

*Introduction:*

- A. *Illus.:* In 1972 I went down to a theater in Evanston to see a documentary entitled *Marjoe*. Marjoe Gortner became a Pentecostal preacher in 1948 at age 4. His evangelist parents saw that their boy had a flair so they schooled him in preaching. He was quite the celebrity on the revival circuit. But then in 1972 he blew the whistle on himself. He was fed up. He took a film crew with him on his revivals to show what a farce it all was. Here's an excerpt.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-NwKD9IaZw> (2 min. 11 sec.)
- B. No one believes they would fall for a heresy but, if our text today is to be believed, we all have to be on our guard.  
*Illus.:* I remember a young wife coming to see me years ago. The couple had met at Trinity. Two Mormon missionaries had come to their door. Her husband, thinking he could persuade them of their error, invited them in. They kept coming back. She came to me because she saw her husband falling away from his orthodox faith in Jesus.
- C. I read a fascinating blog by **Tim Challies** who identifies 7 different kinds of false teachers. The **heretic** teaches what blatantly contradicts an essential teaching of the Christian faith. The **charlatan** is like Marjoe, a person who uses Christianity as a means to personal enrichment. The **prophet**, like Joseph Smith, claims to be gifted by God to speak fresh revelations outside of Scripture. The **abuser** uses his leadership position to take advantage of other people. The **divider** uses false doctrine to disrupt or destroy a church. The **tickler** cares nothing for what God wants and everything for what people want so he tickles their ears. Finally, the **speculator** obsessed with novelty, originality or speculation—what Hebrews calls “*strange teachings.*”

D. Turn to **2 Peter 2**. This chapter and the one-chapter letter of Jude are very similar, and together they are the strongest chapters in the Bible against heretics. You'll remember that **ch.1** ended with the ringing affirmation that Scripture, the work of God's prophets, is absolutely and entirely God's Word. Now we step over to the dark side in **2:1-3a...**

## I. FALSE TEACHERS WILL ALWAYS THREATEN OUR FAITH

- A. Peter isn't talking here about the purveyors of other religions, as dangerous as they are. He is talking about teachers who *say* they are Christians. Jesus said, "*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*" Mt 7:15
- B. The puzzling thing about these people, as well as the way Peter talks about them, is that they *seem* to be Christian. That's why we're reluctant to attack them. They may be off, but they're *our* people. At least they talk about Christ.

In **v.1** Peter uses this puzzling phrase, "*even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.*" If the Lord bought them how can they be doomed to destruction? In Jude 5, Jude (Jesus' brother) addresses that question: "*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.*" Hebrews reminds us of the same thing. Here were people who God saved from bondage and death in Egypt but who refused to trust and obey him as they went forward, and thus, they died without entering the land promised to them. Saved and condemned.

That's the situation here. Peter has already warned us about this very thing in chap. 1. He told us in 1:10 to "*make every effort to confirm your calling and election.*" He said that those whose faith never flowered into virtues

were “*ineffective and unproductive.*” False teachers fit that description. Despite having tasted what the gospel offered they abandoned it to false teaching that robs the gospel of its power. Some have gone so far as to even deny the Lord as the sovereign God and Savior. *Illus.*: I’ve had evangelical pastor friends here and in Pennsylvania who are in liberal denominations like the United Methodist, United Presbyterian, and Episcopal Churches, who ordain pastors who deny the deity of Christ, the authority of the Bible, and both the resurrection and second coming of Christ.

- C. Here in Peter, their heresies are birthed from their behavior not their beliefs. Peter isn’t writing about people who sat down and decided they couldn’t believe Scripture (not that such people aren’t heretics, too). **But these teachers defy Scripture because their heresy is a cover for their sin--“their *depraved conduct.*”** That means they live to satisfy their senses. **V.10** says they “*follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority*” (meaning the authority of Scripture and those who teach it). The salvation they seemed to embrace never took root. **Heb. 6:8** likens them to a field that drinks in the rain but, instead of a crop, only produces thorns and thistles, and thus is worthless.

