

The Teachers of Error: Their Description

2 Peter 2:1-9

Pastor John Miller

I think just about everyone has been victimized by a con artist at some point in their life. Even me, recently. I was watching this commercial on TV, and I never buy those silly, crazy things on TV where they say if you call in now, we'll give you two for the price of one, and "This is a miracle thing" and all that stuff. But I've been trying to patch these grass spots in my back yard, get them seeded, the birds eat it and I try to watch. I've been trying to get some grass to grow, so I saw this advertisement on TV for Hydroseed. Let me tell you right now, don't buy it. "\$19.99 and if you call in right now and put it on your Master Card, you'll get two for the price of one." So I thought, good; you just put it on the hose and seed sprays out and keeps it moist. They showed it spraying on a block wall, and the grass would grow sideways out of the block wall. If it'll do that, it'll do that in your yard, so I thought, "This is great." Finally when I get it, the weather's just right, so I hook it to the hose and "Boom!" It blows up. Doesn't do anything but get me all green. You ever seen a pastor covered with Hydroseed? A green pastor. I thought, "Oh, no"; it was going to be on me when I preached on Sunday. But man, did I feel violated. Did I feel ripped off.

Maybe you've given somebody some spare change. I once gave a fellow some spare change, and he gave me his story, and then I was at the same place the next day and the same guy came up with a different story. Totally different story. I go, "Have you forgotten that I helped you yesterday, and you had a different story? You outta pay attention to who you're ripping off." No one likes to be lied to. No one likes to be conned.

But how much more important that we have the truth of God's Word. When it comes to religious cons, nothing could be more detrimental, because it deals with your eternal destiny. If you're wrong about Jesus and wrong about eternity and wrong about salvation and wrong about the Word of God, it could mean that you will perish without hope for all eternity. If there's anything we'd better be right about, it's God, it's Jesus, it's salvation, it's about heaven and it's about hell. We want to know the truth of God's Word. Now in order to have that truth, we must turn to the Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of God.

So Peter, in this passage, is warning us. The entire second chapter is the heart and soul of this epistle. You ask any Bible student what 2 Peter is about and they'll say it's about false teachers, about a warning to stand on the truth and not be lead astray by the siren call of the false teachers of our age.

Now I want you to notice it in verse 1. Peter says, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers..."—there it is—"...among you..."—that is, "believers in the church"—"...who shall privately..."—or "secretly" or "with subtlety"—"...bring in damnable heresies." They will "even deny the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many..."—verse 2—"...shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Because of their evil lifestyles,

Christianity would be brought into disrepute. Notice verse 3. "And through covetousness shall they with feigned..."—or "plastic"—"...words make merchandise of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation does not slumber."

Now Peter, in this passage, is describing false teachers. He is describing false teachers who would be among the believers. I want you to notice that in verses 1 to 3, we're going to get a description of these false teachers. And there are four words that describe false teachers, right out of the text. The first word is deception. Notice it in verse 1. It says that they come in "privately." They come in with subtlety. And they bring "damnable" or "destructive heresies."

Now the fact that chapter 2 opens with a "but" is significant. You say, "What's the significance?" When the Bible was originally written, it wasn't written with chapters and verses. It was just written, book by book, but it wasn't written with chapters and verses. So we've added chapters and verses and divisions for reference, to make easy reference. But in doing that, a lot of times they break up a thought pattern. They break up a topic. And many times when we come to a new chapter, we automatically think, "Okay, new subject," but it's not always true. Let me show you the connection. I want you to back up into 2 Peter 1:21.

Peter says, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved..."—or "carried along"—"...by..."—Who?—"...the Holy Spirit." And I say "Who" because the Holy Spirit is a person; He's a divine person, the third person of the Triune godhead. So the Bible was given by the Holy Spirit.

