

BEWARE OF COUNTERFEITS

2 Peter 2:1–9 *“¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned. ³ And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words, their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ⁴ For if God did not spare angels who sinned, but cast them into the pit and delivered them to chains of darkness, being kept for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; ⁷ and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,”*

Do you know why most businesses will not accept bills greater than a twenty-dollar bill? It's because larger bills are a much greater counterfeit risk.

Of course, the problem of counterfeiting is nothing new and is relevant to Christians. The spiritual counterfeit is Satan, the “great imitator” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15). He has been a threat to mankind ever since he deceived Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:1–7; 2 Corinthians 11:1–4). He has produced false Christians (Matthew 13:38; John 8:44), a false gospel (Galatians 1:6–9), and even a false righteousness (Romans 9:30–10:4). One day, he will present to the world a false Christ (2 Thessalonians 2).

The nation Israel was constantly being led astray by false prophets. Elijah had to contend with the prophets of Baal, but they promoted a pagan religion. It was the Jewish false prophets who did the most damage, for they claimed to speak for Yahweh God. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel exposed this counterfeit ministry, but the people followed the pseudo-prophets just the same. Why? Because the religion of the false prophets was easy, comfortable, and popular. The fact that the false prophets preached a false peace did not worry the people (Jeremiah 6:14). That was the message they wanted to hear!

The Apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church and then passed from the scene (Ephesians 2:20). This is why Peter wrote about false *teachers*, rather than false prophets, because there are still teachers in the church. It is not likely that church members would listen to a “prophet,” but they would listen to a teacher of the Word. Satan always uses the approach that will succeed.

To warn us to be alert, Peter presented three aspects of this subject of false teachers in the church.

The False Teachers Described (2 Peter 2:1–3) ¹ *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.* ² *And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.* ³ *And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words, their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.*

This is not a very pretty picture! When you read the Epistle of Jude, you will find him using similar language, and vivid language it is. Peter knew that the truth of God’s Word and the false doctrines of the heretics simply could not coexist. There could be no compromise on his part, any more than a surgeon could compromise with a cancerous tumor in a patient’s body.

Deception (v. 1a). This theme runs throughout the entire chapter. To begin with, these teachers’ message is false; Peter called what they taught “*destructive heresies*.” The word *heresy* originally meant simply “to make a choice,” but then it came to mean “a sect, a party.” Promoting a party spirit in a church is one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). Whenever a church member says to another member, “Are you on my side or the pastor’s side?” he is promoting a party spirit and causing division. A false teacher forces you to make a choice between his doctrines and the doctrines of the true Christian faith.

Not only was their message false, but their methods were false. Instead of openly declaring what they believed, they came into the church under false colors and gave the impression that they were true to the Christian faith. “*They secretly bring in alongside*” is the literal translation. They do not throw out the truth immediately; they simply lay their false teachings alongside the truth and give the impression that they believe the fundamentals of the faith. Before long, they remove the true doctrine and leave their false doctrine in its place.

In 2 Peter 2:3, Peter pointed out that the false teachers used “feigned words.” The Greek word is *plastos*, from which we get our English word *plastic*. *Plastic words!* Words that can be twisted to mean anything you want them to mean! The false teachers use our vocabulary, but they do not use our dictionary. They talk about “*salvation*,” “*inspiration*,” and the great words of the Christian faith, but they do not mean what we mean. Immature and untaught believers hear these preachers or read their books and think that these men are sound in the faith, but they are not.

Satan is a liar and his ministers are liars. They use the Bible, not to enlighten, but to deceive. They follow the same pattern Satan followed when he deceived Eve (Genesis 3:1–6). First, he questioned God’s Word—“*Yea, hath God said?*” Then he denied God’s Word—“*Ye shall not surely die.*” Finally, he substituted his own lie—“*Ye shall be as gods.*”

Keep in mind that these apostate teachers are not innocently ignorant of the Word, as was Apollos (Acts 18:24–28). They know the truth, but they deliberately reject it. I read about a liberal pastor who was asked to read a paper at a ministerial conference on “Paul’s views of justification.” He read a paper that superbly presented the truth of the Gospel and justification by faith.

