

People Who Abandon God and His Word

2 Peter 2:1-10a

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Our sermon series for 2 Peter is called *Tough Love*. So far, we have been hearing Peter encourage us to know our salvation and know our Scripture. His encouragement thickens the muscles of our faith and the ligaments connecting our body. The tough love Peter is giving us will also toughen our spiritual skin and strengthen our doctrinal resolve. The tough love Peter gives causes us to stand firm in the face of trials of life and the temptations of the enemy. It reminds us that although we are weak, Jesus is strong.

Brothers and sisters, we are covering a difficult text this morning. Not only is it complicated, but the warning is frightening. So, let's pray and ask the Lord for much grace as we dig into vv. 1-10.

During the Spanish Civil War, General Emilio Mola marched on a city in Spain. He was asked how many columns of men he had in his army. He replied, "*Five! I have four at my back and a fifth column inside the walls.*"

General Mola's reference to a fifth column referred to his supporters, who were within the walls of the city. These partisan rebels were the fifth column. They were the enemies inside the city. They were ready to fight when he laid siege to the city.

General Mola's reference to a *fifth column* has given rise to the powerful image of betrayal that comes from within one's own ranks. 2 Peter is preparing us for this possible betrayal.¹

While 1 Peter prepares us for attacks that come from the outside. 2 Peter prepares us for attacks that come from within our own ranks. Peter knew that the church would constantly be attacked from outside, but the attack that does the most damage comes from enemy on the inside. We must beware of the enemy's fifth column that can be within the church.

This is a hard thing to say because a chapter like 2 Peter 2 can make us suspicious of one another. Yet, Jesus nor Peter allow us to stick our heads in the sand when it comes to betrayal from within our own ranks.

In Luke 22:21-23, immediately after the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus said:

But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" ²³ And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

Peter knew all too well the danger of betraying the Lord. He denied Jesus three times even after Jesus told him he would do it. The difference between Judas and Peter is that Judas' betrayal destroyed his life because he felt remorse, but he did not repent. Peter repented and was restored.

We must heed Peter's warnings because they come with a promise that leads us to increased grace and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, in vv. 1-10 *Peter exhorts us to recognize how the enemy works and to recognize that the Lord will judge.*

I. We Need to Recognize How the Enemy Deceives People (vv. 1-3a)

By the way, we will spend the bulk of our time in vv. 1-3.

A. First, we need to recognize false teachers are inevitable (v. 1a):

Peter drew on the presence of false prophets in the Old Testament to warn the church that false teachers would try to infiltrate their ranks. Notice what he said in v. 1a:

"But false prophets also arose among the people."

He meant that false prophets arose among the people in the Old Testament. Then he tells the churches:

"just as there will be false teachers."

False teachers are inevitable, so we should not be caught by surprise when in our church or another church or the larger Christian culture, a false preacher arises. Also, with the rise of podcasts and celebrity preachers on the internet, there is no shortage of places to find false teaching.

This is a hard thing to say because I am a pastor/preacher. Yet, James warns men and women: *not many of you should be teachers. He warns us because preachers and teachers are judged with greater strictness in their lives and their doctrine.*

B. Next, we need to recognize the five strategies of false teachers (vv. 1b-3a):

¹ Illustration adapted from Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude*, 85.

The first strategy is in v. 1b. Look at what Peter says:

There will be false teachers AMONG you.

The first strategy is that they are AMONG YOU.

When Peter opens the playbook of the enemy, the first play we see is that they dress in our uniform. They have been in our locker room. They have been in our huddles. They know our players. They know our plays. They pretend to be on our team, but all the while, they work against God's people.

Look, false teachers do not parachute into the church with big white parachutes like paratroopers in *WWII*. They do not materialize out of thin air like crew members on the deck of the *Starship Enterprise*. *They come from among us*. For some of us, they are our friends or neighbors.

If you listen, you can hear Jesus' words at the institution of the Lord's Supper saying something to the effect:

One of you who has traveled with Me for three years, who has been discipled by Me and is now sitting at the table eating with Me and has his hand on this very table, will betray Me.²

Jesus says they are wolves, but they are dressed up like sheep who are part of God's flock. Like kids who dress up on Halloween, the false teacher dresses like a Christian, but he is really a devil.

