

# CONSIDER OURSELVES WARNED

## II PETER 2:1-3

**THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THREATS TO OUR HEALTHY CHRISTIAN WALK.**

**WE MUST KNOW WHAT THE THREATS ARE AND HOW TO DEFEAT THEM.**

### Outline

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#### I. WE HAVE AN ENEMY (VS 1)

SADLY, THE DEVIL KNOWS THE BIBLE BETTER THAN WE DO. HE IS ABLE TO USE RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS THAT SOUND SPIRITUAL, BUT IN THE END LEAD TO DESTRUCTION.

A. DESTRUCTIVE TEACHERS

B. DESTRUCTIVE TEACHING

C. DESTRUCTIVE ENDS

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#### II. WE HAVE A DEFENSE (VS 2)

IF WE STUDY THE BIBLE DILIGENTLY AND PURSUE HOLY LIVING, WE WILL BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE FAKE SPIRITUALITY.

A. WHY ARE WE SO EASILY LED ASTRAY?

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### III. WE HAVE A PROMISE (VS 3)

JESUS WILL EXPOSE AND DESTROY FALSE DOCTRINES AND FALSE TEACHINGS.

- A. WHAT MOTIVATES FALSE TEACHERS?
  - B. WHAT IS THEIR APPEAL?
  - C. WHAT IS THEIR DESTINY?
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### II PETER 2:1-3

<sup>24</sup>Here is another story Jesus told: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup>But that night as everyone slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat. <sup>26</sup>When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. <sup>27</sup>The farmer’s servants came and told him, ‘sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds!’

<sup>28</sup> ‘An enemy has done it!’ the farmer exclaimed. ‘Shall we pull out the weeds?’ they asked.

<sup>29</sup>He replied, ‘No, you’ll hurt the wheat if you do. <sup>30</sup>Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds and burn them and to put the wheat in the barn’” Matthew 13:24-30 (NLT).

Jesus told this story to warn us that false teachers and fake Christians will always be part of the church. Jesus simply stated the fact and in this morning’s text, the Apostle Peter warns us to be alert because false teachers will be introducing false theology to

the church that will lead us astray.

The Bible warns us over and over again to be diligent about protecting ourselves from being fooled by false teachers. But the problem is that we don't take warnings seriously.

Let me give you an example. My wife constantly comments on my driving. A car will swerve in front of me and I'll have to hit the brakes. My wife will say, "Why do you have to be so reckless?" If I get caught in the middle of an intersection, she'll say, "You drive so crazy." So I guess over the years, we have kept peace in our marriage because I have learned to tune it all out.

One day, while we were going to dinner, I was going a little fast. She kept nagging at me that I should slow down. I had already tuned her out when all of a sudden, a state trooper pulled me over and gave me a ticket. As we continued on our way, I said, "The guy could have let me off with a warning." My wife said, "You stupid man, I gave you the warning. He gave you the ticket."

The Bible has given us fair warning that the Devil will try and confuse us and get us off track. After listening to what Peter has to tell us in this morning's text we should consider ourselves warned.

From the very beginning of human history, Satan has tried to confuse us about Who God is and who we are in him. God gave Adam and Eve a simple command, "Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Satan managed to take God's words, twist them a little, and get the couple to eat the exact fruit God told them not to eat. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THREATS TO OUR HEALTHY CHRISTIAN WALK. WE MUST KNOW WHAT THE THREATS ARE AND HOW TO DEFEAT THEM.**

In other words, God has given us all we need to successfully navigate through the ups and downs of life. He has given us the Bible to guide us. Throughout the history of Israel and throughout the history of the Christian church, there have always been men and women trying to get us off track by introducing false teachings.

Verse 1 reminds us that we have an enemy. We have an enemy that wants to suck the

joy out of life. The point is this. **SADLY, THE DEVIL KNOWS THE BIBLE BETTER THAN WE DO. HE IS ABLE TO USE RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS THAT SOUND SPIRITUAL, BUT IN THE END LEAD TO DESTRUCTION.**

I am amazed at the number of times people come up and ask me what I think about “The Da Vinci Code” and the latest “Gospel according to Judas.” I think what catches me off guard the most is that these questions often come from people who have been Christians for decades. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised because the Apostle Peter pointed out to his congregations that false prophets were constantly a part of Israel’s history. And further, people were led astray by them. Please look at this in verse 1. He starts out using the past tense. Israel always had false prophets making their appearance alongside of true prophets. Oftentimes, false prophets were employed by Israel’s leaders. They were popular with Kings and princes because they told them what they wanted to hear.

