

## 2 Peter 2

# HOW TO DEAL WITH FALSE TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

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### Student Guide

*J. Oswald Sanders often spoke about Christian character and the devil's attempt to destroy a believer's witness through it. One particular strategy Sanders frequently revealed concerned the devil's use of false teachers (Acts 20:30; II Peter 2:1). These false workers in God's Kingdom specialize in "damnable heresies." They "creep in privily" into the churches and subtly mix truth with error. Though they profess a message from God, in reality they draw inspiration from hell. False Christs (Matt. 24:4-5), deceitful workers (II Cor. 11, 13), and false brethren (Gal. 2:4-5) work to undermine God's church. In chapter two, Peter guides the church through these dangerous waters in dealing with false teaching.*

#### 1. Christians Must Learn how to Detect False Teaching (vv. 1-10a)

Peter opens this chapter with a section comparable to Jude's epistle in which some of the same phrases are used. With Jude Peter exposes the danger of false teachers. Furthermore, one must remember that there is an important distinction to be made between a false teacher who teaches dangerous heresy and a sincere Christian who is mistaken and/or ignorant concerning a particular doctrine. False teachers are professing Christians who know the truth but who selfishly promote themselves through deliberate lies (cp. 2:3, 14).

Thus, Peter begins his answer on how to detect false teaching by describing the *defection* of false teachers. Of all the descriptors of their defection at Peter's disposal, he chose to speak first of their *condemnation*. Peter calls their teaching "damnable heresies." False teachers were, therefore, defective in their method. The false teachers brought alongside Biblical truth their clever teachings and twisted sayings. They may even use the same language; however, they mean something entirely different with their words.

Second, false teachers were also defective in *message*. A sure key to detecting false teaching pertains to the death of Jesus. Did Jesus die for the sins of the whole world as Scripture maintains? Not only does Peter describe the *defection* of false teachers, he also describes their *deception* (vv. 2-3a). The moral lives of false teachers are totally bankrupt. Following unbridled lust and extreme debauchery they show no shame toward their ways. False teachers may use the Christian's vocabulary but they do not use the Christian's dictionary.

Finally, Peter describes the *destruction* awaiting false teachers (vv. 3b-10a). Hence, neither human sinners nor angelic sinners escape judgment upon sin. What is more, while catastrophe came upon the old world in the form of flood (v. 5) and fire (vv. 6-9), God delivered His righteous ones from His wrath for He "knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

**Question:** *Do you think the church is too lenient on false teachers or too hard? Explain your answer.*

#### 2. Christians Must Learn how to Reject False Teaching (vv. 10b-17)

Second Peter tells us we must inspect the teaching of false prophets if we are to expose their dangerous error. The Apostle painfully explains how believers are to inspect doctrine to discern its truth or error. Three areas present themselves to the Christian for examination. *First, note the intellectual area and ask, is there intellectual daring?* Peter insists that false teachers *abuse* their intellect. They portray neither reverence for God nor the sacred in general. In short, they dethrone God

and sit proudly upon the top of life. Moreover, not only do they *abuse* the intellect, they *abandon* it as well. False teachers similarly follow their unchecked passions not allowing their unique human faculties to prohibit barbarian behavior.

*Second, note the moral area and ask, are there actions which are morally disturbing?* (vv. 13-16). While Peter's emphasis is primarily on doctrinal error, when detecting false teaching, the moral lives of the teachers cannot be skirted. Peter insists immoral living *dissipates* the church. It breaks down the moral strength of the whole. In addition, moral laxity *disgraces* the church.

*Third, note the spiritual area and ask, is there spiritual deception?* Peter gives two graphic illustrations (v. 17). False teachers are dry wells; while they seem to have answers, when they are examined in light of the Word of God, they are quickly exposed as cracked cisterns. False teachers can no more quench our spiritual thirst than clouds without rain can soak a parched land.

**Question:** *Do you think the church today adequately prepares Christians to deal with intellectual issues? Explain. What are some ways the church might deal with a lack of intellectual preparation?*

### **3. Christians Must Learn how to Correct False Teaching (vv. 18-22)**

This portion of Peter's letter may represent the strongest language thus far in dealing with false teaching. The horrid portrait Peter paints graphically depicts what sin can and ultimately does do to someone who has never been saved. Several facts about false teachers become clear.

*First, their pronouncements are false* (v. 18). False teachers flatter and amuse while they chip away at a person's resistance. The longer one sits under a false teacher, the more immune one becomes to fundamental truth. Even more, not only is their speech *empty*, it is also *evil*.

*Second, their promises are false* (v. 19). False teachers promise "liberty" to their hearers. How easy to get a following by promising liberty. However, our liberty in Christ was never intended to be a free pass to live loose lives. We cannot confuse liberty with license. There is a bondage which is liberty and a liberty which is bondage. Christian liberty does not mean one does what one wants but does what Christ wants.

*Third, their professions are false* (vv. 20-22). He is referring to false teachers, teachers who have crept into the fellowship of the church and remain unsaved. They are not sheep; according to Peter, hogs and dogs constitute more accurate similes. Why? Peter offers three reasons. First, they *reform outwardly*. False teachers "escape pollution" of the world. In short, though they have a relatively clean public persona, their inward lives remain morally corrupt. Therefore, secondly, they *return eventually*. One may only pretend to be a sheep for so long. But since the nature within has not been transformed, eventually the unsaved person will be exposed.

**Question:** *Reflect for a moment on your church. Has your church ever had to deal with false teaching? Be very careful in discussing this issue not allowing it to become a session where accusations are made. Perhaps your pastor could lead a short discussion on how the church deals with error.*

### **Wrap Up**

*Peter deals with one of the most difficult but nonetheless necessary issues the church faces: how to discern false teaching. By inspecting and rejecting false teaching the church can remain healthy until Jesus comes. In addition, the greatest deterrent to false doctrine is solid Bible study and Biblical preaching.*