



Worthy of Swift Destruction

Series: A Divine Antidote to Heresy

1 Peter 2:1-3

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Introduction: A Review of chapter 1...

Peter's strategy has been through this first chapter to shore up and to strengthen the church, to give support and encouragement to the sheep to which he is undershepherd. He has sought to protect them and encourage them by encouraging and establishing them in the truth, but now he is going to protect them by taking the battle to the false teachers and false prophets who were seeking to lead the church astray. What we will see in chapter 2 flows perfectly from Peter's words at the end of chapter 1. Having explained the grace of God to give us true teachers -- the apostles, and having explained that the OT was written by true prophets through whom God, by His Holy Spirit, has spoken the truth to His people, now he is going to expose the wickedness and the insidious nature of false teachers who have always plagued the people of God.

I want to warn you. Peter's tone here is strong and it's fierce and his tone is that way because of his fierce love for Christ, his fierce love for the church, his fierce love for the gospel and his great scorn and contempt for the false teachers and their wicked attack upon the gospel and the people of God. Peter begins by reminding us first of

1) The ever-present reality and serious danger of false teachers. (v. 1a) Peter writes: **"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you..."**

Having established the faithfulness of the true prophets of God in the OT, Peter immediately tells us that the history of God's people in the OT is strewn with examples of people who claimed to be speaking for God but were really instruments of deception and of sin and so we must expect the same in our age. There are enemies of God in every stage of salvation history. That is what Peter wants to remind us of right here.

As far back as Deuteronomy 13, Moses wrote this strong and clear warning for God's people. This warning, in fact, is given in the light of the binding nature of God's revelation to Israel. They are told in chapter 12 and verse 32: **"Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.**

(Deu 12:32) In light of these words, then Moses says: **(Deut 13:1-5)** You follow the Lord your God, you fear Him and love Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice. Hold fast to God and put the false prophet to death. He is to be cut off from God's people and God's judgment is death. Now obviously as the church, we are not a nation and do not have the power of the sword, but the heart of these words remains binding. God's people are to cut themselves off from any connection or relationship with false teachers. Do you see and hear the intensity of Moses' words?

Love God so much, the God who has redeemed you out of slavery, out of bondage, love Him supremely and with all of your heart and all your soul, that you will not tolerate false teachers and prophets who bring reproach upon the glorious name and person of Christ, but expose them and have nothing to do with them. It is a zeal for God's glory and for His truth that I fear is far too lacking in the effeminized, professing church of this 21st century. Our love for God, our love for His Christ, our love for the truth, our love for the gospel, our love for the people of God, must trump our fear of being labeled intolerant or narrow minded when it comes to the truth of God as revealed in His Word.

It did for Christ when he warned: **(Mat 7:15)** It did for Paul when he wrote: **(Gal 1:9; 2Ti 3:1-9; Titus 3:9-11)** It did for the apostle John when he wrote: **(2Jn 1:7-11)**

I said these words in the first sermon that I preached from this book, but they bear repeating. We live in a time when many of those who profess to be followers of Christ nevertheless believe that the message of Christianity should be pliable and ambiguous, revealing a heart that is more in tune with the culture than with Christ and a heart in love with the spirit of the age rather than filled with the Spirit of Truth. Their "uncertainty" about the clear teaching of the Word of God is really a cloak for worldly living, unholy minds, ungodly behavior, and ecumenism. Many popular preachers of this age reject the transcendent nature of the Bible's message and the gospel and instead pander to the consumer oriented mentality of this age. We are in an age of rapid production and propagation of heresy via TV, radio, internet, books, magazines, seminars and blogs. Well-packaged deceit persuades multitudes to exchange truth for lies. What is worse, many in today's church, some of them popular figures in the church, motivated by a fear of rejection or criticism, motivated by the seductiveness of tolerance, or by

some unbiblical notion of love and unity are unwilling to expose today's apostates. What a refreshingly gutsy and bold and truly pastoral contrast Peter is to these modern day cowards. He has no fear of denouncing the false prophets, exposing their error, immorality and deception.