Then look at the second half of the first sentence. Peter shifts to the future tense. Peter’s point is this. It is a fact that wherever God’s people are gathered together as a community, there will always be the danger of false teachers making an appearance and spreading false teaching and false doctrine. There have been several times since I have been here at Devon Church that people have tried to introduce false doctrine. I am very happy to say that your leaders have recognized false doctrine immediately and put it to rest. I think it is simply a fact, like Jesus’ parable illustrated, that wherever God’s truth is being taught, Satan will try and introduce false teaching.

So I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that people ask these questions about “The Da Vinci Code” or “The Judas Gospel” or whatever crazy form of so-called spirituality makes an appearance. But I do say that I am kind of disappointed that people who have been Christians for a long time are still easily confused.

Why? Because as the verse goes on to say, these teachers introduce destructive teachings. Look at the middle section in verse 1. The sentence starts out, “They will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” Let me start with the word destruction. It is used 3 times in the three verses we are looking at this morning. The word destruction in Greek comes from the word *Apoleios*. It means to kill, to destroy, to perish, to

lose, to be lost, or to lose one's purpose or effectiveness. The Bible gives the name *Apollyon* to the devil. He is a destroyer. Peter uses such a strong word because if you follow a false teacher and start to believe false teaching, Satan will destroy your life, your soul, and at times, local churches. Peter wants us to get the idea that our very souls and our eternal salvation are at stake.

Next, he uses the word heresies. Today, the word heresy has a negative connotation. But in Peter's day, the word was simply used to describe a particular school of thought. For example, if we were students of the philosopher Plato, we would study Plato's heresies. But the fact that Peter puts the qualifier destructive before it, makes it negative. The word heresy evolved into a negative word basically through the church. Any school of thought that sets itself up against the word of God is a destructive heresy.

Peter reminds us that Satan is clever. These false teachers secretly introduce these false teachings. How do they do it? In Peter's day, as well as ours, they would use religious language, perhaps even use the Name of Jesus, talk about the Spirit of God, and use God language. They would talk about prayer, meditation, study, and knowledge. Let me give you an example. I really hate wasting time on and giving publicity to Dan Brown and his "The Da Vinci Code," because it is just stupid to think people can actually be confused by it. First of all, Dan Brown wrote this book as fiction. Did you hear that? It's fiction. He is not trying to sell this as truth.

But here is the hook. It takes place in the context of the historical church. People have a natural hatred towards the church. All throughout history people have hated God's people and the things of God. If the Gospels can be discredited, then Jesus can be discredited. If Jesus can be discredited, then there is no need to worry about holy living. Dan Brown then takes a figure, Leonardo Da Vinci, who was historical, and then points to the painting "The Last Supper," in which Da Vinci appears to paint a woman in the place where the Apostle John should be. At the very least, he paints John as very effeminate. Brown then goes back to things like the Gnostic writings and concocts a story that Jesus had sex with Mary Magdalene and they had a baby girl. After the death of Jesus, Mary and the little girl escape to France and the faithful protect the bloodline of Jesus.

If you have been a Christian for 10 or 15 or more years, do you really need to ask if this is authentic? I don't think so. If you do, it tells me that you have not been reading and studying the Bible.

In the Judas gospel, the theme follows typical Gnostic thought. The body is bad and the spirit is good. And knowing the secret knowledge is what enlightens us. In this document, Jesus shares secret knowledge with Judas. That secret knowledge is that the Spirit of Jesus plans on escaping the body. The body will be put to death through crucifixion and Jesus wants Judas to help Him get crucified. So the theme is that Judas is actually the hero of the story because only he and Jesus know the plan.

Are there people here who are really confused by this? I hope not. Look, here is the hook. These false teachers use words like Jesus, Spirit, The Christ, Heaven, Angels, Holy, etc. They take words that are part of the Jewish-Christian vocabulary, and then define them in ways that are much different than the way they were traditionally defined.

Don't always get interested in programs or people who use religious language or perform miracles, or give prophecies or promise blessings. There is as much garbage out there today as there was in Peter's day.

Here is the very simple test. False teachers will end up by denying Jesus Christ either by theology or by behavior. Again, look at the language. Peter says they will "even deny(ing) the sovereign Lord Who bought them."

In cults like Jehovah's witnesses and Mormons, it is easy to detect the fact that they are false religions. Just ask them Who Jesus is? Peter describes Jesus here as the sovereign Lord. In other words, Jesus has passed from the Suffering Servant, the Lamb of God, to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus is a part of the triune God we worship. He is in control of the universe and will come again to judge the living and the dead. Almost every false teaching will try to dilute the person of Jesus. In other words, they will accentuate the humanity of Christ and downplay or deny the deity of Christ. There are actually so-called "Christians" who say that Jesus did not physically rise from the dead. They say that it is the institutional memory of His love that is resurrected in the church. They deny the historical accuracy of the Gospels. Listen to people talk about Christ. You will

determine very quickly if they are false teachers.

