

LIVING HOPE | Truth in a World of Lies

2 Peter 2

Big Idea: We must discern truth in a deceptive world.

Today we're in 2 Peter chapter 2. And I'm going to do something a little different today. Before I tell you anything about this passage, I just want you to hear it. All of it.

And as I read it, pay attention to how Peter sounds. Pay attention to what he repeats. Pay attention to what seems to concern him most.

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. 10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; 11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. 12 But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.

13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. 14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop

sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

17 These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”

Well, Peter had some feelings! That doesn't exactly read like a warm devotional, does it? Peter is worked up. He's intense. At moments, it almost sounds like a tirade.

But here's what I want us to understand: Peter isn't angry because somebody disagreed with him. He's alarmed because false teaching destroys people.

This is the voice of a shepherd who sees wolves getting close to the sheep.

Now, let me tell you about the time I bought fake cologne. Twice.

BUYING FAKE COLOGNE

Now, let me tell you about the time I bought fake cologne. Twice.

BUYING FAKE COLOGNE

I really love cologne. Many have been gifts, but I have bought a few bougie ones at a steep discount.

A while back, I started having doubts about one, so I joined a subreddit called “Cologne Check.” I posted some pictures, and within minutes people were saying, “Definitely fake!” I was hot!

I'm looking at this thing thinking, *How do you know?! It looks right, it smells right, it feels right. And I got a deal!*

They could tell by the bottle. The lettering. The placement of things. Little details I didn't even know to look for. Turns out, I had bought fake cologne.

Twice. Ouch.

But here's the thing: **I bought it because it looked real to me.**

That's what makes a counterfeit effective. It has to look enough like the real thing to fool you.

Nobody counterfeits something by making it completely different. The danger is in how much it resembles the real thing.

And that's Peter's concern in this chapter. He's not warning the church about people who walk in saying, *"Hey everybody, I'm here to destroy your faith!"*

He says: "There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you..." — 2 Peter 2:1

Among you. Close enough to the real thing to be believed.

So Peter gives the church a triple warning:

Don't be surprised.

Don't be deceived.

And don't be afraid.

1 | DON'T BE SURPRISED: FALSE TEACHERS WILL COME

Peter tells us that there were false teachers in the days of the prophets. Take for example, Jeremiah's generation: While he was preaching God's punishment for Israel's rebellion, others were preaching prosperity!

But Jesus also warned: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing..." — Matthew 7:15

The apostles fought against false teaching. Even the generations immediately following the apostles had to teach Christians how to recognize false teachers.

Wherever God speaks truth, someone will eventually distort it.

And notice where Peter says they will be: **"Among you."**

The greatest danger isn't always somebody standing outside the church saying, "Christianity is false." Sometimes it is somebody inside saying: "**Let me tell you what Christianity really means.**"

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE THEM?

Peter doesn't give us a neat checklist, but throughout the chapter he repeatedly points to their **message, motives, and fruit.**

Their message distorts Jesus. *"They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them." — v.1*

So ask:

- **What are they doing with Jesus?**
- Are they making Him smaller?
- Are they changing His gospel?
- Are they denying His authority?

Their motives reveal them.

Peter doesn't just say these teachers are wrong. He says they *want something from you*. And if you watch closely, you can usually see it.

Greed. It's the preacher who never talks about sin, but always talks about sowing. Give this month, and God will multiply it back to you by December. Buy the course, and you'll finally unlock the breakthrough you've been praying for. Somewhere along the way, the gospel got a price tag, and grace turned into a subscription plan.

Exploitation. This is greed with a victim standing in front of it. It's the leader who finds out you're desperate — desperate for healing, desperate for a spouse, desperate for your kid to come home — and instead of pointing you to Jesus, sells you access to God. A special prayer cloth. A "prophetic word" that conveniently requires an offering to receive. Peter calls it "fabricated stories," and here's what makes it so ugly: it doesn't target the strong. It targets the hurting, because the hurting will believe almost anything if it comes with a promise attached.

Sensuality. This one's subtler, because it doesn't always show up as scandal. Sometimes it shows up as permission. "God just wants you to be happy." "You've suffered enough — you don't owe anyone faithfulness anymore." It's not always someone sleeping around; sometimes it's just someone slowly convincing you that self-denial was never really part of the deal. Peter says these teachers have "eyes full of

adultery" — not because every one of them commits it, but because their whole framework is built to serve appetite instead of crucify it.