Beloved, the greatest reality that the world possesses is divine truth, God's truth. And since the greatest reality the world possesses is divine truth, the greatest threat in the world is any idea contrary to that truth. That explains the very black and white nature of what Peter is writing in this letter. The greatest gift the world has is divine truth. Therefore, all faithful servants of God throughout all of redemptive history, all of human history, all faithful servants of God have been given the responsibility to proclaim the truth and refute error, to expose it and destroy it to contend for the truth of God. We would never accept such imprecision and error anywhere else in our lives – not at the doctor's office, not at a restaurant, not at the mechanic – nowhere. If we had a mechanic who worked on our brakes and didn't get it right causing an accident, a doctor who failed to diagnose a fatal disease, we wouldn't excuse it by saying such things as "I know your heart..." or "Your knowledge and belief is a good deal better than your practice..."

Our response to false teachers cannot be one of burying our heads in the sand, nor of lax indifference, nor of searching out commonalities in their message and emphasizing those. Christ, Peter, Moses, John, Paul all call us to faithfulness to God and vigilance. False teachers are the enemies of God and the enemies of our souls. They are a real danger that we need to be wary of and able to identify. There is no threat to the church than false teachers, than those who lie about God, who lie about Christ, who lie about the Holy Spirit, those who ensnare and damn souls by their lies. To that end, Peter exposes in these first few verses

2) The character of false teachers. (1b-3)

Devious in their infiltration and unorthodox in their teaching – "(they) will secretly bring in destructive heresies." Look, we need to understand that false teachers do not come with a sign around their necks advertising them as such. They do not come into the fellowship saying, "let us lead you into destruction, away from Christ and down the path of death." They are smooth and likable men who claim to be followers of Christ. They claim to be servants of Christ who love Him and have a passion to follow Him. These are men who write books and publish articles in magazines like Christianity Today, men who attack the faith from within. They are masters of deception who use Christian terminology and spiritual sounding lingo. They quote

the Bible perhaps and even use what seem to sound like orthodox expressions, but they mean something entirely different. They weasel their way into the community of faith and they secretly bring in, literally “they smuggle in” destructive heresies. They are deceptive, sneaky and undercover. They will smile and sign or give lip-service to doctrinal statements and profess to agree with the church, and then they will sneak in false doctrine in subtle ways. They speak in truisms, packaging their lies in clever, attractive and catchy messages in which they introduce error alongside of the truth. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11: **(2Co 11:13-15)**

They bring in destructive heresies, lies and doctrinal falsehoods that severely damage or destroy the faith of some, that draw people away from the truth, false teaching that steals joy, that draws people into sin and careless living, that destroys Christian families. Their teaching is soul-damning because they

Deny Jesus Christ – “denying the Master who bought them” Now don’t misunderstand what is being said here. Peter is not saying that these false teachers are saved. What he is saying is that these men and women present themselves as part of the people of God, but ironically they deny the very Master, Jesus Christ, they supposedly serve. How do they deny Christ? They may mention Christ, but they undermine His pre-eminence by making Him as our mascot rather than our Monarch, by making Him the means of human self-improvement rather than the Master of church and the creation. They deny His supreme authority by failing to mention His Lordship. They deny Christ by emphasizing the acceptable aspects of His ministry and mission while minimizing or denying those aspects of His person that sinful men find offensive. They deny Christ by denying His sufficiency or the sufficiency of His Word. They deny Christ by redefining the purpose of the church – making it some man-centered organization existing for the betterment and pleasure of man rather than the theater of Christ’s glory and the reward of His suffering, by making Christ a fulfillment guru, by giving people a batch of philosophy and psychology, behavior modification and human pragmatism, by leaving out the cardinal doctrines of the Word of God, and preach a religion which is uncertainty and shifting sand, by making man the hero of the story and Jesus his trusty sidekick who makes all of his selfish dreams come true, by moving Him from the place of pre-eminence and honor and worship, by redefining Him to suit fallen tastes.