If these warnings are not like defibrillator paddles that shock us back to life, then it may be that you are really dead. Your only hope then is to be raised from death to life by the call of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is like this: Jesus said the wide road leads to destruction. This road does not have a sign above it that says, "*Highway to Hell*." Instead, the sign above the wide road says, "*Shortcut to heaven or Your best life now or This way to freedom or All roads lead to heaven*." Likewise, false teachers do not identify themselves as false teachers. Instead, they call themselves pastors, preachers, evangelists, professors, scholars, and friends.

I am not trying to make us all suspicious of one another, but I am being faithful to the text. So, do not try to remove the speck from your neighbor's eye without recognizing you have a log in your own eye.

The second strategy of false teachers is to destroy the church from the inside. (v. 1c)

Who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.

Scholars Douglas Moo and Matthew Harmon describe the word *heresies* as the introduction of new doctrines to a pre-existing set of beliefs. It was not that the false teachers were hiding what they were teaching but that they were "*covering up the degree to which their teaching differs from the accepted apostolic teaching*."³ They were also hiding the degree of eventual destruction these doctrines would cause.

I would argue that *Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and the Social Justice* movement are doctrines that are currently hiding their devastating effects on the church. Pastors, preachers, professors, and Christian leaders who are trying to marry these social theories and orthodox Christian doctrine are wrecking the church and distorting the gospel. There are some mega-church pastors and celebrity preachers who are weaving these Marxists' social theories into Christian doctrine.

Friends, *Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Social Justice* are the *Holy Trinity of the woke movement*. They have no place in Christianity. *They are false doctrines covertly being added to true doctrine*. These pastors and preachers need to repent and return to historical, orthodox Christianity before it is too late.

The Greek word for "*destructive*" means to kill in a battle. Do you know what does the most damage to the church? It is not someone bursting through the door and shooting people or beheading people, as happened in France this past week.

Listen, those things are bad, but "*destructive heresies*" do more damage than a gunman. *Destructive heresies are the tasteless poison in the Kool-Aid of false doctrine that kills millions*.

In Luke 17:1-2, Jesus pronounced a severe judgment on those who lead others to sin and abandon God:

Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

So, the second strategy of false teachers is to destroy the church from the inside. They may do damage but rest assured, Jesus will judge false teachers.

² This is my amplified version of Jesus' words at the Last Supper.

³ Matthew Harmon, *ESV Expository Commentary: Hebrews-Revelation*, 386, secondary citation Douglas Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, 92.

Their third strategy is to deny “the Master who bought them.” (v. 1d)

This phrase is often debated. One position says that it means you can lose your salvation because it says that *these teachers were bought by Jesus, but then they denied Jesus and lost their salvation.*

I don't think it means they lost their salvation. Jesus holds true believers fast. I think the meaning is simple. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23:

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

These false teachers never were true believers. They claimed to have been bought by Christ, but they never really were. Peter hits close to his own experience when he uses the word *denied*. He understands what it means to deny Jesus. Yet, what he knows is that true believers repent of their sin just as he did after he denied Jesus.

We can recognize false teachers because false teachers do not repent of their false doctrines. They lead others to sin and bring destruction upon the church with their teaching. We should pray that the Lord will guard us from false teachers and bring them to repentance.

The fourth strategy is to deny the biblical sexual ethic. (v. 2)

² *And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

Sensuality is a Greek word that often shows up in a list of sexual sins. *Sensuality* refers to a lack of *self-restraint when it comes to sexual ethics.*

We are seeing this doctrine creep into the church as pastors, preachers, and teachers to change their views on sexual sin. Most recently, Jerry Falwell, Jr. who flaunted his infidelity and is now suing Liberty University because they removed him because they held him to a biblical sexual ethic.⁴ Also, the former high-profile pastor, Joshua Harris, who wrote the popular book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, has renounced his faith in Jesus, left his wife and family, no longer sees homosexuality as a sin and says he is not a Christian.⁵

Many others have left the ministry because they no longer hold to a biblical sexual ethic. May God grant them the grace of repentance. May God hold us fast to His word and a biblical sexual ethic in all areas of life.