## II. THE FALSE TEACHERS AMONG US “SECRETLY INTRODUCE DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES.”

- A. Heresies are invariably tricky. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir sings many of the same hymns we do. They gladly affirm that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But they do not teach that he is one with the Father, “*very God of very God,*” as the Nicene Creed puts it. They do not believe the Old and New Testament Scriptures are the full and final word of God, as Peter affirms here. Their founder, Joseph

Smith, told fantastic—really unbelievable—“fabricated stories.” Like that Peter, James and John appeared to him in 1829 and conferred the Melchizedek priesthood upon him.

**Christian Science** is neither Christian nor science. Their founder, **Mary Baker Eddy**, claimed, “*The Bible has been my only authority,*” yet she also claimed her own divine revelation was equal to Scripture, the glasses through which the Bible is to be read. She said she was “*equal to Jesus Christ, a fulfillment of Bible prophecy of the woman of Revelation 12, the God-chosen revelator for this age, with a superior and final revelation to all that has gone before.*” <http://www.letusreason.org/cults18.htm>

Then there are **Joel and Victoria Osteen and their Lakewood Church**. On the church’s website, under “We Believe,” there is a brief but thoroughly evangelical statement of faith. If you read that you’d think, “*What’s not to like about this?*” I remember the first time I came on Joel Osteen preaching. I had no idea who he was and I heard him begin by telling people to hold their Bibles in the air and say, “*This is my Bible. It is the Word of God. Every word is true.*” I was so impressed I had this church do that the next Sunday! And, man, can that guy communicate! (Of course, if I had his hair, teeth, and suit size I’d probably be in a different league, too!)

**But then you start listening and reading.** Joel Osteen has a recent book with the stunning title, *The Power of I AM*. It’s stunning, first, because that title, I AM, is the name God gives himself. *YAHWEH* means *I AM*. So that book title is pretty audacious, if not blasphemous. Osteen has preached, “*Alright just repeat after me. I am strong. I am healthy. I am confident. I am secure. I am talented. I am creative. I am disciplined. I am focused. I am valuable.*”

*I am beautiful. I am blessed. I am excited about my future. I am victorious. Alright how about amen?"* He said, "When you talk like this, these things will follow you and **God will provide them.**"

Maybe you're thinking, *Well, it's a little over the top for me but what's the harm?* The harm is that none of that is in the Bible, and what *is* central in the Bible Osteen almost never mentions. You won't hear about sin and repentance. You won't learn the message of Romans—or for that matter, 2 Peter. His teaching produces people high on positive mental attitude and hungry for prosperity but ignorant of Scripture. While they're filling hearts with his teaching they are *not* learning love and serve Jesus Christ.

Peter says, "In their greed these teachers will exploit you..." Among other luxuries, the Osteens live in a \$10 million dollar mansion in Houston.

- B. Peter says heresies are *secretly introduced*. They slip in under the radar of the church—like all those Russian ads on Facebook during the election. **Heretics almost always use the same language used by the orthodox**. They use Scripture. Their differences sound pretty subtle. Take the famous **Jehovah's Witnesses's** mistranslation of John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." But the Greek says, "and the Word **was God**." If Jesus, the living and eternal Word, is *a god*, he is not *the God*, and Thomas was wrong when he knelt before the risen Christ and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God."

These subtle changes—about the nature of God the Father, Son or Spirit, or what Jesus accomplished on the cross, or whether Christ literally rose from the dead and will come again—they undermine gospel essentials.

*Illus.:* A friend gave me an interesting article from *ESPN Magazine* about Green Bay’s quarterback, **Aaron Rodgers**. He grew up in a staunchly evangelical home but over some years his questions nagged at him—good questions, like how God could condemn someone who never heard the gospel or who sincerely believed some other religion. “*He started reading books that delved into alternate interpretations of theology,*” says the article. It continues, “*Then, not long after he became the starter in Green Bay in 2008, he met **Rob Bell**, a young pastor from Michigan whom the Packers invited to speak to the team.*”

(I distinctly remember hearing a tape of Bell’s first sermon in his church in Grand Rapids. I’d never heard of him. He preached on Paul’s address to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill. It was good. I thought, *When this guy gets a little experience, he’s going to be a powerhouse preacher.* Now he’s in the Oprah camp.)