They may claim to believe in Jesus but which Jesus? Jesus the liberator? Jesus the tea-partier? Jesus the example? Jesus the life-coach? Jesus the dreamweaver? Jesus the revolutionary? Or Jesus Christ the image of the invisible God, the radiance of the glory of God and the exact

imprint of his nature, by whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, the one before all things, and in whom all things hold together. The head of the church, the victor over hell, sin and death and Satan, the one who bled and died and rose again for the justification of His church, the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Lord of Glory, Lion of Judah, who is the Author and Finisher of our faith He is the beginning, the one who in all things is to be pre-eminent? False teachers deny this Christ, either by ignoring, redefining or minimizing Him. Like Jeremiah wrote of them, these false prophets **think to make my people forget my name...** (Jer 23:27). Unfortunately, however, Peter says they

Have great popularity – “many will follow their sensuality” Many will follow them in their fleshly indulgence. Of course it makes sense that false teachers would be popular. If they speak a message that flatters people rather than calling them to repentance and faith, a message that makes them master over their life, a message that is spiritual and at the self-serving, and that encourages them to exalt and satisfy themselves, to feed their fleshliness rather than calling them to discipleship and faithfulness, that provides a pseudo-religious veneer covering a self-permissive lifestyle, it is not surprising that many will follow. That kind of message makes no demands other than the ones that we want to make upon ourselves. False teachers, by denying Christ, supply a justification for people to do what they want to do any way, to satisfy their lusts. It is no great thing to fill a building with unbelievers, even for a religious service. Just say what they want to hear and justify what they want to do. **(Jer 23:17)** But in this, the false teachers

Bring reproach on the true gospel – “because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed” These false teachers make a mockery of the way of Christ. They mar the reputation of the church and the way of salvation. They make a joke of the manner of life that is to be ours as the people of God, by encouraging the people of God to self-indulgent and self-magnifying living. They give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme, through their minimizing of Biblical truth and by their foolishness they reduce the blood earnestness of the truth of the gospel to the level of a movie or restaurant review and the mission to the level of the local Lion’s Club. But they do not care because they are

Driven by greed and empowered by false words – “in their greed they will exploit you with false words” These false teachers are driven by greed – greed for money, for honor, for prestige, for power, for acclaim and they are willing to exploit, to use people, for their own gain. **Unless those who claim to be God's spokesmen give evidence that their deepest**

motives and life patterns are to honor, glory, and magnify God, and to grow in humility, holiness, and obedience, we can be sure that God has not called or sent them. If they are orientated to money, prestige, recognition, popularity, power, sexual looseness, and selfishness, they do not belong to Jesus Christ. If they are proud arrogant, resentful, egotistical, and self-indulgent, they clearly are false prophets. (John MacArthur) False teachers, driven by greed, exploit people with false words. The word that is translated as false is the word “plastós.” We get the word plastic from it. These false teachers have a plastic message, plastic words. They have a message that is moldable, a gospel that is fake. Just like plastic is fashioned to look like what it is not – metal, wood, leather – their words are molded to look like and sound like what they are not, the life-giving gospel. Plastic theology, molded to deceive. You can see how easily it has happened in the modern church with the gospel.

The common gospel preached now is less shaped by theology and the Word of God than it is by psychology, felt needs, personal success, and fulfilled living. In the name of “positive ministry” many speak only of God’s unconditional love, personal peace, and self-fulfillment. Yes God is loving, but to tell an unrepentant sinner that God loves him and is pleased with him just the way he is, is irresponsible and unbiblical. If people are not confronted with the holiness, justice and wrath of God against their sin and of God’s deep love in sending His Son to be the propitiation for sin then the cross of Christ is emptied of its eternal worth and believing in Christ is reduced to a smart, life-enhancing choice that gets you a more prosperous and fulfilling life.

Contemporary preaching is so shallow and so inundated with humanistic ideas and emotionalism that hearers don’t hear enough gospel to believe or reject. Without the essential Biblical truths of justification by faith, propitiation, expiation, redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, repentance, faith, discipleship, the holiness of God, the Lordship of Christ -- the gospel is not the gospel and Christianity is not Christianity. As a result, people walk the aisle, pray a prayer and sign a card often with no real sense of God’s holiness, their sin and no real understanding of the gospel. It is the very reason why the modern gospel has degenerated into someone imploring you to “Ask Jesus to come into your heart.” And it is why when we ask the average evangelical why they are certain of heaven, we get some response about going forward at a service, praying a prayer or asking Jesus into their hearts and no words about the work of the cross. JI Packer says of these false teachers: **The mark of the false prophet or teacher is self-serving unfaithfulness to God and His truth. It may be that he says what he shouldn’t; but it is far more likely that he will err by failing to say what he should. He will gloss over all the tough questions and issues as did the false prophets in the Old Testament who went around saying, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14). They wouldn't**

