

Beware of Pretenders  
II Peter 2:1-3, 10b-12

When you were growing up or if you remember when your children or grandchildren were little you probably remember pretending with them. They liked playing make-believe.

One day it was cowboys and Indians or soldiers or a super-hero or princess or a sword wielding knight. It often started with a simple and innocent phrase: “let’s pretend”. It’s the stuff fairy tales are made of. It’s a world of make believe.

It was fun.

It was adventurous.

It was innocent.

It was imaginative.

From the dictionary we understand the word to mean something that is make-believe.

Taken in the context of our passage, the word also has a more ominous meaning – something that isn’t genuine, to profess falsely, to make believe in an attempt to deceive.

That is the kind of warning Peter will convey in chapter 2 about false teachers. This isn’t just a make-believe world they were entering. The intent of these false teachers was to knowingly deceive. Peter sets the stage for what he will share in chapter 2 with what he said in chapter 1. In that chapter he told us that we have everything we need for godly living given to us through the promises revealed in God’s Word. This Word, Peter tells us, is what confirms our salvation. And then he tells us how that Word came to existence. God’s Word was not given to us by “cleverly invented stories” but by men who were moved along or led by the Holy Spirit to write down what God wanted to say using their own unique personalities and writing styles.

From what Peter wrote in chapter 1 he will now contrast it in chapter 2 with false teachers. He is telling readers to beware of pretenders. In this chapter he will outline some characteristics of false teachers, attributes from which we are then able to

see that what they are teaching is error. If their testimony is wrong, so is their teaching. Flaws in their character will point to flaws in their teaching.

This morning I want us to look at five character traits that give evidence that these teachers are charlatans, pretenders of the truth to beware.

Verse 1 is a heads up. It tells us to be observant, to be wary or cautious. Looking to the past he cites Israel’s history. “But there were also false prophets among the people.” Essentially he says that since there were false prophets during Old Testament times there will also be false teachers today. Just as there were true prophets who spoke for God, there were also false prophets who claimed they also spoke from God, but gave a message completely opposite from what God said through His true prophets.

God gave instructions about false prophets when He gave the law to Moses to pass on to the people. Deuteronomy 13:1-5

Israel’s history is chock-full of false prophets, teachers who led them away from following God. I Kings 18:16-22

Elijah, the prophet of God, challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest to see who the real God was. Of course, from the account, we know that God is real and Baal is not. If you noticed in verse 21, you can see the apathy of the people. Elijah laid down the challenge.

If God wins, follow Him.

If Baal wins, follow him.

But the people said nothing

I Kings 22:1-28 – Micaiah prophesies against Ahab  
Jeremiah 23:16-18

Jeremiah 28 – the false prophet Hananiah prophesied that after only two years of captivity in Babylon the people would break the yoke of bondage and return to Israel. At the instruction of God, Jeremiah wore a wooden yoke to depict the

continued bondage of Babylon. Hananiah took the wooden yoke and broke it proclaiming that God would do the same to their bondage. God then instructed Jeremiah to tell them their captivity was like an iron yoke and serve Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah further prophesied that because Hananiah gave a false prophecy about Israel's bondage, he would die. Two months later he died.

In Ezekiel 13 God condemned the false prophets and decreed judgment on them for their false prophecies that led the Israelites away from obeying the true word of God. In stern language God says He is against them and because of what would happen to them they would know that He is the Lord.

Peter refers back to the false prophets of Israel and states that just as there were false prophets then, there would be false teachers who would lead them from following God.

He then tells us what to look for that will give away that they are false teachers. It's all about character.

