

# How to Spot a False Teacher

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[ 0 : 00 ] Chapter 2, verses 1 to 10. False teachers and their destruction. 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. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment.

If he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others. If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless, for that righteous man living among them day after day was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.

If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

[ 1 : 27 ] This is the word of the Lord. Two fun facts about me this evening.

One, my head is far too big for this microphone. And secondarily, I'm a late learner. I only passed my driving test back in September. Now, one of the things I've found as a new driver is that I have a fear of losing my license at any cost.

I'm just terrified when I'm driving that I'm going to lose this new thing that I have that means I can get places. But I've also found that half of my friends, all of a sudden, have become speed camera conspiracy theorists.

Everyone wants to impart their wisdom. Did you know the average speed cameras on the A9? They're fake. You'll never get caught. The speed cameras at the new Forth Bridge, they're just a government ploy to make money.

Speed limits are only a guide anywhere, aren't there? We'll never be convicted if you're only going 15% above. All of a sudden, everyone I know has a new conspiracy theory for me.

[ 2 : 36 ] The thing is, and we all know it, like it or not, speed limits exist for a reason. I'm likely to get fined if I speed, and rightly so. Those encouraging me to speed are encouraging me to take others' safety and my own less seriously.

One can only assume that would make them less safe too. The thing is, I find myself kind of wanting to believe them that maybe I can drive as I want. Maybe I can play into that conspiracy.

But someone who thinks that they are above the law is a danger to themselves and others. And as we get into today's passage, we find that there are people who think that they know better than God about the future, about morality, about theology, who in the end are not just a danger to themselves, but a danger to others too.

If we find ourselves thinking there are no false teachers and that it can never happen to us here in St. Silas, well then, we should think again. Now, very simply, we're going to look at this passage in two sections.

First, the danger of false teachers that they pose to themselves and to others. And secondly, the danger that the Lord poses to the unrighteous, but not others. I also think, I haven't turned my microphone on.

[ 3 : 57 ] Sorry, Greg. This is Peter's second letter to these people, and it seems to assume that the message of the first to live holy lives is still totally relevant, that they're still living in a pagan culture.

And that's a theme carried on in this letter. In chapter three, Peter says of his letters that he has written both of them as reminders to stimulate the youth to wholesome thinking.

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the prophets and the commands given by our Lord and Savior through the apostles. This second letter, then, seems to aim to strengthen their thinking about the future, about Jesus' second coming, about that final judgment and the hope of eternal life.

These ideas seem to be coming under fire in the lives of his readers. So Peter is trying to get them to look back and recall God's dealings with people in the past.

And then to look at his own life with Christ. And the apostles' dealings with Jesus in order to strengthen their convictions for today. Now, the last section we looked at talked about the strength of the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament and the strength of the eyewitness account of Peter and his friends.

[ 5 : 15 ] From that strength, then, he turns to the objections that his readers are surrounded by. Now, we might find sections of this letter hard to read. Maybe we might find them quite harsh, maybe blunt.

But I want us to think that God never speaks unnecessarily. There is never a warning or judgment without there being significant danger to be kept from.

Therefore, in a section where the message of judgment is so strong, we must think that these people are in grave danger indeed. Our first section, then, is verses 1 to 3 about the danger of false teachers.

Peter says that false teachers pose three main dangers. Now, I think we often assume that we would just know if we saw a false teacher. You could see them getting off their jet with their dollar sign necklace, their Daz White suit and Daz White smile.

And, well, we're not wrong, are we? American televangelists and prosperity gospel preachers are false teachers, that's clear. But they're not exactly hard to spot. But if that's our view of false teachers, I'm sorry, that's too easy a target.

[ 6 : 29 ] What if Martin is a false teacher? What if Darren and Roz and Chris and Andy and Michael, what if they are false teachers? What if I'm a false teacher and you're listening to me now and just taking it all in?

Are you convinced that you would know the difference? How would you know? And that there is the first danger of false teachers, says Peter, is that they come from among you and that they bring in their false teaching secretly.

A false teacher may unfortunately not be that easy to spot. Notice that Peter keeps pointing back to the Old Testament in order to get evidence for this. Israel had many false prophets leading people away from the Lord, denying everything from God's holiness to his judgment to his works.

People found living faithfully hard so they found people who would just tell them what they wanted to hear. Many of these prophets did so for their own popularity, for their own gain and many, many, many of Israel were led astray by them.

By the time we get to Elijah's day in Kings, he seems to just be the only one left that really believes that God is to be honoured in Israel. Thankfully, there are some things that mark out false teachers though.

[ 7 : 50 ] First, they will deny the Lord, maybe his authority, maybe his works, his character. Do you hear a preacher talk about themselves rather than the Lord? Well, it might be time to stop listening.

