

During the week, I went through the remainder of 2 Peter, trying to work out the best way for us to divide it up over the next few weeks. And it was actually quite a difficult task to do.

Over the 4 weeks it's going to take us to complete this series, 3 of those weeks are going to be a bit confronting. Peter's going to be telling us (over & over again):

- how to recognise false teachers;
- what they do;
- what they're like;
- why they do what they do; and
- his whole purpose is for us to guard against false teachers...

*And I was discussing this with someone just the other day – they commented that our Bible readings have been warning us a **lot** about false teachers. And in their eyes, this is a timely thing, because we've been seeing new and strange teachings coming in locally (& further abroad)... And I agreed... And then we talked about how **a lot** of the New Testament (the Gospels and the letters) is dealing with false teachers corrupting the church, but the thing is, we often tend to skip over these things...*

And that's why I found it difficult to divide this letter up – I'm naturally inclined to take this whole section on 'false teaching' in one hit, because we don't want to labour on this too much – we just want to move on to something else... We'd rather hear about grace; mercy; prayer; freedom; salvation.... – all of the Bible topics we love to study,,, but you know what – the pure Gospel is at risk; and all of these themes we love to

study, these are all at risk of being ‘polluted’, if we don’t know how to recognise false teachers and therefore have nothing to do with them...

And Peter (probably more than most of the New Testament writers) – he doesn’t just skim over this – God has led Peter to be specific, and God has led Peter to give examples from his own experience (and the Old Testament)... And if God has led Peter to be specific, that should indicate to us, that God wants **us** to **know** the specifics, and to study the specifics.

And so, I’m not going to apologise, for taking 3 out of the next 4 weeks, for us to learn what Peter has to say about false teaching.

Righto:

The way Peter has introduced this, he’s done it quite deliberately. He’s had this progression:

- the Godly and right teaching of the Apostles;
- the Old Testament prophets;
- false prophets (Old Testament)
- false teachers in our midst;

Alright, so the Apostles are the source of Godly teaching (now recorded in the New Testament), just like the prophets of old spoke the word of God,,,. But just as there were **false** prophets who distorted the word of God, there are now, and there will continue to be false **teachers** who distort the Word of God today...

He says: They **secretly** bring in destructive heresies.
(false teachings)

Now, when we start talking about ‘watching out for false teachers’, and weeding out heresies from within the church, what do you picture???

I know for some folk, they’re allergic to talking about things like this, because they picture an image of something horrible...:

- legalism;
- witch-hunts; and
- the inquisitions,,,

where the Roman Catholic church conducted farcical trials and burned dissenters at the stake...

But you know what – during those terrible days, the leaders of the church **were** the false teachers, and the **true** men of God, were the ones who were standing up against them, and were trying to weed out the heresies (that had become normal) in the life of the church... And they were executed because they honoured God and stood for the **true** gospel, while the false teachers in the institutional church became more and more corrupt...

That’s what happened in church history. The false teachers (who were the church leaders) – well, for them it was all about power and politics...

Alright, so when **we** talk about keeping false teaching and heresy out of the church, what we're doing, is we're embracing the beautiful Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we're saying "Nothing else is good enough". And so we reject anything that distorts this (anything that corrupts it)... It's not about legalism, and it's certainly not about putting to death 'those we disagree with'.

Our role, is to be discerning, and act with discernment, **and** to warn those who are being swayed by false teaching. God is the one who judges, and He **will** judge. But (at the same time) we are not to allow false teachers to get a foot hold in the church.

Alright, so Peter says **there will be false teachers among you**,

Sometimes false teachers are outsiders, who came in and pollute the church. And sometimes, it's those from within our own ranks...

And I've said this before "We tend to think that false teachers are easy to recognise, but sometimes they're not"... Jesus described them as "wolves in sheep's clothing". They might be a wolf, but they look very much like a sheep...

False teachers – the most destructive false teachers – bring **destructive heresies** in, "secretly"... The Greek word that our reading translated as "Bring in secretly" can mean

“secretly”, or it can mean “along-side”ⁱ And I think it actually means “both”...

Much of the teaching may seem ‘pretty standard’,,,,, but alongside of it, is introduced **new** teachings – teachings that are **not** true... And utterly destructive.

even denying the Master who bought them

What does that mean? Obviously to ‘deny Jesus’, but what does that mean?

