

December 28, 2008 by Steve Brandon



How To Deal With False Teachers

2 Peter 2:1-3

1. Be Aware of them (verse 1).
2. Flee from them (verses 2-3a).
3. Know their end (verse 3b).

Recently, I had a conversation with someone who was convinced that the attack on our nation that occurred on September 11th, 2001 was not a terrorist attack at all. Rather, he believed that it was a planned attack that was staged by the government. It wasn't nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists who hi-jacked four airplanes from US airports, driving them into buildings. Rather, it was a staged attack using remote control capabilities within the airplanes. After all, how could a guy from a cave, deep in Afghanistan orchestrate such a massive attack upon America? Rather, his theory is that the United States had staged the attack, so that we might be able to have reason to attack Iraq and control their oil.

Of particular interest to this person was the way that building 7 in the World Trade Center complex came down. It came down looking like a controlled implosion, rather than looking like a building that had been weakened by falling debris from the twin towers. He told me of how Larry Silverstein, the owner of building 7, had taken out an insurance policy on the building only a few weeks before the attack which had an "terrorism" clause in the contract. (Who has building insurance which includes the word, "terrorism"?) He told me of some chemical called "thermite" which suggested a controlled explosion. Furthermore, he noted that a BBC reporter actually reported that this building had fallen down some 20 minutes before it had fallen down. Of course it was staged, he said. [\[1\]](#)

As I thought about this conversation that I had with this man, several things stood out to me. First of all, he spoke from a tremendous knowledge base. It was obvious that he had studied and researched this issue for hours and hours and hours. Facts about the events came off of his lips with relative ease. By comparison, I was a complete novice in this conversation and said very little. Second, I'm convinced that this man really believes these things. I'm not sure what I could have told him that would change his views in any way. Even if I was equally up on my research, able to combat his every point, I'm sure that he has already considered the other side and rejected it. Finally, I was amazed at how consuming these things had become for him. They consumed his thinking. In the course of our conversation, it's where things naturally drifted. Think about it. If you were convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt that the events on September 11th were a conspiracy, you have to talk about it and get the message out.

As I thought further about my conversation with this man, I thought about another man that I knew when I was in seminary. I remember taking one class together. We went to church together. I remember that he and his family used to sit up in the very front row to listen to John MacArthur preach. I would even call this man a friend. I visited his home. I was good friends with his wife. I played with his oldest child. He and I enjoyed some very good times together. He even attended my wedding.

Since seminary, however, this man's life has taken quite a turn. He began a small Bible study in his home. As he was forced to teach the Bible each week to these people, he began to see in Scripture verses like Psalm 119:104, "From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way." He began to understand for himself that God hates every false way and that He will not tolerate any deviation from the Scripture, no matter how small. As he continued his study, he came to believe that only those who get their theology 100% right are truly converted. He began to find statements in the writings of other men with which he disagreed and could prove false according to the Scripture. One of those teachers that he identified as being a false teacher was John MacArthur. So, on several weekends, he went back to his home church and began to distribute information about how John MacArthur is a false teacher because deep in his book someplace he had not been faithful to Scripture. Eventually, he was disciplined by the church as being a factious man (Titus 3:10).

And now, he is the leader of a cult. It's not a very big cult. Last I knew, he had, maybe 20 followers. He firmly believes that his church is the only church that he knows of. He cannot identify another church that is walking in the narrow way of Christ. Nor can he identify another person he knows who is walking the way of Christ, because he doesn't know their theology completely. Furthermore, he can't even identify anyone from history who he would label a Christian, because those he knows of in history were teachers and he has been able to find reason to disagree with every Christian teacher that he has taken time to read. Oh, he holds out the possibility that there are some others in this world. Elijah, in his loneliness, was told that there was a remnant of 7,000 in the world, but he didn't know any of them. So also does this man believe the same thing. He holds that there may be some out there, but he hasn't yet found a single fellow believer outside of his fellowship of 20 or so. It only makes sense. When you require absolute agreement on everything doctrinally, it's pretty difficult to have a large group of people. Today, he feels the burden to get this message out. He often shows up at some of the biggest gatherings of Christians, where he can protest the speaker inside, identifying him as a false teacher. His motive, he says, is love, trying to rescue the scores of people heading off to hell.