Now in 2 Peter 1:21 where he says that men didn't write that by their own will—they weren't writing out of their own mind, their own thoughts, their own ideas—but "holy men wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." That's what we call the "doctrine of inspiration." The Bible says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Now what do we mean by "inspiration"? We mean that God superintended the human authors so that the very words that they wrote were the words of God. Using their own personalities, God superintended the writing of the Scriptures so that they were writing the very Word of God. And when it says "inspiration," the word means "breathed" or God "breathed out." So God breathed out, the Holy Spirit breathed out, carried them along, and what we have is an inspired book and an inerrant book—it's without error—and an infallible book. So it's true on everything it talks about. There're no errors; it's not wrong historically or geographically or scientifically. It is dependable and reliable and trustworthy. The Bible is the Word of God. And the Bible says God "cannot lie," cannot err; therefore, the Bible is true and the Bible has no errors. And if you study the Scriptures, you'll come to the same conclusion, that this is a divine book.

And there's a sense in which everything we talk about today comes by the book. Everything. You know, in chapter 1, the best antidote or the best defense against error is, number one, real faith; number two, growing faith; and number three, a grounded faith in the Word of God. Not in an experience, but on Scripture.

So without skipping a beat, Peter goes from "holy men of God spoke as they were carried by

the Holy Spirit” and then “but.” “But as in the Old Testament, there were false prophets among the people...”—“the nation of Israel”—“...so there will be...”—future tense—“...false teachers among you.”

Now I want you to look at verse 1 where he speaks about the false prophets. Peter puts it in the past tense “among the people.” So he’s talking about the Old Testament prophets. Then he speaks in the future tense, “even as there shall be...”—verse 1—“...false teachers among you.”

I happen to believe the reason Peter mentions false prophets in the past and false teachers who will be in the future—as you get on in the second chapter, he says “here, and they’re with us now”—is because in the church today we no longer have the office of a prophet. We have teachers. We have pastors or elders. We don’t have prophets. Anyone who comes along and claims to be a prophet, I remind them we’re a “non-profit organization.” And because of that, some people think, “Well, John, you don’t believe in the gift of prophecy?” No. I believe in the gift of prophecy. I believe it’s still available for today, but it will always be aligned with God’s Word. No one will ever prophesy and say anything contrary to the Word.

But there’s a difference between prophesying and being a prophet; having a position of authority, or being a prophet and that whatever you speak is the Word of God. False movements, false teachers, false religions all have their prophets. Why? Because they want to supercede the Scriptures. For us as believers, our sole source of authority comes from the Bible. No human individual; it’s not a pope, it’s not a priest, it’s not a pastor, it’s not a bishop, it’s not an elder, it’s not a deacon, it’s not an organization. It’s the Bible, the Word of God.

We just celebrated 500 years of the Protestant Reformation, 500 years of the Scriptures, focusing on the Scriptures being in the language of the people. And when “we know the truth, the truth will set us free.” So many of the blessings and benefits we have in this western world come to us because of God’s Word in our own language. And that’s so vital. The Bible is that authority.

We don’t have prophets anymore, but we do have, verse 1, teachers. And in the church among us there can be false teachers, as in the Old Testament there were false prophets. And, by the way, in the Old Testament, one of the keynotes of false prophets was that they always told the people what they wanted to hear. They always told them things they wanted to hear. In 1 Kings 22, Ahab and Jehoshaphat were going against the Syrians, and Jehoshaphat said, “Well, let’s ask the prophets whether we should go to battle or not.” And Ahab had false prophets, and he called them in and whatever the king wanted to hear, the false prophets would say, “Thus saith the Lord, go to battle. Thou shalt be victorious and thou will conquer.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Well, something kind of funny about the way they acted and the way they looked and their flashy watch and their rings and their shoes and stuff, so I don’t know if these guys are right on. Do you have another prophet? A real profit?”

And you know what Ahab actually said? “Yeah, we have this prophet. His name is Micaiah, but I don’t like him. He never tells me anything I like.” But he was a real prophet. He was the real

deal. He told them the real word. “Yeah, but I don’t like him. He never tells me anything good.” Jehoshaphat says, “Well, let’s check him out. Let’s call him in.” So Micaiah comes in, and he prophesies for the king and he says, “If you go to battle, you’re going to be killed. You’re going to be wiped out and you’re going to be destroyed.” And King Ahab said, “See, I told you. He never says anything good.” Duh! And they disregarded the words of Micaiah, a true prophet, and they listened to the soothing, palatable words of the false prophet, and they went to battle and they were wiped out and they were destroyed.