“*I didn’t know you believed that,*” a friend said to him after the meeting.

“*I don’t believe it,*” the liberal pastor replied. “*They didn’t ask me for my views of justification. They asked for Paul’s!*”

Denial (v. 1b). False teachers are better known for what they deny than what they affirm. They deny the inspiration of the Bible, the sinfulness of man, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross, salvation by faith alone, and even the reality of eternal judgment. They especially deny the deity of Jesus Christ, for they know that if they can do away with His deity, they can destroy the entire body of Christian truth. Christianity is Christ, and if He is not what He claims to be, there is no Christian faith.

It must be made clear that these false teachers are unsaved. They are compared to dogs and pigs, not to sheep (2 Peter 2:22). Jude describes these same people, and in Jude 19 he clearly states, “*having not the Spirit.*” If a person does not have the Spirit of God within, he is not a child of God (Romans 8:9). He may pretend to be saved and even become a member or an officer in a fundamental church, but eventually he will deny the Lord.

In what sense were these people “*bought*” by the Lord? While it is true that Jesus Christ died for the church (Ephesians 5:25), it is also true that He died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). He is the merchant who purchased the whole field (the world) that He might acquire the treasure in it (Matthew 13:44). When it comes to

application, our Lord's atonement is limited to those who believe. But when it comes to *efficacy*, His death is sufficient for the whole world. He purchased even those who reject Him and deny Him! This makes their condemnation even greater.

Even good and godly Christians may disagree on fine points of doctrine, but they all agree on the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God and God the Son. He is the only Savior. To deny this is to condemn your own soul.

Sensuality (v. 2). *Pernicious ways* simply mean "*licentious conduct.*" Jude accused the false teachers of "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). Now we understand why they deny the truths of the Christian faith: they want to satisfy their own lusts and do it under the guise of religion. The false prophets in Jeremiah's day were guilty of the same sins (Jeremiah 23:14, 32).

The fact that *many* follow the evil example of their conduct is proof that people would rather follow the false than the true, the sensual rather than the spiritual. These false teachers are very successful in their ministry! They have glowing statistics to report, and crowds gather to hear them! But statistics are not proof of authenticity. The broad way that leads to destruction is crowded (Matthew 7:13–14). Many will claim to be true servants of Christ but will be rejected on the last day (Matthew 7:21–23).

What happens to their followers? For one thing, they bring disgrace to the name of Christ. The Christian faith gets a bad name because of their ungodly lives. "*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate*" (Titus 1:16). "*For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you*" (Romans 2:24). Few things hinder the cause of Christ more than the bad reputations of professing Christians who are members of orthodox churches.

Greed (v. 3). False teachers are interested in one thing: *making money*. They exploit ("*make merchandise of*") ignorant people and use their religion as "*a cloak of covetousness*" (1 Thessalonians 2:5). Our Lord was a poor Man, and so were the Apostles; yet they gave of themselves to minister to others. These false prophets are rich men who cleverly get others to minister to them! Micah described these false prophets in his day: "*Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money*" (Micah 3:11). Certainly, the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7), but his motives for ministry had better go beyond money. It has often been said that immorality, love of money, and pride have been the ruin of many people. These false teachers were guilty of all three!

They use their *“plastic words”* as well as *“great swelling words”* (2 Peter 2:18) to fascinate and influence their victims. They flatter sinners and tell them the kind of ego-building words that they want to hear (see the contrast in 1 Thessalonians 2:5). They will scratch the itching ears of people who reject the truth of the Bible and turn to fables (2 Timothy 4:1–4). Religion can be a tremendous tool for exploiting weak people, and these false teachers use religion just to get what they can. They are not ministers; they are merchandisers.

The true minister of Jesus Christ has nothing to hide: his life and ministry are an open book. He preaches the truth in love and does not twist the Scriptures to support his own selfish ideas. He does not flatter the rich or minister only to make money. Paul described the true minister in 2 Corinthians 4:2—*“But [we] have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”* Contrast that description with what Peter wrote in this chapter, and with what Jude wrote, and you will see the difference. How we need to be alert and refuse to support ministries that exploit people and deny the Savior.