Well, it can mean 2 things, and I’ve seen it play out in churches, **both** ways...

Some people who claim to be Christians, and some preachers; ministers; and even bishops don’t even believe that Jesus was raised from the dead... (progressive theology) I can’t fathom why anybody would choose to be a minister in a church, when they don’t believe that Jesus was raised from the dead; and they don’t believe He’s coming back again to judge the living and the dead,,,, and yet, that’s what they preach.... That’s definitely one way

But there’s another way, which is much more subtle (to deny the Master), and I’m pretty sure that this **second** meaning is what Peter has in mind (without excluding the first of course): to deny **the Master who bought them**, isn’t necessarily a denial in words, but a denial in ways/actions. It’s to deny the Lordship of our Master...

Let me explain

If Jesus has saved us from our sin – if by His precious blood, He has **bought** us – He has **redeemed** us – Back in 1:3 Peter described it as [we have] **escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire**

Then, to deny our Lord – to deny our Master, is to continue living in sin (when He died, to set us free from it)... And this is going to become more apparent, as we continue on over the next few weeks.

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned “easy-believism” – a disparaging term to describe those who have the attitude – “You just have to believe in Jesus and you’re saved” – no repentance; No transformation; it’s a change of ‘mind’...

*About 15-20 years ago, the Lordship/non-Lordship debate emerged as a **massive issue** in evangelical churches in the US (and it’s still an issue today). And because many Australian churches like to take their lead from the US, over the last decade or more, this has become an issue in Australia as well.*

There was a whole generation, where “Yeah, I’ve become a Christian”, but their lives and their manner of living, is no different to the world around them... People who claimed to be Christians:

- were living together before they were married, and didn’t feel there was any problem with that;
- they were just as caught up in greed and materialism as much as anybody else;

- fixated on health; wealth; long life;
- narcissists; and
- drunkenness & swearing – no problem...

And the debate was centred around this: A common false teaching, was that:

- to become a Christian, you just need to believe;
- you don't need to repent of sin;
- if Jesus wants you to change, He will change you, without any effort on your part.

But finally, some prominent and highly respected bible teachers spoke up, and called this out as false teaching... It's unbiblical – the Scriptures are clear...

- there is no salvation without repentance; and
- as we keep sinning, we must keep repenting; and
- because Jesus is Lord, disciples of Jesus must walk in the ways of the Lord...

And as we read this 2nd chapter of 2 Peter, you'd think Peter is addressing this exact issue... And he pretty-much is.

Jesus is our Master. He's not your boyfriend; He's not your buddy;buddy;mate;pal... He is our Lord; He is our Master. And disciples of Jesus, must walk in the way of their Lord. That's what Peter told us in Chapter 1: Supplement your faith with excellence of character (& then he listed out a whole heap of attributes – what an excellence of character looks like)... And if we neglect this, it's because we've forgotten what we've been saved from...

And false teachers, in their message, **and** in their example, deny that Jesus is Master – deny the Lordship of Jesus, because they’re not living as obedient children, following the teaching/ways of Jesus (testified by the Apostles), but following their own designs.

And even in this *introduction* about false teachers, Peter **assures** us, that God will punish them, and do it severely... He uses the phrase: **bringing upon themselves swift destruction.**

You and I – **We’re** not the ones to punish them – it’s God who does that, but Peter’s very clear – they’ve brought it upon themselves.

Now, I want us to take a moment, to assess the gravity of this: “false teachers bring upon themselves **swift destruction.**”

For me (as a Bible teacher), I take this very seriously. **James 3:1 (ESV)** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

But who are the teachers today? I know I’m a teacher, and I have to take this very seriously... But for me, it’s not so much “out of fear” that I take this seriously – I want to **know** the pure, biblical truth, that Christ has revealed and the Apostles have recorded... I don’t ever want things of the Spirit to be polluted with things of the flesh... And my greatest delight, is when God does His work through me (& what I teach), and I

get to see the simple, pure, Word of God, touching hearts and lives.... I know, nothing I could ever add to it, could do ever do, what the Spirit of God does with the pure Gospel truth...