It’s kind of like, we don’t come to church to hear what we want to hear. We come to hear the truth. We want to know the truth. We want to know God’s Word. But in the Old Testament, there were false prophets, and now in the New Testament, there are false teachers.

In our culture today, this is not in vogue. It’s not politically correct to say, “This man’s teaching is wrong. It’s not Christian, it’s not Biblical. It’s err. It’ll damn your soul for all eternity.” We deem that as being not nice. And we talk about being tolerant. Tolerant is the big buzz word and has been for many years. But the way they define tolerance is not that I let you believe what you want, even though I think it’s wrong and I can hold my views—one’s wrong and one’s right—yet I respect you and let you hold your view. That’s tolerance. But they define tolerance as everyone’s view is equally valid and true, that everyone’s view is equally right. In other words, we have abandoned truth, and we don’t believe anymore that there’s such a thing as absolute truth. Everything is relative. And whatever you want to believe is okay. And I’m okay and you’re okay and we’re all okay. “Let’s join hands and sing Kumbaya. We’re all going to go to heaven. All paths lead to God.” That’s what’s in vogue; that’s what’s acceptable.

And we know, as Christians, there’s truth and there’s error. The Bible talks about the “Spirit of truth” and the “spirit of error.” “When you know the truth, the truth shall set you free.” When you are following an error, it can damn your soul for eternity. So we’d better be right when it comes to salvation and Jesus and God and eternal things.

And he makes a statement here that we need to give heed to: that “They are among us.” And this is their sphere. They’re not out there, they’re not occultists or overt Satan worshippers, but they’re among us. This is the deception. And I want you to notice that: that they come with subtlety. Verse 1 says, “who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.” They’re camouflaged. When they knock on your door, they don’t say, “Hi, we’re the local cult. We’ve come to share our heresy and damn your soul to hell. You want to have a Bible study with us?” They don’t do that. “Oh, yeah; we’re Christians too. We believe in Jesus. Oh, yes; we believe that, and we can teach you the Bible.” It’s sad that they come with such subtlety.

Jesus said, “They are wolves in...”—what?—“...sheep’s clothing.” “Grandma, what big teeth you have!” When Paul met with the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20—one of my favorite stories in the Bible because it’s a group of pastors meeting on the beach. That’s my favorite thing to do, get pastors and meet on the beach. We have board meetings on the beach all the time. So they’re meeting on the beach and Paul’s praying with them and he says, “Now I know that when I leave shall wolves come in among you, not sparing the flock.” And then he made a statement

saying, “Some will even arise from your own midst and seek to lead people astray.” So they come in with subtlety. They come in with camouflage. They come in with guile. When Satan comes on the scene, he comes with subtlety and deception.

This is what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. Listen carefully. He said, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.” If Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, it’s no big deal for one of his ministers to be changed into a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So we need to be careful of their deception.

But there’s a second word that describes them and that is in verse 1. And that is the word “denial.” I want you to notice it there in verse 1. “Bringing in destructive heresies, even...”—notice this—“...denying the Lord that bought them.” You see that? “Denying the Lord that bought them.” Now what does Peter mean by “denying the Lord that bought them”? Is Peter saying that they are saved? Is Peter saying that they’re born again? Is Peter saying when he uses the words “bought them,” that they were saved, and then they went into error and they can be lost? My answer to that is “No”; I don’t believe that. I believe that the teachers of error in 2 Peter 2 are unsaved, never having been born again.

You say, “Well, what do you base that on?” Look at the last verse of chapter 2. It says, “This has happened unto them according to the true proverb...”—verse 22 of chapter 2—“...’the dog has turned to his own vomit and the pig that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.” So they’re not sheep; they’re dogs. They’re not sheep; they’re pigs. You go, “Pastor Miller, that’s not nice.” I’m just reading the verse. Don’t shoot the messenger. Peter says it’s like “a dog that goes back to its vomit and like a pig that goes back, after being washed, to its wallowing in the mire.” There’s never been a new nature. Why did the Prodigal Son go back to the Father? He wasn’t a pig. He went back home. He went back to the Father. And I believe a true Christian can fall into sin, but they won’t lie there. They won’t stay there. They’ll come back.