The False Teachers Destroyed (2 Peter 2:3–6, 9b) ³ *And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words, their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.* ⁴ *For if God did not spare angels who sinned, but cast them into the pit and delivered them to chains of darkness, being kept for judgment;* ⁵ *and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;* ⁶ *and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter...^{9b} and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,”*

Peter saw no hope for these heretics; their doom was sealed. His attitude was different from that of “tolerant” religious people today who say, “Well, they may not agree with us, but there are many roads to heaven.” Peter made it clear that these false teachers had *“forsaken the right way”* (2 Peter 2:15), which simply means they were going the *wrong* way! Their judgment was sure, even though it had not yet come. The trial was over, but the sentence had not yet been executed. It would not linger or slumber, Peter affirmed; it would come in due time.

In this section, Peter proved that judgment finally does come, no matter how secure the sinner might feel. He used three examples to verify this truth (see also Jude 6–8).

1. **The fallen angels (v. 4).** We wish we knew more about the creation of the angels and the fall of Lucifer and his host, but most of these details are shrouded in mystery. Many Bible students believe that Isaiah 14:12–15 describes the fall of Lucifer, the highest of the angels. Some students feel that Ezekiel 28:11–19 also deals with the same topic. It appears that Lucifer was God’s deputy, in charge of the angelic hosts, but that his pride made him grasp after the very throne of God. (John Milton imaginatively portrayed this in the famous poem, *Paradise Lost*.) Revelation 12:4 suggests that perhaps one third of the angels fell with Lucifer, who became Satan, the adversary of God.

Where are these fallen angels now? We know that Satan is free and at work in the world (1 Peter 5:8), and that he has an army of demonic powers assisting him (Ephesians 6:10–12), who are probably some of the fallen angels. But Peter said that some of the angels were confined to Tartarus (“hell”), which is a Greek word for the underworld. Tartarus may be a special section of hell where these angels are chained in pits of darkness, awaiting the final judgment. It is not necessary to debate the hidden mysteries of this verse to get the main message: God judges rebellion and will not spare those who reject His will. If God judged the angels, who in many respects are higher than men, then certainly He will judge rebellious men.

2. **The old world (v. 5).** Genesis 6:3 indicates that God waited 120 years before He sent the Flood. All during that time, Noah ministered as a “herald” of God’s righteousness. If you want to read a description of the world before the Flood, read Romans 1:18ff. Gentile civilization had become so corrupt that it was necessary for God to wipe the earth clean. He saved only eight people, Noah and his family, because they had faith in God (Hebrews 11:7).

But nobody believed Noah’s message! Jesus made it clear that people were enjoying their normal lives up to the very day that Noah and his family entered the ark (Luke 17:26–27)! No doubt there were plenty of “experts” who laughed at Noah and assured the people that a rainstorm was out of the question—no one had ever seen one? The heretics in Peter’s day used that same argument to “prove” that the *Day of the Lord* would not come (2 Peter 3:3ff).

When you compare our world with Noah’s world, you see some frightening parallels. The population was multiplying (Genesis 6:1), and the world was filled with wickedness (Genesis 6:5) and violence (Genesis 6:11, 13). Lawlessness abounded. True believers were a minority, and nobody paid any attention to them! But the Flood came and the entire population of the world was destroyed. God does indeed judge those who reject His truth.

3. **Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 6, 9b).** The record is given in Genesis 18–19, and God’s opinion of the people of these cities is found in Genesis 13:13—*“But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.”* Peter said they were *“ungodly,”* and Jude said they were given to *“fornication and going after strange flesh”* (Jude 7). The men of Sodom practiced filthy behavior and unlawful deeds (2 Peter 2:7–8). Since the Law of Moses had not yet been given, the word *unlawful* cannot refer to some Jewish law. In what sense were their filthy deeds *“unlawful”*? They were contrary to nature (see Romans 1:24–27). The flagrant sin of Sodom and the other cities was unnatural sex, sodomy, or homosexual behavior, a sin that is clearly condemned in Scripture (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:24–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9).