There are some people who talk all the right stuff about Jesus, but live in total contradiction to what Jesus taught. In Peter's day, and shortly after, the Gnostics believed that since the body was evil and would someday perish, it didn't matter what they did. They claimed to be followers of Jesus, but participated in every type of sexual perverted acts we can think of. There are many teachers and people in churches who claim to be Christian but participate in every type of sexual and immoral behavior.

They also dilute the person of Christ by saying things like Jesus was a manifestation of the Christ Spirit. Then they go on to say things like Buddha, Gandhi, and others were manifestations of the Christ Spirit. People have denied Jesus in all sorts of different ways. Today the destructive teaching is that all religions are equally good and equally true. I hear people say all the time that it doesn't matter what religion you believe in, just so you are a good person, you'll go to heaven. Everybody has to follow what he or she believes.

Think about Who these people are denying and what they are denying. Peter says that if we claim to be a Christian, say and do things like this, we are denying our very salvation. Jesus, through His death and resurrection redeemed us. He purchased our freedom from sin. If we deny our redeemer, we are denying our very redemption.

And as the last phrase in verse 1 points out, false teachers and all who follow them will come to a destructive end. There is that word destruction. The devil is known as The Destroyer. These false teachers and those who end up following them will end losing their souls. In other words, they have sold their souls to the devil. The end, and their judgment will overtake them like a thief in the night. They will be talking and doing their thing, thinking they are right with God, and then all of a sudden, they will find themselves before the judgment seat of Jesus, and then in Hell. It will be swift and final.

I hear public figures make so many rash statements about the nature of God, the nature of the Bible, and what salvation is all about. The thing is, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. I'm planning on going there with my sovereign Lord Who redeemed me, since I know I cannot possibly stand there on my own.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised at the number of church going people who are all confused by false teachers, television preachers and miracle workers, and other crazy spiritualities out there because, **SADLY, THE DEVIL KNOWS THE BIBLE BETTER THAN WE DO. HE IS ABLE TO USE RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS THAT SOUND SPIRITUAL, BUT IN THE END LEAD TO DESTRUCTION.**

Sometimes I think that we fail because we are just plain lazy or we really don't want to humble ourselves and submit to the teachings of the Bible. But verse 2 reminds us that we do have a defense. In other words, **IF WE STUDY THE BIBLE DILIGENTLY AND PURSUE HOLY LIVING, WE WILL BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE FAKE SPIRITUALITY.** Here is another thing that amazes me. There are people who have been Christians for many years, and they actually think they are pretty good. When I come across people who think they are doing o.k. in their Christian walk, I know one of two things; Either they are not seriously reading their Bibles or they are not honestly evaluating their lives. Here's a pretty good test. When people ask you how they can pray for you, do you have a lot of sins that come to mind that you need help with? Often times when I ask people how I can pray for them, most of the time they ask help for their health or problems their facing. Rarely do I run into people that say, "Pray that I learn to control the words that come out of my life. Pray that I learn to submit to my wife or husband better. Pray that I quit holding on to my anger. Pray that I learn to be more humble and submit to God's word." I know there are many of you out there that indeed ask me to pray like that. I can assure you that you are on the right track.

Let's start by asking, "Why are we so easily led astray?" Look how Peter starts out verse 2. He says that many will follow these false teachers. Remember, he is addressing his congregations. These are supposedly Christians. Remember, these false teachers have always used, and will continue to use religious words. Listen to some of titles of false writings; The Book of Enoch, The Assumption of Moses, The Martyrdom of Isaiah, The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Mary, The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Truth, The Epistle of Barnabas, and the list goes on. Did you notice they use names and concepts of famous biblical characters, famous prophets and apostles?

People would hear the word Gospel, or Moses, or Thomas, Mary, or Barnabas, and recognize them as familiar thoughts or names they recognized. Peter's congregations had their Hebrew Bibles, but the New Testament hadn't been codified yet. But for us, I would say that most Christians don't read and meditate on the Bible. My guess is that not many Christians have even read the Bible through. Have you read through the entire bible? If not, why? And when you read, do you let the bible correct your thinking and behavior?