But if when I teach, I don't have a Holy Fear of God, I'm not only "not worthy" to be a teacher – it's dangerous to be a teacher...

But let me come back to the question I asked, "Who are the teachers today?"

Things have changed enormously in the last 30 years, and not just in Christianity. I'm old enough to remember when the internet first started getting going, and at the time, it was touted as "It's going to be the information super-highway"... And as far as I could see, at the time, it was only big businesses with their propaganda, and governments were just starting to get a bit of information there... But now....
Wow...

If you've got an internet connection, you've got immediate access to all sorts of information:

- be it truth;
- lies;
- propaganda;

- news;
- fake news;
- truth, presented as lies;
- lies, presented as truth;

- theories presented as fact;
 - fact, presented as theory;
 - religion presented as science;
 - science embraced as religion...
-
- history as it is;
 - history, re-written through a certain lens;
 - cancel culture, where anyone we don't like, we just erase them...

And this is in every sphere. Everybody's an expert, because they're informed by the cyberspace armchair experts on the World Wide Web:

- Dr Google's knows what's wrong with me, and my GP's an idiot; just as
- the celebrity preacher is the one God reveals 'all truth' to, and the preachers at our local church – they don't have the Spirit like this other bloke – out of touch...

And the whole time, the search engines we use – they know just about everything about us. They know what we like to see; they know what we like to read/hear/see... And that's what they feed us.

It brings a whole new meaning to: 2 Timothy 4:(ESV)
³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

And we don't even have to do it for ourselves – our search-engine does it for us. It knows what tingles my ears, and that's what it feeds me...

But let's take this a step further: When you read something that appeals to you, whether it's truth, or whether it's a lie,, If you like what you hear, what do you do???

- Well, if you share it, you've just become a teacher;
- If you “like” it, you've just given a letter of recommendation to the person who's said it;
- If you send the link to somebody else, you're not only giving your approval – You're a promoter;
- If you've shared a theory, or linked to a theory (something that sounds true, but you don't know that it's true), you've become a gossip;
- And if you've heard false teachings, and become convinced by these false teachings, every time you share, in person, or in cyber-space, guess who the teacher is...

Not many should presume to be teachers, because teachers will be judged more strictly...

OK... Now, how many of us are teachers? Do you see the importance of what we're learning today... If we ever teach (even teaching our children), it's critical, to be able to recognise truth from lie... And even if we don't teach, it's still very important.

It's becoming more and more apparent to me, that the greatest hindrance to the Gospel today, is the many false Gospels, which are so popular, because they appeal to the flesh...

I'd better move on.

V² **And many will follow their sensuality**

Let's not you and I sit here, full of pride and self-confidence, "I'll never be seduced by a false teacher."... **many will follow their sensuality**

You see, when:

- a certain teaching becomes popular among many Christians; and
- a lot of the big-name-celebrity-preachers are saying something similar;
- it may have the appearance of being Godly/biblical;
- we might feel it's "really useful" for our lives; and
- they might even use biblical language...

but a little lie slips in here/there (alongside the truth)... And if we're not studying the Scriptures for ourselves (and doing it well), it's very easy to be led astray...

And false teachings are so tempting, because they **often** appeal to the flesh.

many will follow their sensuality

Now, the word “sensuality” as it’s used here, is about “sinful abandon”. And sometimes, that sinful abandonment is expressed in sexual immorality, sometimes in other ways...

But basically, what Peter’s getting at, is that with false teaching, there is more of an ‘openness’ to worldliness and licentiousness (things that appeals to the flesh). **And** in the very conduct of false teachers themselves, there is a worldliness and a pandering to the fleshly nature... And it spreads – it spreads to infect others, and it discredits Christ and the Christian cause... He says, **because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.**

He could just as well be writing to us, couldn’t he???

Think of:

- the tele-evangelist, appealing for a private jet for ministry, and the widow giving him, her last mite;
- the faith-healer – “Step up to the next level of giving, and I’ll pray for you personally”;
- the pastor who gets caught in adultery, and then claims this is a lesson on grace;
- some churches tell the youth, “If you feel attracted to the same sex, God has made you that way, and you should celebrate your sexuality...”
- the prosperity preacher who tells you, “Believe that God is going to make you prosper, and you too can be rich...”