Despite Abraham’s intercessory prayer (Genesis 18:22ff) and Lot’s last-minute warning, the people of Sodom perished in fire and brimstone. Again, up to the very minute that Lot left the city, the people were confident that everything was safe; but then the fire fell (Luke 17:28–29). God did not spare them, nor will He spare sinners today who willfully reject His truth and deny His Son. God buried Sodom and Gomorrah, probably under the Dead Sea. They are examples to sinners today to beware the wrath to come.

Having cited these three examples of certain judgment, Peter then applied the lesson to the subject at hand, *the false teachers* (2 Peter 2:9b). God has reserved the unjust for special punishment on that day of judgment. The false teachers may seem successful (for *“many”* follow them), but in the end, they will be condemned. Their judgment is being prepared now (*“does not linger,”* 2 Peter 2:3), and what is prepared will be reserved and applied on the last day.

What a contrast between the false teachers and the true children of God! We have an inheritance reserved for us (1 Peter 1:4) because Jesus Christ is preparing a home for us in heaven (John 14:1–6). We are not looking for judgment, but for the coming of the Lord to take His people home to glory! *“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Peter next turned his attention to the believers themselves. How could they stay true to the Lord in such a wicked world?

The True Believers Delivered (2 Peter 2:5–9a)⁵ *and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;*⁶ *and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter;*⁷ *and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men*⁸ *(for by what he saw and heard*

that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,”

Peter’s purpose was not just to denounce the heretics; he also wanted to encourage true believers. He once again reached back into the Old Testament and cited two examples of deliverance.

1. **Noah (v. 5).** This man of faith experienced a twofold deliverance. First, God delivered him from the pollutions of the world around him. For 120 years, Noah faithfully proclaimed the Word of God to people who would not believe it. He and his family were surrounded by moral and spiritual darkness, yet they kept their lights shining. God did not protect Noah and his family by isolating them from the world, but by enabling them to remain pure amid corruption. Through Jesus Christ, we too have *“escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”* (2 Peter 1:4).

Our Lord petitioned the Heavenly Father, *“I pray not that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one”* (John 17:15). Imagine Noah and his wife raising a family in a world so wicked that they could have no believing friends! Yet God found believing wives for their three sons, and God guarded this home from the pollutions of the world.

But God also delivered Noah and his family from the judgment of the world. The flood waters that brought condemnation to the world only lifted Noah and his household up above the judgment. They were secure in the ark of safety. In his first epistle, Peter had seen in the ark a type of our salvation in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:20–22). The world, as it were, was “buried” in the baptism of the Flood, but Noah was lifted up, a picture of resurrection and salvation.

Certainly, Peter was assuring his readers that, when the great day of judgment comes, they will be kept safe. Jesus Christ is our “ark of safety.” He delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). God has promised that the earth will never again be judged by water, but there is coming a judgment of fire (2 Peter 3:10ff). But those who have trusted Christ will never face judgment (John 5:24), because He bore their judgment on the cross.

2. **Lot (vv. 6–9a).** Abraham took his nephew, Lot, with him when he left Ur and went to the land of Canaan, but Lot proved to be more of a problem than a blessing. When Abraham, in a lapse of faith, went down to Egypt, Lot went with him and got a taste of “the world” (Genesis 12:10–13:1). As Lot became richer, he had to separate from Abraham, and this removed him from his uncle’s godly influence. What a

privilege Lot had to walk with Abraham who walked with God! And yet, how Lot wasted his privileges.

When Lot had to choose a new area for his home, he apparently measured it by what he had seen in Egypt (Genesis 13:10). Abraham took Lot out of Egypt, but he could not take Egypt out of Lot. Lot *“pitched his tent toward Sodom”* (Genesis 13:12), and then finally moved into Sodom (Genesis 14:12). God even used a local war to try to get Lot out of Sodom, but he went right back. That is where his heart was.