Here's what's interesting about this man. He speaks from a tremendous base of knowledge. Bible verses flow off his lips like no one that I know. When arguing his case theologically, he barely says a sentence or two without quote a portion of Scripture to defend his position. He is familiar with the teaching of many in church history, because he has gone through them with a fine toothed comb, looking for some error that he might find. Furthermore, he really believes the things that he teaches. He's not a hypocrite in the sense that he says he believes

something, but really believes another. He firmly believes every word that he speaks. And, he has a burden to get this message out. Think about it. If you were convinced that your group of 20 followers was the only genuine church in the world, would you not be out trying to persuade the multitudes of Christians on the wrong path to get on the right path with you?

Now, in our exposition of 2 Peter, we come this morning to the portion of the epistle where Peter begins to address the issue of false teachers. In fact, this is the burden and the heart of his epistle. It's why he wrote: false teachers were in infiltrating the churches.

Peter spent the first chapter laying the groundwork, saying that we have everything that we need for life and godliness in Christ (verse 3), giving evidences of what true salvation looks like, and providing the sure foundation of our faith: the Scriptures. Now, in chapter 2, he begins his discussion on false teachers with these words, ...

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 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.

My message this morning is entitled, "How to Deal with False Teachers." My first point is this, ...

1. Be Aware of them (verse 1).

Know that they exist. You swim differently if you know that sharks may be in the water. You walk more alertly if you know that you are walking in a dangerous part of town. So also, will you be more discerning if you are aware that false teachers are present in the church. This is Peter's point. "There will ... be false teachers among you." So, be aware of them.

Now, it is an unfortunate thing that the chapter breaks at this point, because Peter is making a contrast with what he had just been addressing. You can see this with the English word, "But," He's contrasting the true prophets of verse 21 with the false prophets here in chapter 2, verse 1. The true prophets were the ones who "spoke from God" as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (verse 21). The false prophets, on the other hand, were the ones who "spoke for themselves" as they were "moved by their own desires."

If you survey the Old Testament, you will discover that there were many warnings given about false prophets who would come. And there were many false prophets who arose, just as had been prophesied. Moses warned the people of Israel of false prophets who perform great signs and wonders and miracles. And then, these prophets would speak to the people saying, "Let us go after other gods ... and let us serve them" (Deut. 13:2). Moses says, "You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams" (Deut. 13:3). And the miracles that they did were authentic. They were genuine. But, such teachers who pull you away from the true God are to be shunned. In fact, in the days of Israel, Moses instructed the people to put to death such a prophet or dreamer, "because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD" (Deut. 13:5).

Moses warned that such false prophets would arise. And they arose among the people and led them astray, especially during the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah lamented their presence among the people of God with these words ...

Jeremiah 23:16-18, 21

Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you.

They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the LORD.

They keep saying to those who despise Me, "The LORD has said, 'You will have peace'";

And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, "Calamity will not come upon you."

But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word?

Who has given heed to His word and listened?

...

I did not send these prophets, But they ran. I did not speak to them, But they prophesied.

This is the major characteristic of the false prophets. God didn't speak to them (verse 21). God didn't send them (verse 21). But, they went anyway and spoke of their own imagination (verse 16). In Jeremiah's day, the major message of these prophets was "Peace, peace" (Jer. 6:14). The major message of Jeremiah was "there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked king of Babylon, was rising against Judah. He was a major military threat against Judah. The prospects of his coming to conquer them was very real. The false prophets, like Hananiah, were predicting that Judah would conquer the great Babylon (Jer. 28). But, Jeremiah was prophesying the truth, that the king of Babylon would soon take Judah into captivity (Jer. 32:3). And so, Zedekiah, king of Judah, had him imprisoned for speaking such a message of doom to the people (Jer. 32:2-5). Zedekiah didn't want to hear such news. Instead, he wanted to hear the prophets who said, "Peace, peace!"