Brothers and sisters, the biblical institution of marriage and biblical definition of gender, is under assault. It is not simply under assault from the outside, but it is being attacked from the inside by the *fifth column*.

Brothers and sisters, marriage is meant to be between a man and a woman in a monogamous, covenant relationship for life. Men are born men biologically, and women are born women biologically. There is no category called *transgender*. The idea of choosing your gender is a lie. The idea of sexual preference is a myth. God determines gender, and sexual preference is determined according to His sovereign design.

When the biblical sexual ethic is dismantled from the inside, it leads to the blaspheming of “*the way of truth.*” The goal of false teachers is to bring reproach on the gospel. They want to destroy our efforts of missions and evangelism of the church from the inside. They want unbelievers to look at Christians with reproach and think, “*There is no way the gospel can be true. I will not listen to them. Look at how their leaders live.*”

The fifth and final strategy is to exploit the church.

In v. 3a, the Apostle Peter has not only opened their playbook, but now he reveals their motive—greed!

And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words.

The old adage is true—it is all about the money. The motive of false teachers is to make money. This does not mean it is wrong to pay ministers, but when money and not the gospel of Jesus Christ is the driving force of the minister then there is something wrong in the heart of that minister.

Here is what we must do. Peter has shown us the playbook of the false teachers. Let's take what we have learned and stand firm as a church. Let's covenant together to hold one another accountable to be faithful to God's word. Let's be quick to repent if we

⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/jerry-falwell-jr-suing-liberty-university-after-his-forced-resignation-n1245258>.

⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Harris_\(pastor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Harris_(pastor)).

stray from the truth. Let's speak the truth in love and strive for the holiness of a biblical sexual ethic. Let's speak the truth in love and call false teachers and a lost world to repent of their sin and turn to Jesus.

II. We Need to Recognize How the Enemy Deceives Our Own Hearts (vv. 4-8)

The fifth column is not only inside the church body, but it can be inside our own hearts. Remember what Peter says in the first part of v. 2, "*and many will follow.*" This means there is a battleground within our own hearts.

Peter uses three Old Testament examples in vv. 4-8 to show us how false teachers appeal to our *deceitful desires*.

The first deceptive strategy was *sexual autonomy* (v. 4):

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

According to Genesis 6:1-4, the nature of the angel's sin was abandoning their created purpose to worship God and instead decided to do their own thing and have sexual relations with the women of earth. These angels abandoned the purpose for which they were created to do what they wanted to do. Those angels listened to the lie of autonomy.

As Christians, we are not autonomous; we were bought with a price. *We are slaves to a King who became a Slave in order to purchase us for Himself and adopt us into His family. The beautiful truth of the gospel is that in Christ, we have true freedom.*

The second deceptive strategy was *apostasy* (v. 5):

⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

This may not sound like an effective strategy to you, but it is. The false teachers in Peter's day were teaching that Jesus was not going to return and that since He would not return, there would be no judgment. This false doctrine led people to lose hope and stop living godly lives.

Now consider our situation. It has been over 2000 years since Jesus walked on the earth, and He has not returned. A 2000-year window gives false teachers plenty of room to proclaim Jesus will not return and that there will be no judgment. Some even proclaim that He has already returned, and we just did not know it.

These kinds of doctrines lead people to abandon the faith and simply give up living godly lives. They begin to indulge themselves in every kind of sensuality.

This was the kind of culture in which Noah preached. Noah warned the people of his generation of the judgment to come, but no one listened. He called them to repent, yet the people ignored him. Noah preached the word of God until the ground beneath his feet was saturated with waters of judgment.

Friends ⁵ do not be deceived. Our culture will tell us that Christianity is outdated, the word of God is in error, the supernatural cannot be real, and there is no such thing as a coming judgment, and that all of this is legend and myth.

However, there is a judgment coming, and the next time it comes, it will not be with water but with fire. So, like Noah, we must keep preaching and proclaiming the truth of God's word until the ground under our feet is warm.

The final deceptive strategy was *ease and immorality* (vv. 6-8).