Because that's what Peter goes on to say. Many of us will end up following these false teachers and false theologies into wrong thinking and wrong behaving. Sometimes we like to follow these false teachings and false theologies because they allow us to follow our own lusts, desires, and personal agendas. I know I shouldn't be surprised but it always catches me off guard when I read the statistics taken among believers of how many are have sex outside of marriage, how many are having adulterous affairs, how many are hooked on drugs, pornography, or other things. And they still believe they are right with God.

How can that be? What kind of theology or teaching says that we can be living unholy lives and still be right with God?

As Peter goes on to point out, when Christians, don't read, submit to, and obey the Bible, we are actually bringing dishonor to our Lord's Name. If you are a Christian who does not understand the plain truths of the Bible, please do not tell people you are a Christian. If you are living an immoral life, please don't tell people you are a Christian. If you are always unhappy and living defeated, please don't tell people you are a Christian. If you are angry and unforgiving, please don't tell people you are a Christian. If you are prejudiced, again, please don't tell people you are a Christian. And especially, if you think you are good in any way, please, please don't tell people you are a Christian. Because we bring dishonor to the Name of Jesus.

I have heard Christians say the most stupid and wrong things you could possibly imagine. What they were saying and teaching were exactly the opposite of what the Bible teaches. They should shut up. I have seen Christians act so unkindly, they should never tell anybody they are a Christian.

We bring credit and honor to the Name of Jesus by knowing, sharing, and living the truths of the Bible. If we want to successfully avoid being confused by false teachings and false theologies, let's remember that the best defense is a good offense. Get committed to reading and studying the Bible. Get into some sort of small group experience where you can be held accountable for your thoughts and actions.

When I went to Costa Rica , I lived with a family who was an average family. They didn't have any special education. But here is what was remarkable about them. They got up every morning at four o'clock and read the Bible together as a couple. They belonged to a small group at church and they went to do ministry regularly. They didn't need any special theological training to recognize false teaching or wrong behavior. Their lives were bathed in and saturated by the Word of God. They lived and breathed the truth of the Bible. They studied the Word of God and practiced holy living. That's the best defense. We must submit our pride and everything to the plain teachings of the Bible and we must practice living holy lives. There are plenty of opportunities to be in small groups, to be held accountable, and to study the Bible. But each one of us must seek those opportunities out ourselves. Our defense against being sucked into false teaching is this. **IF WE STUDY THE BIBLE DILIGENTLY AND PURSUE HOLY LIVING, WE WILL BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE FAKE SPIRITUALITY.**

As I have been writing and thinking about this sermon, it occurred to me that oftentimes I come across as overly pessimistic. I think from a human perspective, I have portrayed culture and life accurately. I don't think it takes much observation to see the world is getting worse and worse. We can see that evil is increasing at alarming rates. But like I said, that is from a human perspective. However, we are called to adopt a supernatural view. In other words, even though we live in this world, we actually belong to the Kingdom of God . We are called to live with hope, joy, and courage because as verse 3 points out, we have a promise. The promise is this. **JESUS WILL EXPOSE AND DESTROY FALSE DOCTRINES AND FALSE TEACHINGS.** I don't necessarily think we should go out hunting for false teachers. We have enough to do by keeping our local church free from false teachers, false teachings, and false doctrines. We must keep watch over our own souls, our families' souls, and the church's soul. If we have been diligently studying our bibles and

pursuing holy living, we can easily detect false teachers and false teachings.

First, examine what motivates false teachers. Peter starts out verse 3 by saying they are motivated by greed. This is greed for money, power, and fame. I certainly don't think I'm very intelligent, but I think I know enough that if some preacher gives me a prayer cloth or some holy water, or some holy oil, and tells me that if I send him some money that God will hear my prayer and bless me, that guy is a false teacher. Watch out for religious people who seek money, fame, or power. Those three things are very seductive. Add to that, that from other places in Scripture we see that false teachers often live secretly immoral lifestyles.

But what is their appeal that so many people are led astray? Peter says these false teachers exploit us with stories they have made up. We all have this secret desire to be rich, powerful, and famous. Oftentimes in history Christians find themselves disenfranchised from the cultures in which we live. When we see the flamboyant preachers performing all sorts of miracles, it appeals to our desires. When they promise health, wealth, and prosperity, and tack God's Name onto it, we easily fall prey to them because we so desire health, wealth, and prosperity, that we forget all the examples in the Bible that demonstrate clearly that the closer we come to living God's holiness and righteousness, the more we will suffer.

The problem is that these false teachers appeal to our ungodly desires. And they tell great stories. They call them "testimonies." You see that's another Christian word. I know many people say to me, "Sure you can recognize these false teachers, but I never went to seminary." Listen, let's again pick on poor Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code," and the latest craze, "The Judas Gospel." Just try this experiment. Go and buy a simple bible commentary or home bible study guide on I and II Peter. Do a personal bible study through the I and II Peter. I promise you, you will get a whole education on the Gnostic books these false teachings are based on. Now if that's the case, sadly I have to tell you that the reason you don't know about these things are simply because you have been lazy and not studying your bibles all these years.