Times haven't changed between the Old Testament days and our days. People want to hear what they want to hear. Paul told Timothy, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Just as there were false prophets in the days of Israel, so also are there false teachers in the church. This is Peter's point in verse 1, "But, false prophets also arose among the people [of Israel], just as there will also be false teachers among you [the church]."

This is the nature of truth. Where there is truth, there is also error. Where there is gold, there is also fools gold. Where there is authentic currency, there also counterfeit money. Where there are genuine diamonds, there are also cubic zirconiums. Where there are genuine prophets, there will also be false prophets. Where there are genuine teachers, there will also be true teachers.

Notice that Peter uses the future tense, "there will ... be false teachers among you." In some sense, Peter was being prophetic, in that he was anticipating the many heresies that would arise in the church. But, Peter's emphasis here isn't so much upon the future as it is upon the certainty that false teachers will come into your churches. It's not like false teachers weren't around in Peter's day. Throughout chapter two, he speaks about what they are like, not what they will be like. Peter's use of the future tense here is that they are out there and they are coming to a church near you, if they haven't already, so be ready for them. One way to be ready is to be aware of false teachers.

You can't read the New Testament without being struck by the number of times that it mentions the presence of false teaching in the church. In fact, one of the qualifications of an elder in the church is that he would be able "to refute those who contradict" the sound teaching of Christ (Titus 1:9). Much of the New Testament was written to combat the false teaching that was arising in the early days of the church. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to battle with the "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5), who lifted themselves up as worthy to be followed. Paul wrote Galatians to battle with those who would want to draw us back into following the laws of the Old Testament. In this same vein was Hebrews written to persuade those Jews who were drawn back into the Levitical sacrificial system to stay true to Christ by faith in Him. Paul wrote Colossians to combat those who were teaching that you needed to add something to your faith, be it ritualism, asceticism, or legalism. Second Timothy was a warning to Timothy to remember the fundamentals of the gospel so as not to be derailed by the false teachers of the day. Jude wrote his epistle "to contend earnestly for the faith" against those who were drawing people away.

Please notice also that these false teachers aren't out there, somewhere. No, these teachers are in the church. Peter says, "there will also be false teachers among you," that is, in the church. This ought not to be a surprise to you. Jesus warned His disciples, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). They look like an innocent sheep on the outside, but their nature isn't one of a sheep. Rather, they are hungry, snarling wolves, seeking to capture other sheep. Paul picked up this same terminology when he gave his final warning to those elders in Ephesus, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). The amazing thing here is that Paul anticipates that the wolves would come up from within the leadership of the church, seeking to pull people to follow their words, rather than following the truth.

See, when false teachers come into the church, they put on the disguise of followers of Christ. The devil doesn't show up with a red tail and horns and a pitch fork. (We all have that imagery burned into our mind enough to flee from such a one.) Rather, the devil comes disguised as an angel of light. "Therefore," Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:15, "it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds." And this very idea of these false teachers coming incognito is prominent.

Look again at verse 1, "there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies." These false teachers aren't going to come in announcing themselves as "teachers of heresy." Rather, they will come in under the guise of orthodoxy, using the Bible to proof text their teachings. But, as soon as they gain their teaching platform and some semblance of credibility in your eyes, their heresies will begin to be manifested.

If you know anything about the history of the early church, you know of the heretical teachings that floated about the church. Early on, the church was bombarded with the heresy of *Gnosticism*. While Gnosticism accepted several of the important themes of Christianity, there, such as the need for salvation and an ultimate being, ultimately, it fell far short of Christianity. In many ways, it was an effort to synthesize Christianity with the dualism of the Greek and Roman gods. Early on there was a heresy called *Docetism*, which rejected Jesus Christ having come in the flesh. Rather, they believed that Jesus was more of a spiritual being, who only "appeared" to be real. As the early church began to flush out the meaning of the Trinity, there were some who believed in *Modalism*, which teaches that the one God merely manifests Himself in three different forms. Sometimes He is the Father. Sometimes He is the Son. Sometimes He is the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of the fourth century, the main heresy of the day was called *Arianism*, in which the full deity of Christ was rejected. Following this, there were the errors of *Apollinaris*, who taught that Christ was made up of half-man and half-God. Jesus had a human body, but his mind and spirit came from his divine nature. Then, there was *Nestorianism*, who saw two separate persons in Christ. There was a human person and a divine person dwelling in one human body. Less than a hundred years later, *Pelagianism* came about because of the teaching of Pelagius and his followers. Pelagius rejected original sin and the sovereign grace of God in our salvation. Rather, he believed that people are basically good and that we all have free will and power within us to live a righteous life.