So I believe all through the second chapter—and I believe it’s foundational—we are to understand that these false teachers are “professors” but not “possessors.” Do you know that a person can say they’re a Christian and not be one? Did you know a person can say, “I love Jesus. I’ve been born again. I’m a Christian. I’m a child of God.” They can say that but not really be a true Christian or a child of God. Here’s the problem: They have the same vocabulary, but they use a different dictionary. Don’t forget that. Same vocabulary—salvation, sin, heaven, hell, Jesus, Lord, Son of God—but a different dictionary. They use the same words, but they give them different definitions.

False teachers are known for what they deny. Now I want to stop here for a moment and give you some of the things that they deny. Most often a false teacher will deny that the Bible alone is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. And most cults and false groups have their books to go with the Bible, which they claim to be of equal authority. Now, in all due respect, I

mention the Book of Mormon. Why do they have the Book of Mormon? Because it's a different gospel and it's a different Jesus. The Pearl of Great Price, the doctrine of the covenant. So I've had ex-Mormons come up to me and were so thankful that I would even mention that or deal with that.

What about Jehovah Witnesses? They believe—this is quoting their own material—that if you read your Bible by itself, you will go into darkness. That's what the Watchtower Society says: that if you read the Bible by itself, you will go into darkness. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is true and the Bible is light and God said what He meant and meant what He said. And the Bible will set you free. You need their magazines to understand their lies and their deception, which are ancient heresies that have just resurfaced with new clothes. But they deny the infallible, inerrant Word of God. And, again, I could preach a whole sermon on this point.

It all comes back to the Scriptures. I heard an atheist recently say, "Who do the Christians think they are to tell us the way to heaven?! Who do Christians think they are to tell us that they have the way, the only truth?!" "Yeah, that sounds pretty good. Who are we?" And then as I thought about it, I thought, "Yeah, we're people of The Book. That's who we are." We have a book, and it's from God. And it's the inspired Word of God. And it's not what I say; it's what God says in His Word. So it's not my thoughts or my opinion or my view or "thus saith John Miller." It's "Thus saith the Lord" in His Word. That's who we are; we are actually people of The Book.

The early church was actually known as the people of The Book. I love that concept. We come to church and we read our Bibles and we live by the Word, and everything we do is filtered through the Word of God. It's impossible to be deceived if you have a grounded and growing and genuine, authentic faith that is grounded on God's holy Word. So false teachers inevitably deny God's Word.

You know what the first words recorded in the Bible in Genesis 3 from the mouth of Satan were? His words were, "Did God really say that?" Isn't that interesting that the first words out of the mouth of the devil, who came with subtlety—he didn't show up and say, "I'm the devil. I'm going to deceive you, Eve, and ruin the whole world." He came with subtlety. He questioned God's Word. Then, secondly, he denied God's Word. He said, "You will not die." And then, thirdly, he substituted God's Word; "You shall be a god" or "You shall be as God." And that's one of Satan's lies even today. "We're god, you're god, we're all gods. We all have a divine spark within us that we need to fan into flame. We're all one with the universe, and we're all divine. We need to develop this god-consciousness within every one of us."

It's funny; you go to a seminar and pay a couple of hundred dollars to find out you're god. Isn't that bizarre? You pay all this money, you go somewhere. "Wow! I'm god." What kind of god are you that you have to pay money to find out you're god? Utter, utter foolishness. A lie from Satan himself. God is God, and we'll never be god. And God is not His creation. He's the creator, and God transcends creation. He's above and outside of creation. He's not a tree. He's not a flower. He's not the wind. He's not an emotion. He's a personal, eternal, all-

powerful, all-knowing God. But they deny God's Word.

Let me give you the other things they deny. They deny the Trinity. Do you know the doctrine of the Trinity is orthodox Christianity? Did you know that if you deny the triune nature of God, that's not Christianity? God is one. We're monotheistic, but He is three Persons, triune in nature; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This is what the Bible teaches and Christians have believed throughout all church history. You deny the Trinity, you do not have Christianity. And most false teachers deny the Trinity.

