

## 2 Peter 2:1-3 – How to spot false teachers

*1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

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Now we are into the meat of this letter! Peter wrote to help the believers stand firm against false teachers. Did you think false teachers were a new problem? Did you think that the early church was united and not troubled by such problems? Not so! When we read Peter's words, we might think he knew our situations today. So, how does he tell us to defend ourselves against the problem of false teaching?

### **False teachers: certain (v1)**

There have always been false teachers amongst God's people. Moses warned the Israelites about false prophets before they entered Canaan. They would even do signs and wonders. The Lord would let them rise up, so that the people's love for God and his truth could be tested (Deuteronomy 13:3). Those who claimed to be prophets had to be tested (Deuteronomy 18:20-22), and the false ones dealt with severely. But Israel often did not listen and had much trouble from these people (Lamentations 2:14, Ezekiel 22:28). So, we should not be surprised to find them today. Satan always tries to counterfeit the truth. Only the gold is worth copying – who will try to counterfeit something worthless? We must not despair or think it is impossible to survive.

Peter warned against false teachers, not prophets, because the gift of prophecy was dying out in his day. Prophecy, like apostleship, was for the beginning of the church (Ephesians 2:20). When Christ first died and rose, the early church needed to be taught what it meant. But now, we need to study and remember the apostles' teaching, which is now written down in Scripture, and to pass it on (2 Timothy 2:2). Jesus is the fulness of the truth (John 14:1-11). The gift of prophecy died out with the apostles. Those who claim to be prophets today are deceiving us.

Peter told us that there would be many false teachers, coming again and again. How to we spot them?

### **False teachers: cunning (v1-3)**

There are wrong ways to spot false teachers. Many people follow preachers who are interesting, successful, handsome, rich, pleasant, attractive people. Beware! Verse 1 says that false teachers bring in their teachings secretly. They do not openly tell the church that the old truths are wrong, or that they wish to change them. They pretend to be faithful men, like everyone else. They mix in their errors with subtlety and cunning. They are clever, v3 – they bring stories to persuade. They are not stupid and unqualified! Verse 2 tells us that many people will follow them. The true gospel tells us that we are sinners who must repent. It tells us that discipleship is often hard – the way of self-denial, the way of the cross. Often people want to hear something different. They are eager (2 Timothy 4:3) to be taught something else. So false teachers often have big churches. So, how can we know them? We must compare their teachings with the truth taught in the Bible by the apostles. Their teachings are new. Especially they change the gospel of the Lord Jesus (v1). They do not preach, or they undermine the preaching of and lead people away from, Christ as the Saviour who purchased his people by his blood and who demands a life of discipleship from them. Beware!

### **False teachers: depraved (v1-3)**

In a dark world, what happens if you do not follow the one light, along the one path? You go astray. Jesus said that the way is narrow (Matthew 7:13). God's truth points the way to holiness and purity: it teaches repentance and godliness. But false teachings point the way to sin and depravity. In verse 1, Peter describes false teachers' heresies as “destructive”. They tear down. The truth is like solid meat to build us up – but falsehood is poison, to tear us apart. Verse 2 tells us that false teaching leads to shameful teaching. This is shown also later in the chapter, e.g. Verses 10, 14. Those who dare to change God's word will also defy his commandments. People love false teaching because it gives them excuses for bad lives. We believe errors, because they let us sin. This all leads to Christ's name being blasphemed, v2. What is done in the name of Christ is seen by the world. That is why churches must deal strictly and quickly with false teaching – otherwise they dishonour the Saviour. False teachers are usually motivated by greed (v3). They are not serving people, but using them to make money (1 Timothy 6:5-10). The Bible teaches us to be content with food and clothing during the pilgrimage of this life. Our glory is in heaven, and will not arrive on earth until Christ returns. Jesus was a poor man (Luke 9:58), and so was Paul (2 Cor 11:24-27). Beware!

### **False teachers: doomed (v1, 3)**

Does God notice? Will he do anything? Where are the strikes of lightning from heaven to destroy the houses of the false teachers? Peter tells us to not be deceived. God's judgment, when it comes, will be swift. He explains this later in the chapter. Like Sodom, they will be sent to sudden and awful doom. Has he forgotten? No – he has already appointed judgment; it has hanging over them, waiting for the right time (v3). God will honour his own name, and avenge the wrongs done to his people. The false teachers are following their own pleasures now – but are ripe for eternal judgment. So, do not fear them – they may boast much, but they are already ruined. Certainly, do not follow them. It is not safe to allow them in our homes or our churches, because they are under God's wrath already, waiting for the right time.