Second, their conduct will be depraved, says Peter. And the emphasis here, if you read through other translations, is that they will be openly or privately sexually sinful and encouraging others to do the same, to be permissive on sexual issues.

If someone claims to be a Christian preacher but their conduct is openly sinful and they hold holiness in low regard, then don't listen. They will lead you astray.

Finally, false teachers are greedy for followers. If you find someone who just wants you to be on their team, who will tell you whatever they need to tell you just to get them to follow them, well then run a mile.

Psalms 12 says this, they lie to their neighbors. They flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts. We must be careful who we listen to and how we listen to them.

[ 8 : 56 ] When you listen to sermons and talks, whether in church or online, when you read Christian books, are you doing so with your brain switched on or just passively absorbing? We must test what we hear lest we are led away by teaching that denies Jesus' authority and the need for people to live holy lives.

The second danger of false teachers then is that they bring the truth into disrepute. Israel, at certain times in the Old Testament, had become a laughing stock. Their enemies looked at them and saw how foolish and how weak they were and mocked.

Israel's conduct made their God look small, pointless and they were living a lie. When false prophets infected Israel, their downfall was inevitable.

When false teachers infect the church, we shouldn't expect to fare any better. False teaching never only impacts one person, it impacts whole communities and churches for generations.

When the church becomes weak on the gospel, permissive of sin, it kills evangelism. There is no more surefire way to make Jesus look pointless and irrelevant than a church full of people who act like he barely matters.

[ 10 : 19 ] False teaching doesn't just make the church look bad, it makes the gospel of Jesus look unattractive and that is a terrible indictment. Finally, the third danger of false teachers is that Jesus in the end will not be discredited.

False teachers will not last forever. Judgment is coming for them, says Peter. In verse 3, hanging over them, their destruction is not asleep. Chilling words that convey a deep warning.

Their destruction isn't asleep, it is merely lurking. Those who are led astray by false teachers will be overcome by the same fate. So false teachers are a danger not just to themselves but to others.

So friends, guard your hearts, guard your minds, and guard your ears. Be careful how you listen, who you listen to, what story do their lives tell, do they honour Christ or are they seeking followers for themselves?

Don't be so naive to think that you won't come across a false teacher here in Glasgow. If the church is to survive, we must constantly be testing everything we hear and holding onto only the true gospel, the one predicted by the prophets, says Peter, the one full of Christ's lordship and holiness, forgiveness, and abundant grace.

[ 11 : 43 ] There is a gospel that looks like it's worth following and a false one is of no comparison. May I say, if you are an older Christian here, you've been walking with Jesus for years, you must make every effort to help us younger Christians hold on to the true gospel.

Those of us who have maybe been Christians for a shorter time, you must seek out wisdom and train yourself to hear the true gospel and know when you're hearing something false. And all of you, our whole church, must hold me and Darren and Andy and Craig and Martin and everyone who teaches, the children and at the front and in every way, you must hold all of us up to Jesus' authority in his word.

If we start disagreeing with Jesus, you must disagree with us. Help us to keep the gospel clear and central. Well, imagine yourself back in the car.

You're driving through a beautiful bit of northwestern Scotland and the highlands. It's a sunset, a long, empty, open road, a beautiful bit of the highlands right in front of you.

Incredible views out from miles in every direction. Think of Applecross or the Norman 500. And then, just out of the corner of your eye, you pass a sign and your blood starts to run cold.

[ 13 : 04 ] You've been enjoying the scene so much that you've been driving at 70 in a 40 zone for 20 minutes. Nightmare. At that point, it's really quite hard to regain the grandeur of the situation, isn't it?

You're not going to love the surroundings because all you can do is fear the inevitable letter that's about to drop through onto your doormat with three points on your license and a massive fine. But, imagine that letter never came.

Imagine you kept driving on that road and though initially kind of tentative and worried, you find yourself going faster and faster, more and more often. You might begin to think that my conspiracy theory friends were right.

Maybe you won't ever get caught. Maybe the restrictions are a lie. But one day, one hidden camera later and you get caught. Not just going over the limit but going at 120 in a 40 zone and bam, huge fine, driving ban, license revoked.

You got complacent, thinking it would never happen and now it's too late. Well, similarly, when we get complacent in our spiritual lives, lax in our holiness, we are in danger.

[14:17] We can easily mistake God's patience, his kindness towards us, for his absence. One day, says Peter, it will be too late.

The second point I want to make in a slightly shorter way is how Peter confirms what he said about false teachers by looking into Israel's past to tell us about our future.

false teachers are dangerous to themselves and others but our second point is that the Lord is only a danger to the unrighteous but not others.

Just because false teachers have not been judged yet doesn't mean that judgment won't come and how God has acted in history confirms this. Verses 4 to 10 are very structured making a pattern of an argument that says if these things in the past were true then how much more after Jesus are they true for us today?