#### I. THEIR CHARACTER IS DECEITFUL – v. 1b

Hackers know how to get in your computer without you knowing it. One day you get an email you think came from a friend. Sometimes the subject line will be blank or it will be some simple thing like "Hey." When you open up the email the message is pretty generic and then it will have a link they want you to check out. When you open it up it launches a virus of some kind that will either immediately cause your computer to freeze or sometimes won't occur until you hit a certain key or open on a certain day or time. That might happen days or weeks later. They do it secretly or behind the scenes so that you don't see it until it's too late. That happened to us a few years and two computers ago when hackers got into our computer and encrypted all the files on our hard drive and back-up external drive. They wanted me to pay a fee if I wanted the files unencrypted. I

gave the external drive to Jason Chamberlain whose job in the Navy had to do with setting up cyber security. He and a couple of guys on his team took a look at it and couldn't decode it. It had some 24 bit password that even they couldn't break.

If false teachers came into the church teaching doctrinal error we would immediately recognize it and never let them in so they do it with subtlety and deceit. Jude 4 says false teachers crept in unaware. Peter says they came in secretly. The term refers to a clever defendant who attempted to fool a judge or a criminal who was secretly returning from a place he had been banished from.

These false teachers coming into the church posed as pastors, missionaries or evangelists. The word refers to them coming alongside claiming to be something they were not. It was a ruse. They were masters at camouflage. Nature provides us with some great examples. Take a look.

The point that Peter makes is that false teachers "secretly introduce destructive heresies" for the express purpose of deceiving you in order to lead you from the truth. They are so good at doctrinal camouflage that you can't even detect the subtle nature of their false teaching. They use all the right Biblical terminology, they carry the right Bible, they take communion, they pray, but there is a subtlety to what they say twisting it just enough to make you question what you have been taught and believed all your life. It's what Satan did in the Garden of Eden by asking Eve to question God's Word and authority. "Did God really say that? Did He really mean what He said?"

J.I. Packer suggests that the word heresy in the New Testament means more than just teachings that are wrong but also includes conduct that is wrong. We'll talk about that more later on.

Understand that false teachers will start from the premise of what the Bible says and then ask hearers to consider whether that is true. Is it possible, they

ask, that it doesn't really mean that? Could it possibly mean this instead? They question right thinking and right actions, but they do so in a way that is deceptive.

Notice what heresy Peter says they taught. They denied the sovereign Lord who bought them.

We are not talking about some minor doctrinal differences here. These are core or foundational doctrines on which the Christian faith hinges.

The deity of Christ

The incarnation of Christ

The atoning death of Christ

The resurrection of Christ

For example, Jehovah's Witness believes there is no hell, they don't believe in the trinity, they don't believe in the deity of Christ or in His resurrection and believe that only 144,000 make it into heaven.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century a man by the name of Arius from North Africa began to teach that Jesus wasn't fully God or fully man. He claimed that there was a time Jesus did not exist and therefore was not eternal, He was not God. The heresy even alarmed Constantine. Even though the Emperor didn't completely understand the debate he wanted unity in the church and called for a general council of the church in the town of Nicaea. While 1,800 bishops were invited only about 400 showed up due to difficult traveling conditions. Arius presented his case, which was followed by a strong rebuttal from Alexander and Athanasius citing orthodox teaching. A bishop by the name of Hosius suggested drawing up a creed, a statement of faith. It was completed on June 19, 325. About Christ the creed stated that He was "God from very God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father, through whom all things were made...who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered and rose again..."

Robert Morgan writes "The creed was adopted, and the doctrine of Christ's divine nature – a belief both essential and unique to Christianity – was formally affirmed for the first time."

Yet still today there are churches and pastors who deny these very truths. If Christ was not fully man He could not have died for sin and if Christ was not fully God He could not have atoned for sin. He couldn't have bought us as the verses says.

What they teach is heresy, a word that means a self-willed opinion.

If you ever get into a conversation with someone or if you are reading a book or listening to a sermon on line, a fundamental question to ask is what they believe about Christ. To deny Christ is heresy. Their character is deceitful.

## II. THEIR CHARACTER IS DEPLORABLE – v. 2

The thought here from Peter is that the moral character of false teachers is wrong. If they begin to teach that their perversion is okay, they're a false teacher.