The *ESPN Magazine* article says that Rob Bell sent Aaron Rodgers books on all kinds of subjects and they talked often. It says, “*Over time, as he read more, Rodgers grew increasingly convinced that the beliefs he had internalized growing up were wrong, that spirituality could be far more inclusive and less literal than he had thought. As an example, he points to Bell’s research into the concept of hell.... I ask him whether he still sees himself as a Christian, and he says he no longer identifies with any affiliation.*” [“The Search for Aaron Rogers,” by Mina Kimes, 8/30/17]

- C. In **v.3** Peter says, “*these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories.*” The Greek literally says, “*with made up words.*” They made up their teachings, which contrasts directly with those who wrote the Bible: **1:20-21**... That’s not what the false teachers do.

- D. It's bad enough that these teachers undermine our faith in sound doctrine, but they also often lead their followers into sinful behavior. **V.2** says, "*Many will follow their depraved conduct.*" **Alexander Nisbet**, a minister in the 1600s, wrote, "*It is not strange to see that the most dangerous heretics have many followers; every error being a friend to some lust.*" What a wise insight! More on that next week.

### III. THESE FALSE TEACHERS AMONG US ARE A TRIAL TO US

- A. They make our lives difficult. Again, **v.2**, "*Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.*" Another translation of that is "*blaspheme the way of truth;*" which means *desecrate, demean what is holy*. The world won't notice their false teaching but they'll speak ill of our faith because of their **depraved conduct**. People who saw *Marjoe* suspected lots of preachers were like him. Unbelievers think we're the spiritual relatives of the fire and hate heretics, or the money-grubbing heretics, or the loony heretics. *Oh, you're all the same! A bunch of hypocrites!*
- B. These teachers aren't our kin, but they're definitely on our block. All Christians live in a bad neighborhood. We must always be vigilant. Lock your doors. Guard your identity. Study the Scriptures. Fellowship with believers. Be humble.
- C. Peter says Noah was a "*preacher of righteousness.*" He was the only one in the world! No one but his family listened to him. Yet in the midst of a very wicked time, Noah spoke up for God's righteousness. So must we. **Jude** puts in this way in **v.3** of his letter, "*I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once*

*for all entrusted to God's holy people." This is war!  
Contend for the faith.*

*Illus.:* A few years ago I received a letter from some missionary friends, Bruce and Mary Damon, in Macau. Bruce wrote:

In recent months a Christian heresy called "Eastern Lightning" has entered Macau from Mainland China. They proclaim that Jesus has already returned to earth in the form of a Chinese woman! The adherents of this "new revelation" are standing on different street corners in our city each day, offering their literature while standing next to large signboards that state the essentials of their message.

Earlier this week, Mary got into something of an argument with one of the cult members. Normally she would not attempt any such thing—but the woman was her good friend Mrs. Leung. Just last year we wrote to you about how eager she was to learn more about Jesus and the Bible. We had been glad to hear she had begun attending a solid evangelical church near her home. But now this! Please pray with us that God will rescue Mrs. Leung and turn her back to the true Jesus.

- D. These false teachers infest and infect churches, tear apart Christian relationships, they swindle people out of their faith, they ruin the reputation of Christ and his church, they desecrate the holy, they greed instead of grace, and "they promise freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity." So we contend for the faith.

But they will not get away with it. Listen to **vv.3b-10a...**

#### IV. FALSE TEACHERS WILL FACE GOD'S SUDDEN AND TERRIBLE JUDGMENT

- A. Did you notice who these false teachers are like? Fallen angels, a world so wicked they had to be destroyed by the flood, the lascivious and lawless people of Sodom and Gomorrah. That is the category in which false teachers fit.
- B. Notice, too, that Peter's language speaks to those who think they can get away with it, who treat preaching like a racket, who are in the religion game. If God didn't spare angels or the ancient world, or Sodom & Gomorrah yet preserved Noah and Lot "*then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.*" God Almighty will most certainly set things right! Our job is to remain faithful and to contend for the faith till the Lord returns.
- C. This is deadly serious business. No one in Scripture is described as facing more serious threats than these. The rest of this chapter is even more vivid. **V.17** says, "*Blackest darkness is reserved for them.*"
- D. Peter will sum up in the last verses of **ch. 3**, "*Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, **be on your guard** so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. **But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To him be glory both now and forever!"*