

Dear Friends,

The more I study 2 Peter the more I am convinced of the diametrical opposite condition between Chapter One and Chapter Two. In the first chapter, Peter focuses on a fruitful, sound, and faithful faith, grounded in that "more sure word of prophecy," Scripture. He begins Chapter Two with a warning. Life in the faith-way shall not always be a matter of warm fellowship and happy times. As false teachers abounded throughout the Old Testament, even so, Peter warns us, they shall also abound in the Lord's church. If we faithfully follow his teaching in the first chapter, we shall be equipped to deal with the false teachers in the second chapter.

I have read that the division of our government that deals with counterfeit money practices a wise method to train new agents how best to spot a counterfeit bill. They repeatedly, over and over and over again, expose the new agent to real money. The more familiar they become with real money the more they will skillfully identify counterfeit bills. The same habit holds true in our walk of faith. A believer who decides he/she knows enough about the Bible, so they slip into occasionally reading a few verses here and there are fair game for the false teacher. In contrast, the believer who faithfully keeps his/her heart and studies in the Bible will recognize the false teacher and his teaching, and reject it. The more time we spend with God's "more sure word of prophecy" the better equipped we shall be to recognize false teaching and false teachers. We shall also learn from our faithful studies how best to deal with the false teachers. Our human nature would like to shout our objection to the false teacher from rooftops. However, Scripture teaches us to "Mark" them and to "Avoid" them. The worst thing you can do to a false teacher is simply to ignore him and his teaching, but it is the best thing--the Biblical thing--for you and for your faith. (Romans 16:17 KJV) His ego relishes any attention you give him and his errant ideas. And his ego grieves when you simply ignore him and his teachings. To be thorough, the New Testament does teach us to admonish the false teacher once or twice (Not endlessly). (Titus 3:10 KJV)

It is fitting that we mourn the grave damage to the faith and to the fellowship of godly people that a false teacher can cause. Peter admonishes us by the presence of this chapter in his letter to devote our selves to Chapter One so we know more how to recognize--and to avoid--false teachers in the second chapter, for they shall surely come our way.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

## 2 Peter, Second Movement, False Teachers

**But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (2 Peter 2:1-3 KJV 1900)**

In the beginning of this series, I observed that 2 Peter was written in three “Movements,” three distinct themes, each primarily covered in a chapter. We might give the title, “Our More Sure Word of Prophecy, Scripture,” to the first chapter. Peter names the focus of the second movement, “False Teachers,” a vivid contrast to believers respectfully and faithfully following that “more sure word of prophecy.” I approach this chapter with humility and care. It is one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament. Please pray that I will have the Lord’s kind grace to respect the theme, but also to flavor my thoughts with positive points of the gospel.

We do ourselves and the chapter a grave disservice when we ignore Peter’s stated theme. This chapter is not about evaluating the salvation state of every false teacher who appears in Peter’s lesson. We can’t know the eternal salvation state of anyone unless Scripture specifically states it. **“By their fruits shall ye know them”** (Matthew 7:15-20 KJV) is not a lesson about how we may know who is saved and who is not. Jesus introduced this lesson to warn us against false prophets. And, yes, He did warn us that many of these false teachers, though appearing as sheep, in fact are “...inwardly...ravening wolves.” This is hardly a reasonable description of a deceived and deceiving child of God. He knows every human heart, so He can discern them, but we can’t. Our charge from Him is to know and to distinguish false teachers from faithful and sound teachers. In this chapter, Peter guides us through the tortures of false prophets, some of whom may match Jesus’ “Ravening wolves” description, and some of them may be self-serving, ego-driven children of God who ignorantly deceive others as they themselves are deceived. From our individual perspective, it is all but impossible to know the difference. If we accept Jesus’ warning in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, whatever judgment we make on who is a “Wheat” and who is a “Tare,” we are liable to err, as well as do great harm to other “Wheat” plants. We should content ourselves to wait till Judgment Day when the Lord makes that distinction public for all to see and know.

**But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.** In our idealistic hopes, we’d like to think the Lord’s church and people will always believe only sound Biblical truth, make wise Biblical decisions, and live together in love and harmony. History, Old and New Testament, proves that idea wrong. Peter’s opening thought to this chapter draws us back to reality. Just as we see false teachers or prophets in every setting of the Old Testament, we should prepare ourselves for similar false prophets in our time. The primary theme of 2 Peter 2 is not a litany of non-elect sinners parading as children of God and spiritual teachers. Peter sets the focus we should maintain as we study this chapter.

**...who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.** Peter opens his expose of false teachers with one of their primary strategies. They will not stand up in church and loudly proclaim and defend their errant ideas. They look for and carefully choose private moments to sow their ideas to a few naïve unsuspecting souls. Typically, they also strive to show a sincere winsome attitude as they spread their ideas. This leads the naïve believers to respond in shock if reminded of the gravity of the error, “But he is such a sincere caring person.” Peter teaches us to deal with what they teach, not with their demeanor or friendliness. For Peter in this chapter, as with Jude (Jude 1:3 KJV; “...the faith,” that one body of accepted doctrines and teachings first taught by Jesus and His followers, and maintained by His church since that time), a fixed body of truth exists, and any significant departure from that one “**the faith**” Peter labels quite explicitly. These people “bring” their ideas into the church community, ideas different from that common and accepted “faith.”

Contemporary Christian culture ignores New Testament teaching on the character, purpose, and mission of a New Testament church, so it is no wonder if unsuspecting believers listen to individuals, especially people who befriend them and appeal to their appetite for greater insight, but the ideas false teachers introduce, though in a wardrobe of “Greater insight” into spiritual mysteries, are grave errors, as Peter describes it. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul taught that the Lord’s church, not an individual teacher, is “...the pillar and ground of the truth.” Even sincere and sound individuals can be deceived. If we look to our latest favorite preacher for truth, we’ll live an unstable faith. However, if we look to the adopted and historical faith of our church, we follow Paul’s teaching in addition to gaining stability in our faith. I am a strong believer in a church adopting a fixed body of “Faith” and not looking for reasons to change it.