So if you look at those verses you'll find five ifs, two buts, two ands all culminating in a then in verse 9. A structured argument giving evidence for what Peter has said about false teachers.

[15:28] So what is the argument? Well, Peter looks back over Israel's history to see how God has acted so that he can understand how he will continue to act today. He is unchanging.

So we need to look both back to ancient Israel and also to Peter's time in order to understand what this means for us. So what historical evidence does he give?

Well, first he talks about God's judgment on spiritual evil. There are a few parts of the New Testament that testify to God's punishment of spiritual evil, of the demonic, the devil himself, the inevitable and thankfully definite end for them.

We see some of this displayed in the fear of the demons who Jesus casts out in the Gospels, their fear of him and understanding of his authority. Thankfully, our Lord will not let that evil keep going. He will remove it completely and destroy it. This is good news. Secondly, the flood, the ungodly were judged and not spared for their evil behavior, says Peter.

[16:32] And thirdly, the events that took place in Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, this time total destruction for the lawless rebellion against God, done as an example to warn people of the consequences of turning against the living God.

Now painful though that is to hear and we might find in our hearts we react against that, but God is Lord of all creation. He has made it clear time and time again that those who are against him will in the end be destroyed and we can't argue that any of us sitting here don't deserve the same judgment.

We have all sinned and rebelled against God. We are all under his judgment and deserving of his wrath. The Bible's not unclear about that. Notice though in all three instances of judgment what actually happened and this is where those ands and buts come in.

Angels, unlike humans, are completely aware of the consequences of their sin. In the flood, Noah, here described as a preacher of righteousness, warned his generation about the coming judgment and thus he and his family were saved.

Lot, although if you know the story well, hardly a good example in Genesis 19 was distressed by the sinfulness of the people of the city he lived in.

[17:59] According to Peter, he was tormented in his righteous soul by what he saw and heard in those days and he too was rescued and from that we see the pattern of how the Lord works in judgment.

Peter could have called on hundreds of other examples to make this point where we get that then conclusion in verse 9. If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the judgment, the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

Judgment may not have come on false teachers yet, but it is coming. Don't mistake God's patience for his absence and do not separate God's rescue from his judgment.

It comes together. We can't have one without the other. Without judgment there is no rescue. Those Peter is writing to may not see an end to false teaching in their lifetime, but that doesn't mean that false teachers won't go unpunished, nor those that follow them.

Out of that, however, God will always rescue and preserve a righteous people. The Lord is not a danger, to the righteous, but to the unrighteous.

[19:20] To the righteous he is a savior. What raises the stakes even higher for false teachers is verse 10. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise

authority.

And here we see, as at the start, false teachers are likely to be living sinful lives, living in rejection of the Lord's authority as revealed in his word. As Peter looks back in history, we look back to Peter. He walked with Jesus and talked with him and heard him and listened to him preaching to crowds of people and Jesus' words of judgment must have been ringing in Peter's ears when he was writing this.

The memory of what he said to those crowds and therefore it should be rightly ringing in our ears as well. See the judgment God brings in the Old Testament.

Remember, we see that God even more clearly in Jesus and know that judgment isn't just coming but it is assured. It's a judgment that everyone deserves and we can only be saved by being rescued by Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 30 ] Jesus has made it clear that he is coming again and on that day not just the false teachers but all who reject God and live lives about him will be judged and only those who have faith in Jesus will be saved.

So how will Jesus find you either when you die or he comes again? Will he find someone complacent having bought into a false gospel or faithful seeking to live a holy life for his glory? Some of us just need to wake up. The coming judgment is real and we must not live as if it is not coming. This is tough to hear I admit but if it is true we must act.

That judgment is something that we should fear and it should motivate us to a holy life. It must also move us to urgency in our evangelism. Judgment is coming and those outside of Christ will be destroyed.

Our non-Christian friends and family are heading to an eternity in hell if they are not in Christ and we must warn them. May I say if you are here and you do not know Christ this must sound in some ways terrifying but you must fear his judgment.

[ 21 : 47 ] Understand though that what you are offered is a rescue a total and secure rescue but it is not just a rescue it is a relationship with the God who made you and knows you and loves you even with all your faults and failures and wants to rescue you and bring you home to life eternal.

That is not really an offer of rescue but an offer of grace and it is good. As a church we must be very clear that anyone who preaches a gospel without Jesus' authority and without judgment is a false teacher and refuse to listen.

We must all keep in our minds that though we will be judged God has demonstrated that he is more than able to rescue us and in Jesus we have a total secure rescue from God's wrath and in that we can rejoice.

With that thought in our mind then let's turn to prayer using some of the words from the end of this letter. 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 Saviour Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.