As a result of these heresies, the early church convened several times to develop formal creeds as to what the church believed. And these creeds have helped the church define the borders of orthodoxy for many years. But, don't think that the statements of the early church have solved all of the heretical problems in the church, because they haven't. Heresies continue to arise in the church, which lead to the damning of souls, as people are carried away into falsehood. And for your own good, you need to be aware that such heresies exist! There are forms of Gnosticism and Arianism and Pelagianism that still exist today. There are heresies that promise people in the church health, wealth and prosperity. There are heresies in the church today that call us to hold too closely to the law. There are heresies regarding the role of ritualism in your salvation.

Let's look closely at the heresy that Peter is dealing with here in 2 Peter. Look again at verse 1, "[these false teachers] will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." As I have said several times before in our exposition of 2 Peter, we have no mention of the actual teaching of these false teachers in Peter's day. Rather, Peter points out the way that these false teachers are living. In weeks to come, we will see how these teachers ...

- ... are like unreasoning animals (verse 12).
- ... are doing wrong (verse 13).
- ... revel in their deceptions (verse 13).
- ... have eyes full of adultery (verse 14).

- ... entice unstable souls (verse 14).
- ... have a heart trained in greed (verse 14).
- ... have gone astray (verse 15).
- ... speak arrogant words of vanity (verse 18).
- ... entice by fleshly desires (verse 18).
- ... are slaves of corruption (verse 19).
- ... are entangled in the defilements of the world (verse 20).

This is the key that Peter gives us to identifying these false teachers: they live lives of wickedness. Now, that's not to say that we ought to believe anybody who comes along living a righteous life. No, when someone comes along and teaches error, they ought to be confronted and rejected regardless of how pious their life may appear. But, Peter's point here in 2 Peter is that those who live blatantly immoral lives can be regarded as false teachers merely on the basis of their lifestyle.

This is why it's so important to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (3:18). It's the growth that confirms our calling and election (1:10). But, these false teachers were not growing in their "moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love" (1:5-7). Rather, they were living lives of sin. And it's their lack of growth in Him that gives the biggest clue that they are teaching falsehood. Something isn't quite working in their life.

Now, here in verse 1 we may have the only hint of what they were teaching. We read that these false teachers were "denying the Master who bought them." They were denying Christ. This phrase may give us a hint into their heresy. Somehow, in some way, their teaching was denying the person and work of Jesus Christ. Perhaps they were denying His humanity as the Docetists did. Perhaps they were denying His deity as the Arians did. Perhaps they were denying the supremacy of His sacrifice as the Pelagians did. But, as I looked at this passage this week, I don't think that Peter is getting at the way that they were denying Christ doctrinally. Rather, I believe that he was addressing how they were denying Christ morally, that is, by the way that they were living.

The entire chapter speaks this way. The chapter speaks about the lives of these false prophets. They may profess to have a Lord, but the way that they live, they demonstrate that they really don't have a Lord they follow. Rather, they are living for themselves. This is the thought that Paul gave in Titus 1:16, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." Also, I think that the way that Peter says these things gives us a hint that he's not talking so much about their doctrinal denial of Christ, as he is the manner of their lives. Peter writes that they have "denied the Master who bought them." The language here is slave-market terminology. The Master has bought them and they are now to submit to their Lord. But, as they refuse to submit to Him, they deny that they even have a Lord at all. They might say one thing with their mouth, but they are doing something entirely different with their lives.

The logic of Paul is the same as Peter's. "You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). Christ is your Master who has purchased you with His blood. Therefore, live as a slave to the one who bought you, submitting to His authority, obeying His voice, and walking in a manner worthy of your calling (Eph. 4:1). As these false teachers bring shame to His name and malign the truth of God (verse 2) with their lives, they are, in effect, denying the Lord they profess.