**...even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.** Bible students debate this thought. Do all false teachers deny the Lord? Various New Testament Greek dictionaries define the Greek word translated “denying” as to contradict, to disown, or to discredit. However, while exposing these people as false teachers, Peter specifically refers to them as being “Bought” by the Lord. Can a saved person become deceived and fall prey to false teachers? Can a saved person become so mesmerized by error that they promote and teach these ideas? A study of Acts and the epistles that follow in the New Testament includes several examples of this sinful errant conduct. If this is Peter’s intent, we should strongly emphasize that they do this to their own hurt and to great disservice to the Lord and His people. Such conduct cannot be ignored or minimized. In an apparent effort to avoid this distasteful and disgraceful thought, John Gill (His commentary on the whole Bible) taught that Peter was referring to those Old Testament false teachers among Israel who denied the Lord who “Bought them” out of Egypt.

**...and bring upon themselves swift destruction.** That Peter qualifies the judgment as “Swift” leads me to believe that he in fact was referring to deceived—and deceiving—children of God. Their destruction does not wait till they die or till the Second Coming. It is “Swift.” While false teachers often have honed their personalities and verbal skills sufficiently that they traffic in their

ability to deceive many sincere and studied believers in a church, they cannot—and do not—deceive the Lord. They may think themselves successful by counting the number of people they attract to their error, but the Lord knows both their heart and their conduct. In my sixty-eight years in ministry, I've encountered a few of these false teachers. Even as they may have been congratulating themselves for succeeding in deceiving people, I've observed the quiet chastening hand of the Lord taking away their influence and especially their joy in the faith. One example will suffice. I knew a man who at one time exuded joy in his preaching and talking about the Lord and His gospel of grace. As this man slipped into error, he lost that joy. He worked to maintain a persona of joy, but it was a thin veil over a somber joyless outlook. I listened to a sermon he preached on joy, but the delivery, both content and the quality in his voice seemed joyless. The Lord is—thanks to His kind mercy—long-suffering toward His people in their error, but even His long-suffering quickly ends when His children begin to mislead and do harm to His beloved children. The eternal judgment of the Lord toward the wicked is long delayed, though certain. His temporal chastening judgment toward His children is “Quick.”

**And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.** When believers neglect or turn from that “More sure word of prophecy” which forms the centerpiece of 2 Peter 1, they become easy prey for the false teachers of Chapter 2. Whatever the error, the result of false teachers and their ideas is always damaging to “...the way of truth.” A false teacher's error to someone not familiar with him or with the fellowship of churches to which he belongs will label all believers in the false teacher's fellowship. If he believes X, so must they also believe it. The grossness of the error serves to magnify the damage to the way of truth.

**And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.** Covetousness is not always about hunger for money or other material things. It may be about ego and self-gain in a false teacher's mind. ... **with feigned words make merchandise of you.** Peter started this chapter by naming the first strategy of false teachers, privately deceiving individual believers until they become emboldened by their increasing number of followers. In this point, Peter identifies another strategy commonly used by false teachers, “**feigned words.**” This strategy manifests itself in deliberate deceitful words. A false teacher will begin his deceit by framing deceitful words so they sound to the naïve ear the same as Biblical sound doctrine, but he does not believe that sound doctrine. As he gains the trust of his audience, he will increasingly become bolder in his choice of words.

A personal experience will exemplify this point. A man I knew well slowly drifted from sound doctrine into significant error. During a conversation in which I tried to reason with him, he protested, “Joe, I preached exactly what I believe at Church A, and—you know how sound their deacon is—after the service, he told me what I preached was exactly what he had heard sound men

preach all his life.” I am grateful for the man’s honesty. When I questioned, “Did you frame your words to teach what you truly believe, or did you frame your words to sound like what he has heard all his life?” Literally, the man laughed and replied, “Oh, I framed my words.” To his shame, the man honestly acknowledged his deliberate deceit from the pulpit. Such is the sad state of the false teacher. As Peter described, the false teacher doesn’t respect and treasure your friendship, he thinks of you as “Merchandise,” something he can barter with other believers to promote his error.

**...whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.** Peter repeats his emphasis on a swift judgment, key to our understanding of the Lord’s chastening judgment against His erring, sinning children. False teachers become so focused on how many people they can gain from their errant ideas that they often forget the greater reality. No smoothly crafted words can deceive the Lord. He knows their heart, and He knows their false teaching.

I close this difficult introduction to 2 Peter 2 with a personal confession from many years ago. Someone I had respected slipped away into error and actively promoted his error to any whom he thought might be receptive. I talked with him many times trying to reason with him, but his mind was made up. I grieved his loss and departure deeply. Sometime later I was talking with a mutual friend who had a similar experience with this man. I was openly grieving to my friend. He listened kindly and patiently. Then he gave me a gem of wisdom that taught me richly what I needed, “Joe, we must remember. We serve in the Lord’s church. In His time and His way, the Lord will judge those who turn away.” I lived to see the truth of my friend’s gentle reminder. Some things the Lord charges both pastors and churches, to “Judge” and to deal with. Other things, things which we cannot resolve, the Lord, in His time and way, shall judge. And we can rest confidently. The Lord shall preserve His truth and His church against false teachers within or without His church. We have such a precious blessing in the Lord’s church. Lord help us to respect it, to treasure it, and to faithfully stand with it in holding to and “contending for” that “faith which was once delivered to the saints.”

Elder Joe Holder