It is difficult for us to understand Lot. Peter made it clear that Lot was saved (*“just Lot...that righteous man”*), and yet we wonder what he was doing in such a wicked place as Sodom. If we understand Genesis 19 correctly, Lot had at least four daughters, two of whom had married men of Sodom. All the while Lot lived in Sodom, his soul was *“tortured”* and *“greatly troubled”* by the filthy conduct of the people. Perhaps he thought he could change them. If so, he failed miserably.

God enabled Lot and his family to remain unpolluted, even though they were living amid a cesspool of iniquity. God also rescued Lot and two of his daughters before the judgment fell on Sodom and the other cities of the plain (Genesis 19). Lot was not rescued because of any merit on his part. He was rescued because he was a believer and because his Uncle Abraham had prayed for him. Abraham outside of Sodom had more influence than Lot inside the city. Lot even lost his testimony to his own family, for his married daughters and their husbands laughed at his warning, and his wife disobeyed God and was killed.

Lot *chose* to live in Sodom and could have avoided the wicked influence of the place, but many people today really have no choice and must live surrounded by the pollutions of the world. Think of the Christian slaves who had to serve godless masters, or Christian wives married to unsaved husbands, or believing children with unsaved parents. Christian employees working in offices or factories are forced to see and hear things that can easily stain the mind and heart. Peter assured his readers and us that God knows how to *“be delivering the godly out of testing and temptation”* (2 Peter 2:9) so that we may live victoriously.

He also can rescue us from judgment. In Noah’s case, it was a judgment of water, but in Lot’s case it was a judgment of fire. The cities of the plain were caught in a violent overthrow as the area became a vast furnace of fire and brimstone. This certainly would parallel Peter’s warning about the coming judgment of fire (2 Peter 3:10ff).

Peter was not pointing to Lot as an example of separated living, but rather as an example of one whom God rescued from pollution and condemnation. In a sense, Lot

was even rescued against his will, because the angels had to grasp him by the hand and pull him out of the city (Genesis 19:16). Lot had entered Sodom, and then Sodom had entered Lot, and he found it difficult to leave.

Our Lord used both Noah and Lot to warn us to be prepared for His return (Luke 17:26–37). The people in Sodom were enjoying their regular pleasures, careless of the fact that judgment was coming; when it came, they were unprepared. *“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless”* (2 Peter 3:14).

But the same God who delivers the godly also reserves the ungodly for judgment. It has well been said that if God spares today’s cities from judgment, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. Why is God’s judgment lingering? Because God *“is long-suffering...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). The culture in Noah’s day had 120 years in which to repent and believe, yet they rejected the truth. Though Lot’s example and testimony were weak, he at least represented the truth; yet his immoral neighbors wanted nothing to do with God.

Our present age is not only like *“the days of Noah,”* but it is also like *“the days of Lot.”* Many believers have abandoned the place of separation and are compromising with the world. The professing church has often presented a weak testimony to the world, and sinners do not really believe that judgment is coming. Society is full of immorality, especially the kind of sin for which Sodom was famous. It appears God is slumbering, unconcerned about the way rebellious sinners have polluted His world. But one day the fire will fall; then it will be too late.

God’s people, as weak as they are, will be delivered from judgment by the grace and mercy of God. God could not judge Sodom until Lot and his family were out of the city. Likewise, many believe that God will not send wrath on this world until He takes His own people home to heaven. *“For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep [live or die], we should live together with Him”* (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10).

One day soon, the fire will fall. Are you ready?¹

¹¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2) Victor Books.

1. Discernment Question (Head)

Where do you see “spiritual counterfeits” showing up today—either in culture, media, or even in church—and how can we recognize them?

Purpose: Helps them process **deception** and apply biblical discernment.

2. Reflection Question (Heart)

In what ways are you most tempted to believe something that “sounds right” but may not actually be true according to God’s Word?

Purpose: Moves from theory → **personal honesty and conviction**

3. Application Question (Hands)

What is one practical step you can take this week to grow in knowing the truth so you don’t fall for the counterfeit?

Purpose: Forces **action and growth**