⁶ if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸ (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)

The prophet Ezekiel helps us understand the deception of *ease and immorality*. Listen to his assessment of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:49-50:

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them when I saw it.

Ease and immorality are the most deceptive teaching that is affecting the western church today. We have been lulled into complacency with our material wealth and ease. We bathe in the waters of wealth and breathe the air of ease while we quietly drown in the lukewarm water of immorality.

Brothers and sisters, we must be diligent to increase in the knowledge and understanding of our salvation and in the Scripture. We must hold to a biblical sexual ethic. We must use our wealth to bless the nations and serve the poor. We must contend for the truth that was once for all delivered to the saints so that we and future generations will not be led astray by false teachers.

III. We Must Recognize That the Lord Gives Biblical Justice

The Christians in Peter's day were tired and worn out from living in a broken world. They were tempted to believe the lies of the false teachers that said that Jesus will not return, nor will He administer justice.

Friends, we live in a world today that is crying out for justice. Many Christians have grown weary of waiting on the LORD to give justice, so are abandoning biblical justice for the world's definition of social justice. Again, we must not place our faith in the social engineers who are false teachers. They give false hope to people in a broken world.

Our message to this broken world is that the Savior who was broken on the cross for them will return. He will make all things right. He will judge in righteousness and with Holy justice. Here is the bottom line on biblical judgment.

A. Number One: The Lord reserves the ungodly for torment.

Listen to the thread of judgment that is woven through v. 1 through v. 10:

[They bring] upon themselves swift destruction . . . Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep . . . For if God did not spare angels [and] . . . he did not spare the ancient world [and] . . . [he] turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes; he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly . . . [for the LORD knows how] to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,¹⁰ and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority

Friends, the day of biblical justice will come. Do not ever believe that the ungodly will get away with all of their sins and escape justice. Sure, they may escape justice for a little while and even escape it in this life, but they will have to stand before the throne of our Holy God and give an account of their lives. Their only hope is to turn to Christ before it is too late.

Friend, if you have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to know that the wrath of God is still upon you for our sin against the Holy God. If you die in this condition, then you will spend eternity in Hell. The only way to avoid this punishment is to turn to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to this earth and lived the holy, perfect life you should have lived and died your death on the cross, thus paying for your sin. Then He rose from the dead on the third day and is alive in Heaven. He calls you to turn from your sin and trust Him as your only hope.

Won't you repent of your sin today and place your faith in Jesus? Talk to a Christian who is here this morning and find out what it means to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You may talk to me after the service has concluded.

B. Number Two: The LORD rescues the godly from trials (vv. 1a, 2b, 9a):

Peter uses three phrases in vv. 1, 2, and 9 that reminds us of the sovereign, providential care of God to guard and guide His people safely home to heaven.

The first rescue is that we have been bought by Jesus (v. 1a).

"The Master who bought them"

Jesus bought us by His sacrifice on the cross. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says, *"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* Also, the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 that, *"[We] are not [our] own,²⁰ for [we] were bought with a price."*

Jesus Christ gave Himself as a ransom to God. He was a propitiation for our sin. Christ's sacrifice satisfied the wrath of God that was upon us for our sin against Him, and now we belong to Jesus. We are no longer slaves to sin but slaves to righteousness.

The second rescue is that Jesus leads us in His truth (v. 2b)

"the way of truth."

Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us in all truth. He fills us with His Spirit, who enlightens our minds to understand the word of God.

Finally, in v. 9a, the Lord provides a way of escape from temptations.

"The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials."

When Peter uses the word *rescue*, he is making a direct link to how the LORD rescued Lot from his trial in v. 7. The godly are rescued from their trials because they are *walking in the way of truth*. So, when temptation comes and tempts them to give in to sin, God rescues them.

Think about it this way. Jesus told us to pray *that we will not be led into temptation*. The Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is when we are under siege of trials, suffering, affliction, and persecution that we are tempted to give in to the fifth column's false teaching. Whether in our own church or our own hearts, this is the pressure point for us. It is here that the battle is fiercest, and it is here where we will seek relief. Relief will come if, by faith, we hold to Jesus.