Spiritual arrogance. And then there's the one Peter seems almost personally offended by — the teacher with secret information. They know exactly what the demon in your house is doing. They know exactly what God is "about to do" in the region. They know which spirit governs which city. It sounds impressive. It sounds like access. But Pedro's warning could be paraphrased pretty simply: *don't confuse spiritual swagger with spiritual authority*. Confidence is not the same thing as truth. Somebody speaking boldly in Jesus' name is not automatically speaking *for* Him.

Here's what ties all four together, and I want you to actually sit with this: false teaching is rarely about someone being wrong on a doctrine quiz. There's always something they want. Money. Power. Influence. Sex. Control. Admiration. Ask that question the next time something sounds a little too good, a little too tailored to what you wanted to hear anyway: *what does this person get if I believe them?*

Their fruit exposes them. Some of you already know part of our story — you know I grew up in a group that called itself the truth and wasn't. I'm not here to retell all of it today. I want to give you just one moment out of it, because it's the one that belongs in this passage.

My father was born into that world. Not converted — born into it. It was the only reality he'd ever known. And then he found out the truth about the man everyone called a man of God — a pattern of abuse, hidden for years behind the language of holiness.

He had a choice. Looking away would have cost him nothing. Acting on what he now knew was true cost him everything. He acted anyway.

God was gracious to remove the veil that had blinded my father's eyes, and the way He did it was by examining fruit. Jesus said: "By their fruit you will recognize them." Peter says essentially the same thing throughout this chapter.

Don't only ask, "Can this person preach?" Ask, "What kind of life does this teaching produce?" Because charisma is not character. Popularity is not authority. Confidence is not truth. And spiritual language is not necessarily spiritual fruit — even the devil knows how to talk like a Christian.

My father seeing the fruit for what it was — that took discernment. But staying free of that man's grip, once you'd seen the truth, took something else. Because these teachers aren't just selling lies. They're selling freedom. And that's what we have to talk about next. ***Peter warns us....***

2 | DON'T BE DECEIVED: FALSE FREEDOM LEADS TO SLAVERY

This may be Peter's clearest diagnosis of these teachers. "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity." — v.19

That's the sales pitch. Freedom. And it doesn't usually show up sounding dangerous — it shows up sounding compassionate. **"Grace means God doesn't care what you do with your body anymore."** **"Real love never tells you no."** **"You don't need to submit to anyone — not a spouse, not a church, not a conscience."** Every one of those sounds like kindness. Every one of those is a leash you can't see yet.

Think about anything that's ever had a grip on you — a substance, a habit, a relationship, a screen. Nobody talks you into slavery. Nobody says, **"come be trapped."** They say, **"come be free."** And it feels true, for a while. Peter says these teachers work the exact same way. He doesn't say they'll become slaves. He says they already are. They're not offering you something they found — they're selling you the very thing that already has them by the throat.

That's why the test isn't **"does this feel like freedom."** Everything that eventually enslaves you felt like freedom on day one. The real question is: what does this actually produce over time? More love for Jesus? More holiness, humility, self-control? More capacity to actually love the people in your life? Or does it just keep asking for more of you while giving you back less of yourself? Biblical truth doesn't just affirm you where you already are. It transforms you into someone freer than you knew how to want.

Peter has one more image for this, and it might be the sharpest line in the whole chapter. He calls these teachers "springs without water." Picture walking through the desert, dying of thirst, and spotting water shimmering in the distance. You run for it — and there's nothing there. Not less water than you hoped. Nothing. That's what false freedom does. It doesn't disappoint you a little. It was never there to begin with.

3 | DON'T BE AFRAID: THE LORD KNOWS HOW TO RESCUE HIS PEOPLE

Then Peter does something that can feel like a tirade. Angels judged. The ancient world judged. Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed. Lot rescued. Balaam rebuked. Why all of this?

Because he's not randomly listing destruction. Every example says the same thing: **God knows the difference between those who belong to Him and those who don't.** Noah lived surrounded by corruption — God knew where Noah was. Lot lived surrounded by wickedness — God knew where Lot was. False prophets rose up among God's people — God knew how to deal with them.

You want to see Him do it again, centuries later? Fourth-century church.

Imagine being told the truth you'd die for was now the minority opinion in your own church. That actually happened. A group inside the church started teaching something that sounded almost right: Jesus was the greatest being God ever made — powerful, glorious, first in line, above every angel — but still made. Still created. Close to God. Not God.

And it spread. Not on the fringe — through the mainstream. Bishops preached it. Emperors enforced it. For a long stretch, most of the empire's church leadership believed some version of it.