The book of Jude gives us further insight on this. Jude contains much of the same material that 2 Peter chapter 2 does. If you read that book, you will find many similarities to what Peter is saying here. When Jude articulates the issue with these false teachers, he says it this way, "Certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnations, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). You see here the same things that Peter addresses. People who have come into the church secretly. They deny our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. How? By turning the grace of our God into licentiousness.

Think about it. They don't deny the grace of God. Instead, they distort the grace of God. They say, "God is so gracious to forgive that I can live as I please." That's what's going on here. In the end, it will be seen that they don't understand the grace of God. Those who say, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ... so let us continue to sin so that grace may abound!" (Rom. 5:20-6:1), have missed the grace of God. "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:2). You can't. How shall we who are slaves still refuse our master? You can't. But, that's what these false teachers were doing. They were professing Christians, who refused to submit to the Lordship of Christ in their lives. And that's their fatal flaw. You can't have Christ as your Savior if you don't also take Him as your Lord.

How do you deal with false teachers? 1. Be Aware of them (verse 1). Secondly, how do you deal with false teachers?

2. Flee from them (verses 2-3a).

Look at verse 2, "Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words."

Here we begin to see a picture of what these people are like. Peter describes them as being "sensual." This word is often linked with sexual sin (Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21). The idea here is that they are "licentious." They live their lives to an excess, without legal or moral constraints. There are no bounds to their sexual sin. There are no regards for the moral law of God.

Twice more in this chapter Peter will use this word. He uses it down in verse 7 to describe the debauchery of Sodom and Gomorrah. He uses it in verse 18 of "fleshly desires." Such is the moral conduct of these false teachers, and the people love it so. Notice that "many will follow" them in this way. They say, "I can have Jesus and my sin as well? Count me in!" Or, they say, "No repentance? No demands upon my life? I can live as I please? Where do I sign up?"

That's the type of Jesus that many will follow. But, that's not the real Jesus. The real Jesus calls us to "repent" (Matt. 4:17). Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). The real Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and be willing to die for Him. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25). The real Jesus calls us to "give up all of our possessions" (Luke 14:33), storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth (Matt. 6:20). When you present the real Jesus to people, Jesus Himself said that only a few would follow Him. He said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Is it any wonder, then, when Peter tells us that many will follow after the sensuality of these false teachers, that they are presented with a false Christ to follow? They are given a Christ who gives all and demands nothing. Of course people will take that. But, that's not the real Jesus. The real Jesus calls us to the narrow, difficult, small, and hard way to life. It's the life of discipleship. It's the life of total love to Jesus.

My exhortation to you this morning is this: don't buy into their lie. Don't think that you can keep your sin and have your Jesus at the same time. Instead, flee from them (verses 2-3a). Don't be numbered among the many who follow after them.

Polycarp, a student of John, the disciple, told a story of what he observed in John. He said that there was an occasion in which John was in Ephesus entering one of the public baths. Inside the baths, John saw Cerintus, who was a well-known Gnostic. Upon seeing him inside, John left the baths saying "Let's flee before the baths fall in. Cerintus the enemy of truth is inside." [\[2\]](#)

This is the implication of verse 2. "Many will follow" these false teachers, but you ought to flee from them. See, the life of a follower of Christ is not to be characterized by such wickedness. Paul called us to a spirit-filled life in Galatians 5. He said, "walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). He continued, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). Catch carefully what he said, "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

God is serious about sin. The writer to the Hebrews said, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). Christ told the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 over and over and over again the same message: repent. "Repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent." (Rev. 2:5). "Repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" (Rev. 2:16). "I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds" (Rev. 2:21-22). "Remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you" (Rev. 3:3). "Be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Christ calls His followers to follow Him, not their own lusts. To follow the path of your own lusts is the path of destruction.