No wonder the way of truth is blasphemed...

V³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.....

Peter's digging in deep here. I said at the start, "This isn't going to be superficial" ...

In this one verse, he addresses the:

- **motive** of the false teachers;
- **outcome** of what they achieve; and
- **method** they use.

Their motive, is "greed". **In their greed they do this.**

I used to have trouble getting my mind around this, because when we think of "greed", we think of "greed for money/possessions" ... And obviously, there's big examples of this:

- the tele-evangelist and his jets and limousines;
- the faith healer and his many mansions;
- the celebrity teacher and their millions in book-sales;
- the Christian musician and their millions in album-sales

Alright, so there's some obvious big examples of financial greed...

But I used to have trouble getting my mind around this, because I've come across some false teachers who **weren't** in it for the money. One bloke I can think of – the sort of bloke he was, he could sell ice to an Eskimo. If he was working in sales, he would make a killing, but in the little country church he was pastoring, he was making a pittance compared to what

he could earn in the commercial world... And so, it was obvious that his motivation, wasn't greed for money...

The Greek word Peter uses here (as the motivation) is πλεονεξία (pleonexia), which isn't just "Greed for money" – It's about "wanting more". It's about having an insatiable appetite for what:

- we have no right to;
- we have no need for;
- things;
- money;
- sexually;
- forbidden things; and
- one of the earliest uses of this word, denotes an immoral lust for power...

The motivation – the greed, can be greed for any of these things... It might the insatiable desire to:

- be popular;
- have the biggest church;
- have the statistics – to have the most:
 - conversions (be they real or shallow and false);
 - healings;
 - youth;
 - emotion;
 - people fall over
- be known;
- be needed;
- be recognised:
 - man of God;
 - someone who's close to God;

- prophet;
- spiritual

insatiable desire to

- be liked;
- be loved;
- **get** the most
 - “likes”
 - views
 - downloads
 - hits
 - followers
 - “friends”;

insatiable desire to

- influence people;
- hold power over people;
- be ‘admired’ ...
- bask in the admiration of a congregation “Isn’t our pastor just wonderful”...

I’m pretty sure I don’t get too much of that here (which is a good thing).

So, the motivation, is an insatiable appetite for more – maybe more money, but often more power over people, and more recognition as being ‘spiritually elite’ ...

That’s the motivation. What’s the outcome? Exploitation...

Isn't that sad.... From my experience, sometimes false teachers don't know that they are exploiting people... They have it all justified it in their mind. "I've been given a vision from God, and if you follow my lead, I'll bring you closer to God"...

And in the process, their congregation are being exploited... They'll **tell** you it's for the glory of God, but it's actually for their **own** glory – It's for their own insatiable appetite for more of what they shouldn't be craving... And they will 'use you up'...

Something I've noticed with false teachers, is they like to '**have** servants', rather than 'be servants'... They exploit people. They 'use them up', to try and achieve their vision...

So, that's the outcome – their congregations are exploited.

BTW: If you ever hear someone say "It's God's will for you to follow the vision of the Pastor, even if you disagree with him"... If you ever hear something like that, that is a sure and certain sign that you are being primed for exploitation...

And so we come to the method: **false words**.

I seem to be digging in to the Greek dictionary more than normal today, and I'm about to do it again.

The actual Greek word here for "false", is πλαστοῖς (plastois) from which we get our word "plastic" or "plasticine" – it's

something malleable, which can be formed and shaped. And that's pretty-much what *plastois* means – they shape words – they construct words and teachings into something new.

In a few weeks' time (as we get to the end of 2nd Peter), Peter says they “twist” the Scriptures. And that's what he's getting at here – they

- form and shape the Scriptures (as if they were a piece of plasticine);
- change the meanings of words
- take one verse, or part of a verse, and they use it to explain something that that verse was never talking about in the first place; and
- they claim it as a Scriptural authority, to ‘prove’ their whacky teaching...

They use the words of Jesus like plasticine, and bend them all out of shape...