And then, thirdly, they deny the deity of Christ. And this is where our text brings us. It says they "deny the Lord that bought them." Their Christology, their doctrine of Christ, is wrong. And if you're wrong about Jesus, you're wrong about God. They don't believe that Jesus Christ is God. Jehovah Witnesses deny the deity of Christ. The Mormons pervert the deity of Christ. They're polytheistic; they believe in many gods, lords. They believe that you and I can have our marriages sealed in the temple, that we can attain godhood, that we have god wives and a god planet and that we'll be divine someday. That's the lie from the Garden of Eden. Jesus Christ, though, is God in flesh.

And they deny the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. That means they deny the fact that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. When Jesus died on the Cross, as the God-man, He was actually paying the penalty for man's sin. He was a substitute. He took our place. And God's wrath was poured out upon Jesus on the Cross, and He paid in full the penalty for our sin. So they deny the substitutionary death of Christ.

They deny Christ's bodily Resurrection, that Jesus physically rose. Same vocabulary, different dictionary. "Oh, we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ." "Well, what do you believe?" "We believe He rose spiritually, that it was a spiritual Resurrection." That's not what the Bible says. When Jesus rose from the dead, His body was gone, because it was resurrected. And it was changed into an immortal body, so He could pass through the tomb without the stone being rolled away. The stone was rolled away so the disciples could get in to see that He arose, not so Jesus could get out. And then He would appear and disappear. He would be able to be touched, and He would eat. So He had a body like we're going to have when we rise from the dead.

So Jesus conquered death. And He paid the penalty for sin. And then He arose from the dead, and He ascended into heaven and He's exalted by the right hand of the Father. Right now, in heaven, is where Jesus is. And guess what? The story's not over yet. He's coming back. And this is one of the main things they deny: "Jesus isn't going to return. Since our fathers died, everything stays the same. Uniformity. We're just going to go on and on and on and on and evolve into our own god consciousness. Jesus isn't coming back." Don't be fooled. Don't be deceived. He is coming back. And when He comes back—as we're going to see in this chapter, verses 4 to 9—He's going to judge the wicked. He's going to judge the ungodly and these false teachers.

So the first characteristic we see is that the false teachers are deceptive; they come in with subtlety or camouflage. They are tares sown among the wheat—"not everyone that says 'Lord, Lord'..."—and, secondly, they are deceiving, doctrinally.

Then I want you to notice, thirdly, their sensuality. In verse 2, we find this statement. Very important. Peter says, "Many shall follow..."—and here it is—"...their..."—my King James has—"...pernicious ways." And because of that, "the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Now what does he mean by "pernicious ways"? Actually, here we get some insight into their motive. They do false teaching so that they can accommodate a sinful, sensual lifestyle. The Greek word translated in my King James Bible "pernicious" should be translated "sexually immoral" or "sexual license." It is a reckless, hardened immorality. And it's in what's called the "plural form," which denotes the repeated acts of the sexual and sensual exercise.

William Barclay, the great New Testament scholar, said it describes the attitude of a man "who's lost to shame. He is past the stage of wishing to conceal his sin and being ashamed of it." In the book of Jude it says that "they have turned the grace of God into lasciviousness."

Now listen to me very carefully. What comes along with false teaching 99.9% of the time is sexual immorality, because what we believe determines how we behave. You show me a cult, and I'll show you people who, quite often, are living in sexual immorality. And many times they turn the Scriptures to accommodate their sinful lifestyle. Joseph Smith was a polygamist. Brigham Young was a polygamist. Many early Mormons were polygamists. Why did they teach polygamy? Because of their licentiousness. Their sinful desire.

Not too many years ago I sat with a man in a suit and tie. Intelligent, an insurance broker, who was a Mormon. And I asked him, "If polygamy was legal in the United States, would you be a polygamist?" And he said, "Yes, I would be." So Mormons today, who really hold to their teaching, accommodate their sinful, lustful lifestyle.

Back in the early '60s, there was a cult known as the Children of God. They were lead by a man called Moses David Berg. He changed his name to a Biblical name. The cult group became completely perverted sexually and immorally. Terrible stuff in the name of Christianity and in the name of the Jesus Movement. So they were tares among the wheat. They were not authentic. They were not the real. They were not genuine. And that's what Peter's saying here: sensuality will be that which marks them. And notice it says in verse 2, "Many will follow them." It's popular. "The way of truth shall be evil spoken of" because of them.