At this point, please don't get me wrong. Don't get Peter wrong. Christ certainly doesn't call us to perfection, rather, He calls us to grow. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our heart. He will help us and strengthen us in our sin. His cross covers all of our sin. But, there is a huge difference between the one who sins and hates his sin and cries to God for help compared with the one who sins willingly and joyfully, presuming upon the grace of God. God delights in receiving repenters.

When Christ came to earth, he said, "I didn't call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). But I doubt that "repentance" was in the language of these false teachers. And as such, "the way of truth will be maligned" (according to the end of verse 2). People the world over know that our God is a righteous God. People the world over know how Jesus lived, righteous and holy. People the world over expect His followers to reflect our God!

God expects his followers to be like Him. In his first epistle, Peter said it this way, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). And when professing believers show no signs of righteousness, but rather delight in their wickedness, "the way of truth is maligned." People speak badly of Christ. Isn't it true that whenever a big-name preacher falls to sin, the media picks it up. The result is that many in the world speak poorly of Christ and His followers. "Well, if this is how their leaders behave, how can Christianity really be true?" And in a small town, if a preacher falls, news carries as far as his influence. The damage done is equally great. If not in scope, in the depth of people's hearts.

In the beginning of verse 3, we find another characteristic of them: they are greedy. In other words, they are in it for the money. Peter writes, "And in their greed they will exploit you with false words." Later, in verse 14, Peter will address the issue of their greed, saying that they have "hearts trained in greed." These false teachers aren't so much lovers of truth as they are lovers of money. And it's pretty easy to tell when a teacher is a lover of money. He talks about it all the time. He calls others to give of their resources to his ministry. He promises great blessing from God if you will send your money to him! When pastors are living in big, luxuriant houses and driving expensive cars, the world takes notice and sees the sham that is taking place.

See, of all people, the followers of Christ are called to live above this world. We are called to live here on earth like aliens and strangers, knowing that inheritance is in heaven. As false teachers openly live a life that is contrary to this, seeking to amass for themselves treasures in the here and now, others see it and can easily malign the truth.

You ask, "Where am I to flee to?" The answer is quite simple. Flee to the cross of Jesus Christ. It is there that you will find refuge. It is there that you will find forgiveness. It's there that you will find your joy and strength to carry on, despite the temptations to go astray.

So, how do you deal with false teachers? (1) Be Aware of them (verse 1); (2) Flee from them (verses 2-3a); and thirdly, ...

3. Know their end (verse 3b).

Peter writes at the end of verse 3, "their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." Oh, it may look good for the false teachers of today, who amass the riches and have crowds following them. But, that's not always going to be the case. They are living with the black cloud of judgment hovering over their lives, which will come and consume them at some point. They are like men on death row, who may appear to be living the life of ease now, in a warm jail cell with three hot meals each day. But, their day of justice will come

Their judgment may look like it is idle. Their destruction may look like it is asleep. But, they are coming in God's time. We won't spend much time on this point this morning, because this is going to be our main point next week. But, here is a synopsis of what lies ahead. In verses 4-9, Peter will speak about how God has a way of making sure that those who live unrighteously face His wrath. In verse 4, he addresses the judgment that came down upon the sinning angels. In verse 5, Peter talks about the society in Noah's day, who were all drowned. In verse 6, he talks about the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. None of these people escaped. But, in the midst of the judgment, there were righteous people who experienced the protecting hand of God upon their lives. Noah was protected, as he and seven member of his family were preserved in the day of trouble. And Lot, who lived among the people of Sodom was protected by God. The conclusion comes in verse 9, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment."

God will keep His people from temptation. God will keep His enemies, so that none will escape His judgment. That is the point of verse 3, "Their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." God will come. God will judge. God will right all wrongs. You don't need to take judgment into your own hands. That's the wonderful thing about the doctrine of the final judgment of God. It has a wonderful way of minimizing our own need to feel vengeful toward these people.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 28, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] If you want to read about these things, all you need to do is type in "911 conspiracy" into Google and you will get a million hits. You can read for days and look at pictures and watch videos giving evidence to support this man's view. You can also find many, many sites which seek to refute the claims of those who believe that the 911 attacks was a large-scale government conspiracy.

[2] Bruce Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, p. 66.