view:

1. **Jesus is our pre-existent God.** A teacher from God confesses that Jesus is uniquely “from God”. He was in the beginning with God. He is God of very God. Nothing that is made was made apart from Him. Jesus is necessary for our salvation. There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 29

Q. Why is the Son of God called “Jesus,” meaning “savior”?

A. Because he saves us from our sins. Salvation cannot be found in anyone else; it is futile to look for any salvation elsewhere. Matt. 1:21; Heb. 7:25; Isa. 43:11; John 15:5; Acts 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:5

Q&A 30

Q. Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus?

A. No. Although they boast of being his, by their deeds they deny the only savior and deliverer, Jesus. Either Jesus is not a perfect savior, or those who in true faith accept this savior have in him all they need for their salvation. 1 Cor. 1:12-13; Gal. 5:4; 2 Col. 1:19-20; 2:10; 1 John 1:7

Q&A 31

Q. Why is he called “Christ,” meaning “anointed”?

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance; our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us. Luke 3:21-22; 4:14-19 (Isa. 61:1); Heb. 1:9 (Ps. 45:7) 2 Acts 3:22 (Deut. 18:15); John 1:18; 15:15; Heb. 7:17 (Ps. 110:4) Heb. 9:12; 10:11-14; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24; Matt. 21:5 (Zech. 9:9); Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:28; Rev. 12:10-11

2. **Jesus is fully man and fully God.** A teacher from God confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh. His human name is “Jesus” . . . a name given by His earthly parents. He is the person who was born as an infant of the virgin Mary. He is the God-man. He is co-equal and co-eternal with God. Yet He is fully human. *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory . . . glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* John 1:14. Any spirit denying that Jesus is both God and man is a spirit of antichrist.
3. **Jesus made an atoning sacrifice for our sin on the cross.** A teacher from God confesses that Jesus the “Christ” . . . the Messiah who bore God’s wrath in our place upon the cross.

False teaching of the early Gnostics:

1. They taught that the divine Christ came upon the human Jesus at his baptism and then left him at the cross, so that it was only the man Jesus who died. 4:2
2. They taught that man’s basic problem was not sin, but a need for new liberating knowledge of God.
3. They taught that salvation was not through atoning work of Jesus, but through experiences with God through secret knowledge.
4. They taught that Jesus was a divine spirit who was not flesh and blood, but only appeared to be flesh and blood.
5. They denied that their sin was sin. 1:10 They changed God’s laws to fit their lives.

6. They insisted that the Apostles teaching needed to be supplemented with their “higher knowledge”. They had secret knowledge of God and His workings. 2:27. These teachers had access to truth that others did not have and that the New Testament did not provide. Something more is needed to really be spiritual and experience God.

One can be wrong at a million different angles. But here is the test: Does this teaching place Jesus at the center of everything. Does it rejoice that Jesus is God come in the flesh? Does it place its hope in His death upon the cross? Does it

Key idea: False teaching diminishes Jesus and His work. Jesus, both His Person and His work, is central to the Gospel. False teaching diminishes Jesus and His work d sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly. But **in the end, false teaching places the focus on something other than the Jesus of the New Testament.** It might be a prayer technique. It might be on a new teaching about Jesus . . . a new ritual . . . a new paradigm . . . a new voice. But Jesus as presented to us in the NT in His power and glory is no longer preeminent in our thinking. He has faded into the background and is obscured.

“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough . . . For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” (2 Corinthians 11:3-4; 13–15 ESV)

“In fact, when we listen to the church today, at least in the West, we are often left with impression that Christianity actually has very little to do with truth. Christianity is only about feeling better about ourselves, about leaping over our difficulties, about being more satisfied, about have better relationships, about getting on with our mothers-in-law, about understanding teenage rebellion, about coping with our unreasonable bosses, about finding greater sexual satisfaction, about getting rich, about receiving our own private miracles, and much else besides. It is about everything except truth. And yet this truth, personally embodied in Christ, gives us a place to stand in order to deal with the complexities of life, such as broken relations, teenage rebellion, and job insecurities. ”
— David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth*

Denial #2: False teachers often deny the necessity of practical holiness.

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

When a teacher misses the beauty of Jesus taught by the Gospel, they will also miss the beauty of a holy life. Practical holiness is not about living a respectable life. Our sanctification is about living out in the present world the life of Jesus that we now possess through faith. To live in sensuality is to live contrary to faith in Jesus.

This sensuality takes many forms. I think of three kinds of sensuality that have invaded Jesus’ church.

Sensuality #1: The sensuality of sexual “freedom” . . . a kind of freedom that enslaves those who embrace it. It is remarkable how many believers believe that sexual relations prior to marriage is not a Gospel problem. Today, the church is full of teachers who undermine the Bible’s healthy and beautiful truth about the sins of divorce, homosexuality, transgenderism, pornography and adultery.