Now here's the fourth, and the last, word that describes these false teachers. It's in verse 3. It's the word "greed." "And through covetousness..."—there it is—"...shall they with feigned..."—or "phony" or "plastic"—"...words make merchandise of you; whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not." In other words, God is going to judge them. The New Living translation renders verse 3, "In their greed, they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money." Not only is sensuality characteristic of false teachers, but also covetousness. Money, money, money and more money.

How many times have you heard people say, "I'm not going to go to church. They only want your money. All these preachers want is your money." And that's sadly true in some cases. Any time a preacher talks more about money than he does Jesus, run for your life. Any time a preacher talks about health and wealth more than Jesus Christ, run for your life. False teacher. They're not only sensual; they're covetous.

In 1 Timothy 6, Paul was warning Timothy that there would be those in the church who would preach that godliness is a way to get rich. Have a familiar ring? "If you're really godly and you really have lots of faith, you're going to be rich. And you're going to have a nice car, and you're going to have a nice house and you won't be sick. You're going to prosper." Sometimes they're known as the "health and wealth" preachers.

I want you to turn back with me to 1 Peter 5:1. Peter says, "The elders which are among you I exhort." The elders there are pastors. And Peter says, "I'm a pastor, I'm writing to pastors and I'm exhorting them." He says, "I'm a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Here's what he tells pastors in verse 2. "Feed the flock of God." Notice it doesn't say, "Fleece the flock of God." "Feed" them. Don't "fleece" them. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight, not by constraint..."—"not because you have to"—"...but willingly; not for filthy lucre..."—"not because of money"—"...but of a ready mind; not being lords over God's heritage..." but that you will be ready to give an account to "...the chief shepherd..."—verse 4—"...who shall appear, and you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away."

So you're not going to be lording over God's heritage, but you're going to serve God's people. So you're not there for what you can get; you're there for what you can give. A pastor is never, ever to be motivated by money. He's to be motivated by a love for God and a call of God. He's never to be motivated by "How much can I get?"

These false teachers can think only about their own needs. And that's sad. They use feigned words. They make merchandise of the people. The word "feigned" there is the word "plastos" in the Greek. We get our word "plastic" from it. This was long before plastic was ever invented. We called it plastic because it's fake. Fake plastic wood. Fake things. Cheap things. Plastic.

You say, "Well, Pastor John, how does this happen? How is it that false teachers are among us? How do they come into the church?" Hear me well; this is a very important passage that is dear to my heart. It's in 2 Timothy 4. Paul tells Timothy, "Preach the Word." That's what a pastor's supposed to do. And he tells them how to preach the Word. "Be instant in season, out of season." In other words, when it's in vogue, when it's popular, and you preach it when it's not popular. What I'm preaching right now is not a popular message. It doesn't always make people happy to hear this. But you're to preach the Word, and you're to do it "in season and out of season." And you're to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine..."—"truth," "teaching." Why? Here it is—"...Because the time will come..."—and I believe the time has come in the church today—"...when men will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts..."—"their own desires"—"...they heap to themselves teachers, having

itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables.” And Paul says, “You, Timothy, watch in all things, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry.”

Now the itching ears are not the teachers’ ears. It’s the people’s ears. And what does it mean? It means that they find a pastor who will itch their ears, telling them what they want to hear. “Ah, that feels good.” They want a pastor who will tell them not the truth, but what they want to hear. “God wants you rich.” “Ah, yes. That feels good. Thank you, pastor.” “Did you know that there’s no hell?” “Ah, Yes.” Instead of saying, “Preach it,” they say, “Tickle it.” “Everyone’s going to go to heaven. There is no devil. There is no hell. Jesus is not the only way. Let’s accept one another.” “Yes, that feels good, pastor. Just keep tickling our ears.”

If there’s anyone here right now who has an itching ear, I’m not going to tickle it. I’m not here to tickle your ear and to tell you what you want to hear. I’m here to faithfully and as reliably as I can tell you what the Bible says. That’s what I’m here to do. I’m here to read the text and explain the text in its historical, grammatical, theological context and apply it to our lives.