What I'm about to tell you, you may not believe. It may even curl your hair. I don't want to believe it, but I heard it and read it. You will be appalled that it is happening and in the name of Christ. I listened to a brief video clip on Facebook about a couple in Florida who claim to be Christians, who teach a Bible study, but who openly promote a swingers lifestyle and I'm not talking about swing dancing. They claim that being intimately involved in an orgy is a way to evangelize by spreading the love of Jesus through Bible studies. They even went so far as to say that when God told them it's wrong they'll stop. I want to say "Honey, the Bible already tells you it's wrong."

For false teachers there is no shame to their immorality as they not openly engage in but also encourage the same behavior from their followers.

Last year I read an article about a pastor who preaches au natural and encourages his congregation to come to church that way if they are comfortable with it.

That is wrong on so many levels. The only motivation for such activity is to justify their own perverted lust. And the very sad reality, as the verse continues, is that many follow them into the very same shameful activity. The word Peter uses here in describing their shameful activity (Pernicious in the KJV, shameful in the NIV and sensuality in the NASB) is a strong word referring to what John MacArthur says is “habitual sexual immorality and unrestrained, debauched conduct. By using the plural form Peter emphasizes that the false teachers’ sexual lewdness came in many forms and extremes. Because they rejected the lordship of Christ, their lives were characterized by unrestrained indulgence and lewdness. They intentionally refused to place any restraints on their fleshly desires.”

Peter concludes the verse by saying their very hedonistic behavior smears or defames the truth of the gospel.

For those of you who recall the demise of The People’s Temple in Jonestown that was the character of Rev. Jim Jones. Unfortunately we see that blatant conduct in too many who claim they are preachers of the gospel.

Their character is deplorable.

### III. THEIR CHARACTER IS DISGRACEFUL – v. 3a

We saw in verse 2 their motivation is to satisfy their own lustful appetite. Peter gives another disgraceful motivation. It’s to satisfy their greed. It’s all about money and they are willing to fleece the flock to get rich.

The name Creflo Dollar may ring a bell. If not, maybe what he was asking will. He is the pastor of a megachurch in Atlanta, GA. In 2015 he asked his congregation and those in TV land to donate over \$50 million so he could get a new Gulfstream jet and all I wanted was asking for is a new rototiller.

Greed  
Give me, give me, give me

More, more, more  
It’s an uncontrolled, covetous desire or thirst for power, fame, money, sensuality.

John MacArthur calls them “experts at bilking people in the church out of their wealth.”

Back in the 1980’s it was Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. He had the slicked back hair and plastic smile. She had that poofy, swirling thing on the top of her head with those big, thick, fake eye lashes and caked on makeup that would run like a river whenever she cried those big crocodile tears as they plead with people to send them money for their ministry. They began innocently enough with a puppet ministry that garnered national acclaim launching them into the PTL Club. Using PTL funds they purchased a \$385,000 condo in Florida lavished with \$40,000 worth of bedroom curtains and bedspreads. An article appeared in Christianity Today that described the televangelists activities this way: “Both the sex and the greed drove jaw-dropping levels of deceit. Jim went to extreme lengths to cover up [his] affair, a decision that fit into a much larger pattern of illicit lies. The Bakkers’ meteoric rise to Christian celebrity status was made possible by the faith and generosity of countless ordinary believers, who tuned into PTL’s television programs and donated to its telethons. Jim and Tammy Faye violated their trust early and often.”

Someone has rightly said that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Greed is a power that corrupts and false teachers were in it up to their eye balls.

Peter says their tactic was to exploit their followers. Used here it refers to something unethical. The very people they claim to want to minister to are the very ones they are using for their own personal gain and greed all in an effort to line their pockets. Again the sad reality is that many people are duped into following them. They do so, as Peter says, by using

false words. We get our word plastic from this Greek word. The word referred to something that wasn't authentic. They may look like the real thing but under careful examination it's a fabrication. It may look like real metal or wood or china but it's only plastic. That is the description of their words. They are plastic. Their doctrine appears to be genuine but is really just a plastic fabrication. Their character is disgraceful.