Sensuality #2: The sensuality of anger and offense. It is remarkable how many believers believe that anger against those who have offended them is a path to fulfillment and hope. Yes, God hates sin in all its forms. He does not call us to hide the sins of others. But the LORD does call us to forbear with each other, to forgive each other and to pray for those who persecute us. Many inside the church teach that it is healthy to give oneself over to the pursuit and intensification of offense, rather than to the pursuit of the grace and mercy of Jesus.

Sensuality #3: The sensuality of worldly riches and power. It is remarkable how many believers score the fulfillment of their life based upon the job that they have, the popularity they acquire and the things that they own. Friends, these are metrics that fall outside of the Gospel. Beware of any teachers that encourage you to pursue the best that this world has to offer.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17 [ESV](#))

"What has happened, of course, is that over a period of time our society has slowly exited the moral world and it now lives, instead, in a psychological world. The difference is that in one there is right and wrong and in the other there is not. In this other world, we are comfortable or not, psychologically healthy or not, dysfunctional or not, but we are never sinners."

— **David F. Wells**, [*The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World*](#)

4. Their Fruit

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

The impact of false teachers upon the church members is division, deconstruction of faith and eternal disaster for those who listen to and follow them. They do not shine the light of Jesus in our dark world, but they put the light of Jesus under a blanket so that the church has little to no eternal impact upon the world.

*"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, **and by smooth talk and flattery** they deceive the hearts of the naive." (Romans 16:17-18 [ESV](#))*

I am concerned for every age group, but I pray much for the young people inside the church. **You are getting hammered by false doctrine . . . perhaps in a way that is unprecedented in church history. You are actively taught by those in our culture, but also inside the church to find meaning outside of Jesus . . . outside the Gospel.** The voice of God is muted and the voices of false prophets are given microphones. And I think you can see the spiritual emptiness that false teaching brings to your peers. There is a kind of despair and confusion that attacks the souls of those around you.

Illustration: Kimberly went to a high music event at local junior high. Three young teens sang. One from a Christian home sang praise song. Two others sang songs that reflected the hopelessness of the world.

One sang a song entitled, “Growing Sideways” by Noah Kahan.

*So I forgot my medication, fell into a manic high
Spent my savings at a Lulu, now I'm suffering in style
Why's pain so d___ impatient? Ain't like it's got a place to be
Keeps rushing me*

...

*'Cause everyone's growing and everyone's healthy
I'm terrified that I might never have met me
Oh, if my engine works perfect on empty
I guess I'll drive*

*And if all my life was wasted
I don't mind, I'll watch it go
Yeah, it's better to die numb
Than feel it all
Oh, if all my time was wasted
I don't mind, I'll watch it go
Yeah, it's better to die numb
Than feel it all*

This is the fruit of false teaching! Kimberly said that as she listened to this young man sing she wanted to run up to the stage and hug him and tell him that Jesus offers hope. It makes me weep to think of the devastation of false teaching upon the souls of the young.

5. Their End

*“even denying the Master who bought them, **bringing upon themselves swift destruction**. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.” (2 Peter 2:1-2 [ESV](#))*

“Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (2 Peter 2:3 [ESV](#))

God really really cares when His beautiful, Christ-exalting, life-giving Gospel is twisted into an ugly, self-promoting, death infusing false Gospel. We may think that arguments about doctrine are petty and mean and fruitless. But the LORD does not think so. This is why so much of His Book warns false teachers of the judgment that awaits them.

“And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own hearts. Prophesy against them and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls! Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people and keep your own souls alive?” (Ezekiel 13:17-18 [ESV](#)).

More on this next week . . .

Conclusion: What do we need to do? Embrace the true Gospel!

Practical Steps to deepen the church grasp upon the Gospel:

1. **Rejoice in listening to the apostles teaching together with your local church and in your own physical families.** God designed us to need one another. And He calls us to listen to God’s Word together.
2. **Pray for elders/pastors who teach the Word.** Without teaching of sound doctrine , we are without protection. Sound teaching builds our spiritual immunity to the seduction by false prophets.
3. **Love the teaching of sound doctrine.** Churches will become what the congregation loves. Take interest in doctrine!! Do not be a follower who thinks, “Hey, just give me the practical stuff. I don’t need all that doctrine.” Yes, we do!!
4. **Examine the scriptures to see if what is taught is true.**
5. **Be prepared for ridicule by worldly people . . . many whom are in the church.** Some nice people hate what the Bible teaches. And if our church teaches the Bible, then they will hate us too. Maybe we are wrong when others say we are wrong? Good to ask the question. Right to humbly listen and reflect upon the scriptures. BUT we must not use the measure of other’s opinions to discern. “Let God be true though every one were a liar,”(Romans 3:4 [ESV](#))

A Mugshot of False Teachers

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