speaking the tough word calling for repentance nor suggest that Israel was out of sorts spiritually. Instead they brought groundless comfort, lulling people into a false sense of security so that their hearers were totally unprepared for the judgment which eventually came on them. There are teachers in the church today who never speak of repentance, self-denial, the call to be relatively poor for the Lord's sake, or any other demanding aspect of discipleship. Naturally they are popular and approved, but for all that, they are false prophets. We will know such people by their fruits. Look at the people to whom they have ministered. Do these folks really know and love the Lord? Are they prepared to take risks, even hazard their lives, for Jesus? Or are they comfortable, inactive, and complacent? If so, they are self-deceived, and those who have irresponsibly encouraged their self-deception will have to answer for it. Anyone who is in a position of spiritual leadership who fails to teach the more demanding, less comfortable, "narrow gate" and "rough road" side of discipleship becomes a false prophet. The true prophet or teacher preaches and teaches the message of the Bible, and the other preaches what he thinks the Bible ought to be saying and teaching. The end for these men is that they are

Worthy of destruction – Peter says these are men and women who are “**bringing upon themselves swift destruction**” and though for a time they seem to be flourishing, “**their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.**” Sometimes it is frustrating, wondering why God does not strike down false prophets now but we must remember the words of Galatians 6:7: **Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. (Gal 6:7)**

Do not be fooled, judgment is coming. It will happen according to God's timing. Swift destruction is coming and when it comes, it will be with a ferocity that is awesome. We will look at the nature of this judgment next week.

One of the questions often asked is: “Do these false teachers know what they are doing?” Some certainly do. They have no fear of the Lord at all. And then in light of Matthew 7, I think many of them are not aware. But here is the truth. There is no distinction made in the word of God between those who know that they are leading the people of God astray and those who don't. A man who believes he is called to be a pastor or a teacher ought to make it his business to know the Bible, to know the truth of the gospel, to know God and to tremble before Him as He preaches and teaches the Word of God. Any pastor, preacher, or counselor that does not consider that eternal life is at stake in their preaching, teaching, and counseling is foolish and

lacks the fear of the Lord. For that reason, carelessness in the truth is criminal in the eyes of God and worthy of judgment.

3) What response to false teachers is required for us to be faithful to God?

Pastors must expose the wolves, guard the sheep, and preach the gospel. The responsibility of the pastors and elders is to guard the flock, to be faithful to the word of God, to see that the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth. To the elders in Ephesus, Paul said: **(Act 20:26-32)** Elders are responsible to protect the church from false teachers, aberrant doctrine and falsehood.

The body of Christ must know the Bible and true theology and live it out. You determine to know the gospel backwards and forwards. You determine to know what pleases God according to His Word. You determine to know what the church is about according to the Word of God. You be willing to sacrifice your emotions or what seems right to you or what is pleasing to your flesh to the clear truth of the Word of God. You be discerning with a mind renewed by the Word of God. The reason why false teachers have such a wide audience today among professing Christians is the simple fact that people know hardly anything about theology or biblical interpretation. Today most people spend virtually all their spare time watching television, playing video games or other entertainments. Consequently, when a preacher comes along with some new idea that is heretical and dangerous the people accept it because of the “authority,” charisma and intellect of the pastor instead of the authority of God’s Word. **The message validates the messenger.**

Christians must seek membership and fellowship in a faithful church. This isn’t the only place that preaches the truth -- praise God that is true -- but thank God that it is one that does. That is not what this text or this sermon is about. It is not about elevating this church above other churches. It is about magnifying the truth above error and guarding the people of God from falling away from God. If people attend a church that compromises and does not hold to the truth, then it is virtually inevitable that they will compromise and decline spiritually.

The role of the church is to lift high, to put on display, to magnify, to show forth the truth of God in Christ, the truth of God’s Word, the truth of God’s glory. The church has a responsibility to believe, teach, propagate, uphold and obey what God has revealed, the Bible and the whole **truth** of Christianity. The **church** has a responsibility to keep as a sacred treasure biblical doctrine. She must not modify, ignore, corrupt, add to or detract from the authoritative,

unchanging doctrine of Scripture. One of the **church's** most important responsibilities in upholding the **truth** is warning people regarding false teachers and deviant doctrines. We must continually be on guard against the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees and the false teachers of our age.

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