#### IV. THEIR CHARACTER IS DESPICABLE – v. 10b-12a

In these verses Peter indicates that they aren't even ashamed to defame angels. He refers to them as audacious and arrogant, they are bold and braggadocios. They aren't afraid or ashamed of despising authority. At the same time while exalting themselves, they willfully, even defiantly challenge the angelic host. They act in a way that even angels who follow God don't act toward fallen angels. Godly angels, if I can use that term, know that only God can bring judgment against the fallen angels, but false teachers seem to think they can take fallen angels head on and call them out. They have no regard for the fact that angels are more powerful than we are.

False teachers aren't afraid or ashamed of attacking anyone in authority. We are taught in Scripture that we aren't to speak evil of anyone, but instead we are called to pray for those in authority. We may not like their policies or politics, we may not like their practices but none the less we are called to pray for them regardless.

Peter says they blaspheme in matters they don't even understand. They don't even know what they are talking about. Warren Wiersbe says "They may use our vocabulary, but they don't use our dictionary."

Because they aren't afraid to blaspheme or slander those in authority, even angels, their character is despicable.

Finally, I want us to see their character is destructive.

#### V. THEIR CHARACTER IS DESTRUCTIVE – v. 1c, 3b, 12b

"They will secretly introduce destructive heresies."  
 "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."  
 They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish."

In Matthew 23:15 Jesus strongly condemned the Pharisees for going to great lengths and distances to convert people and then concluded that once they were converted to Judaism these converts were made twice the sons of hell as the Pharisees were because the converts were given more regulations than the Pharisees were willing to follow.

The doctrines taught by these false teachers will lead people away from the truth of the gospel, especially since they deny the very Christ who bought them, meaning they deny the only means by which they can be saved, through the blood of Christ, the price paid for salvation that is received by faith. They, along with those who follow them will encounter destruction. This destruction is something verse 3 says has been hanging over them, a destruction that has not been sleeping.

Some people think that God's judgment has been delayed or isn't coming. They call Him an absent landlord. But rest assured that what may seem like a long time to us is nothing in God's timetable. His judgment won't linger or as one author put it, His judgment "does not dillydally."

In 1926 novelist Sinclair Lewis speaking in a Kansas church took out his watch and gave God 10 minutes to strike him dead. Someone hearing about this remarked "Did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of God in ten minutes?" In verse 13 comparing false teachers to nothing more than brute beasts, Peter says, that just like

those animals, false teachers will also be caught and destroyed.

To coin a phrase, “they will meet their maker.”

John Philips writes “In the end, they fall victims to their own propaganda and succumb to the consequences of their corrupt lifestyles. Death is God’s ultimate answer to those who abuse Him.”

If you don’t want to fall into the same trap as false teachers then you need to consider their character carefully. They may sound good and smell good and look good, but their character gives away what’s really inside. They are only pretenders. On the way to church a dumpster sits by the road. The outside is beautifully maintained. There isn’t any rust. It’s bright with a shiny red coat of paint. On the front is a huge yellow smiley face. But don’t let that fool you. It’s still a dumpster filled with trash on the inside.

Don’t let the smooth talk of the false teachers fool you. They’re still filled with garbage.

Acts 17:11 says that Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they searched the Scriptures to make sure what Paul taught was true.

As we close that’s what I want you to do. I want you to be discerning about the things you read or watch or hear from, well, anyone who teaches God’s Word, me included. There are many charlatans out there who will intentionally lead you astray from the truth for their own personal gain.

You will know them by their character.

Peter wants us to be warned and be wary.

God’s Word says His Spirit will teach you truth. So if you aren’t sure, search His Word and ask His Spirit to be your teacher. He’ll never lead you astray; after all, He’s the One who inspired it.

So, beware of pretenders.