And I want you to know something: There are still false teachers among us. “Not everyone who says ‘Lord, Lord’—not everyone on the television, not everyone on the radio, not everyone who writes a book. When you go into a bookstore and you find a book, and it claims, “Jesus is speaking. Jesus is calling me,” be careful. Any book that claims they got it directly from hearing God’s voice, that what they are writing is the word of God, I don’t want to read that book. You certainly have to examine it with the already revealed Word of God. “I am a prophet. I am an apostle. I speak with authority. I have a word from God. I have God’s word written in black and white in the Scriptures.”

You know, when you open your Bible, you don’t have to put filters on. All you have to do is read it. God said what He meant and meant what He said. You don’t need other magazines or other books or other people to interpret the Scriptures. Read it. It’s in your hand. It’s clear. Get a modern translation. They’re good. It makes it very clear what God has said in His Word. There’s no ambiguity. It’s crystal clear. I not only believe in the inspiration of Scripture and the veracity of Scripture and the sufficiency. I believe in what’s called the “clarity” of Scripture. You know what that means? It means it’s clear.

You know, most people are bothered not by the verses they don’t understand. They’re bothered by the verses they do understand. Those are the ones they want to tear out of the Bible. Tear that one out, tear that one out. “Did Jesus really say that? ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’” [ripping sound] Wow. It’s coming out. Tear that one out!” “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” “Oh, let’s tear that one out.” “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality.” “Let’s just tear that right out.” And we want to pick and choose. We become the authority rather than God in submitting to his Word.

Remember when Jesus went into the temple, and there were money changers there? They

were ripping the people off. What did Jesus do? He overturned their tables. He actually made a whip and drove them out. You talk about not nice! What are you going to do when you get to heaven? "Hey, Jesus, I really want to talk to you about when you made that whip and whipped on those dudes. That really wasn't very nice. You really upset me." Is that what you're going to say when you get to heaven? "That really wasn't nice." Jesus said, "These guys have taken My Father's house, which is to be a house of prayer, and they've turned it into a den of thieves." They're covetous. It was all about them and what they could get from the people. And they were fleecing the sheep rather than feeding the sheep the Word of God. But God will condemn them. The end of verse 3 makes that very, very clear.

So, as I said, verses 4 through 9 give us three examples. In the past God destroyed the ungodly. In verse 4, He has put in chains the angels that sin. In verse 5, the old world, the antediluvian world before Noah, He sent a flood to destroy all flesh upon the earth. He saved Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives. There were eight souls saved on that Ark. You know, the story of Noah's Ark is not just a cute little nursery story for kids to decorate their nursery at home with animals on a boat. It's a story about God judging sin. The world had become so wicked that God had to destroy all flesh upon the earth. He did it once. He'll do it again. And then the third example is Sodom and Gomorrah, verses 6 to 8. He took Lot safely out of the city, and then He rained down fire and brimstone and judgment on that sinful, wicked city. So what Peter is trying to say is that if God did it before, God can do it again.

Now I want you to notice in verse 9 he says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations..."—or "trials" or "testings"—"...and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." There you have it. The ungodly are headed for judgment. The righteous, the godly, are headed for salvation. Two destinies, two roads. Jesus said, "There's a broad gate that leads to a broad road that leads to destruction. And many go down that road. There's a narrow gate that leads to a narrow road. And few there be who find it. But it leads to life." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Me."

I'm here to tell you in closing that there's only one way for you to be saved and go to heaven. And that's through Jesus Christ. And when Jesus died on that Cross, He took your sin and He paid the penalty. And He rose victoriously from the dead. You, like the Bible says, "have sinned." The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There's no one righteous; no not one." If you'll acknowledge your need of Jesus Christ and you'll trust in Him today, He'll forgive your sins. He'll come into your heart, and He'll give you eternal life.

So even though I've talked about the false teachers, I want to end on this note: You can be saved. You can be forgiven. You can have the hope of heaven. You can know that when you die, you'll go to heaven. And you can have that by reaching out in faith and taking the hand of Jesus Christ.