Look, I'm no different. If I spent as much time in study, prayer, and meditation as I do playing, watching television, or with entertainment, I could easily conquer some of the bad attitudes and behaviors I struggle with.

These false teachers appeal to the worst thoughts and desires we have. We, just like the crowds in Jesus' day want to see manifestations of power and miracles. The crowds cheered Him when He fed them and healed them. They cried out, "Crucify Him," when He called them to live pure and holy lives. These false teachers and stories have been around from the beginning of the church, and they will be with us to the end. The early church father Irenaeus said of these stories, "There are as many systems of redemption as there are teachers of these mystical doctrines."

These false teachers easily fool us because deep down we desire what they are selling. We desire health, wealth, and prosperity. And that's what they are selling. Jesus promised suffering and death. To be sure He promised us a bunch of peace, joy, and contentment through it all, but if I'm not mistaken, Jesus commands us to lay aside our personal desires, pick up our crosses, and follow Him. Spend time reading the Bible, ... the whole Bible, ... and pursue a holy lifestyle, and these false teachers and what they are teaching will not appeal to us in the least. I remember one afternoon Henry and I were sitting on my deck. We were talking about this Toronto Airport Church where people were finding gold in their mouths during the service. People were flying in from all over the world to attend the church and discover gold in their mouths. Henry asked me if I was going to go. I said, "No, I don't need gold, I need holiness. If I could control the words that come out of my mouth, I would be happy. I don't need to find gold in my mouth, I need to find holy words coming out of my mouth." I can tell you very plainly, I need holiness, not health, wealth, or power. Remember, we can only be fooled by them if we allow them to appeal to our sinful desires. We can easily keep on track by diligently studying Scripture while pursuing holiness in our everyday lives.

The last sentence in verse 3 describes the greatest promise of all. It describes the destiny of false teachers. Here is that word destruction again. These false teachers, false preachers, false prophets, and false miracle workers have destroyed the lives of many Christians who have been fooled by them. Satan has destroyed many Christians' lives. But in the end, God will judge Satan, his false prophets, preachers, and teachers, ... along with all who have followed them. All the false teachers, prophets, and preachers will find out exactly Who Jesus is when He comes to judge the living and the dead. **JESUS WILL EXPOSE AND DESTROY FALSE**

## **DOCTRINES AND FALSE TEACHINGS.**

We started here and we shall end here. The whole question is “Who is Jesus?” Jesus indeed was the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. He is the only way to salvation. He suffered and died so that when we surrender our lives to Him in faith, we are forgiven for all our sins and given eternal life. But He is also The King of kings and the Lord of lords Who will return like a thief in the night to judge the living and the dead. The Bible warns us time and time again to be on guard. We do that by studying the Bible diligently and pursuing holy lifestyles. We need to consider ourselves warned because **THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THREATS TO OUR HEALTHY CHRISTIAN WALK. WE MUST KNOW WHAT THE THREATS ARE AND HOW TO DEFEAT THEM.**

The sad thing is that many of us will leave here this morning and not take this warning seriously. That seems to be human nature. *Leadership Magazine* gives this illustration about human nature.

“The May 1984 *National Geographic* showed through color photos and drawings the swift and terrible destruction that wiped out the Roman Cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 B.C.

The explosion of Mount Vesuvius was so sudden, the residents were killed while in their routine: men and women were at the market, the rich in the luxurious baths, slaves at toil. They died amid volcanic ash and superheated gasses. Even family pets suffered the same quick and final fate. It takes little imagination to picture the panic of that terrible day.

The saddest part is that these people did not have to die. Scientists confirm what ancient Roman writers record – weeks of rumblings and shakings preceded the actual explosion. Even an ominous plume of smoke was clearly visible from the mountain days before the eruption. If only they had been able to read and respond to Vesuvius’s warning!

There are similar “rumblings” in our world: warfare, earthquakes, the nuclear threat, economic woes, breakdown of the family and moral standards. While not exactly new, these things do point to a coming day of Judgment. People need not be caught

unprepared. God warns and provides an escape to those who will heed the rumblings.”

Let’s consider ourselves warned. There are all sorts of false teachings out there. They appeal to our sinful desires so we are easily fooled. The way to stay on track is by diligently studying our Bibles and practicing holy living. Jesus will come to judge our thoughts, words, and behaviors.