Let me give you an example:

“Repentance”

The Scriptures very clearly teach that “Salvation depends on repentance”. If I don't repent, I can't be saved... And repentance is to literally turn and change direction... Alright, so we once were walking in sin, (the worst sin of all, rejecting Christ), but we repent, and we have a complete turn-around. We're now going to walk in the ways of the Lord, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We've put to death the old man and our fleshly ways, and been born again....

But a more enticing message (to some) is, “You don’t need to change your behaviour - just change what you believe.”

And they trot out a dictionary definition of “metanoia”, that says “a change of mind”. And so they change the word – they change the shape of the meaning so they can teach, “to repent, means you change your mind about who Jesus is. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and He died for your sins, and that’s what it means to repent. And you’re saved.”...

But the problem with that is, it ignores the raft of teaching in the Scriptures, that teach us what true repentance looks like.

To quote the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,

In fact the predominantly intellectual understanding of metanoia as change of mind plays very little part in the NT. Rather the decision by the whole man to turn round is stressed. It is clear that we are concerned neither with a purely outward turning nor with a merely intellectual change of ideas.ⁱⁱ

They shape the word “repentance” to remove the change of life.

And that’s just one example of how false teachers misuse the Scriptures, and bend them out of shape like plasticine.

Here’s a little challenge for us: Next time somebody tells you something about God/Jesus/Christian life,

- ask them where that is in the Bible,, And then,

- don't just read the one verse, or the few words that they give you... Read it in its context.
- Read the whole paragraph/chapter/book of the Bible; and
- see how it fits in to the message of that book of the Bible; and then
- have a think about how it was quoted to you.
- Is that verse even talking about that subject?

And often you'll find it's not...

You see, this is why we study whole books of the bible – to hear what **God** is wanting to tell us, instead of us trying to find what **we** want to hear.

BTW, if you ever hear someone quote from the “New World Translation” (JW), or “The Passion Translation” (to support “New Apostolic Reformation” teachings). BTW, from what I can see, TPT is worse than the JW's version... So if anyone ever quotes from those ‘plasticine versions’, don't just accept it. You go and check it out in a real bible, and see what God's word really says... It's pretty concerning when a certain teaching needs to have it's own bible to teach it...

Let's finish up.

Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Things are not as they appear. It seems like, with all the false teachers in the church today, they're just getting away with it.

- Drawing the unstable away from the true gospel;

- Preaching a gospel that is so corrupt that nobody will be saved by it;
- In their greed, they treat the word of God like plasticine, to exploit those in their church...

But Peter's saying, God hasn't dozed off – He hasn't forgotten about them – Their destruction is coming...

And we're going to hear more on that next week, but I want us to finish on a positive note today:

We guard against heresies/false teachers, because the **true** Gospel, is worth keeping pure...

The true gospel, leads us to Godliness. The Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross to redeem us – to buy us back out from under the power of sin. And He's given us everything we need for a Godly life... That's a beautiful message. Let's never dumb-that-down with a false Gospel. Let's never:

- take that grace away;
- preach a grace that's content with remaining under the power of sin;

Let's never

- let the focus shift to ourselves and our passions
 - Let's keep the focus on Jesus (where it belongs); and let's
- always keep our worship for Him, never seeking our own glory (or that of our leaders)

Embracing the truth, demands the rejecting of lies.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We thank You for the beauty of the pure Gospel.
Guard us, we pray.
Help us to seek and listen to
those who have the gift of discernment.

We aren't always good at recognising the wolf
when the wolf is dressed like a sheep.

And Lord forgive us, for when we've readily accepted
false teachings (& the false teachers who teach them)
and excused them – that's not important...

Forgive us for when we've repeated
Plasticine understandings of the Scriptures,
and haven't even bothered to read Your word
as Your word stands.

And to take the time to read a whole chapter of Your
word,
when a few words tell me what I want to hear...

Lord,
Give us a love for your Word,
and a love for Your Gospel in all of its pure beauty.

And help us to lovingly and firmly reject falseness,
as we embrace the beauty of truth.

Praise the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master.

Amen.

ⁱ Green, M., 1987. *2 Peter and Jude: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The verb *introduce* (*pareisagō*) has two overtones; it means to ‘bring in alongside’ (sc. true teaching) and also to ‘introduce secretly’

ⁱⁱ Goetzmann, J., 1986. μετάνοια L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.