One bishop wouldn't bend. Athanasius. He kept insisting: no — Jesus isn't the highest created thing, He IS God, fully, from the beginning, not made. For that, he was exiled from his home five times by five different rulers. Roughly seventeen years of his life, kicked out of his own church, for refusing to soften one sentence about who Jesus is.

He died before it was ever settled. The church didn't formally affirm it until decades after he was gone.

But it was affirmed. The belief we recite without a second thought — Jesus Christ, fully God, not created — survived because one man refused to trade it for peace, popularity, or his own safety.

Here's what I need you to hear: that's not ancient history. That exact claim — "Jesus is close to God but not fully God, not eternal, actually created" — got rejected sixteen hundred years ago. And it's back. It has a name, a doorbell, and a pamphlet. It's what Jehovah's Witnesses teach when they knock on your door. It's baked into Mormon theology. The same lie the church buried in the fourth century is standing on your porch, asking for five minutes of your time.

Wow.

[Let that sit.]

The Lord doesn't just win these fights once. He knows how to preserve His truth across sixteen centuries — and He still needs people in this room who know it well enough to recognize it the moment it knocks.

So what do we actually do?

4 | KNOW THE WORD. TEST THE MESSAGE. TRUST THE LORD.

Peter doesn't tell Christians to become experts in every counterfeit. He already told them what to do: "You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place." — 2 Peter 1:19

The best protection against counterfeit teaching isn't spotting every fake — it's deep familiarity with the truth.

So I did something for you this week. I made a list. **Pastor Joel's Top Five False Teachers**. Go ahead, take out your notes, get your phones ready [SHOW SLIDE — title only, no names yet]

[Pause. Let it sit.]

Some of you just leaned forward. Some of you are already nervous. A few of you are thinking, he better not put my guy up there. I see you. [Longer pause.]

I'm not giving you the list.

I know — I built it up. That was on purpose. Because I want you to notice what you just felt. For about ten seconds, you were ready to let me do your discerning for you. You wanted the answer key. And I get it — it would be so much easier if I just told you who to avoid.

But here's the problem: if every time a new voice shows up you have to text me, "Pastor Joel, is this guy okay?" — I haven't taught you to discern anything. I've just made you dependent on my discernment. And what happens the day I get it wrong? Or the day I'm not around to ask?

Remember the cologne? Nobody handed me a catalog of every fake bottle ever made. That's not how you catch a counterfeit. You catch it because you know what the real thing feels like in your hands.

Same here. I'm not going to hand you five names to avoid. I'm going to point you back to one: Jesus. Know Him well enough — His voice, His character, His gospel — and you won't need my list. You'll recognize the fake the moment it's in your hands.

Church, know the real thing.

Remember that list I promised you earlier and then didn't give you? Here's the list I'll actually give you. Not five names to avoid — two questions to run on anything you hear.

[SLIDE: THE TEST (just the title and questions)]

1. What does this do with Jesus?

Does it make much of the biblical Christ — or a version of Him that's smaller, safer, more convenient?

2. What does this produce?

Not "did I like it." Not "did it go viral." Not "did everybody say amen." Does the life behind this teaching — and the life it produces in you — actually look like holiness? Like Jesus?

Peter keeps circling back to money, sex, and power for a reason: false doctrine always eventually shows up in how someone actually lives. Run those two questions on anything — a book, a podcast, a preacher, a post — and you'll know a lot faster than you think.

And one more thing before we move on: whatever you do, don't confuse a crowd with the truth. "Many will follow their depraved conduct." Many. Sometimes error gets the room and truth doesn't. So don't count followers. Test fruit.

CONCLUSION | LEARN THE REAL THING

When people learn to spot counterfeit money, they don't study every fake that's ever been printed. They handle the real thing until nothing else can pass for it.

That's Peter's invitation. You don't need to know every cult, every heresy, every voice that'll show up next year claiming to speak for God. Know Jesus that well, and when something false comes along, you'll feel it before you can even explain why.

Church — there will be false teachers. Don't be surprised. They'll promise freedom and deliver bondage — don't be deceived. And the Lord still knows how to rescue His people — so don't be afraid.

Before we close, I want to give you a minute of quiet. Not to perform anything — just to be honest with God about where you actually stand tonight.

Maybe you've been listening to a voice — a teacher, a podcast, an account, a "prophecy" — and something in you has already started to wonder. You haven't said it out loud yet. Tonight, just admit it to the Lord. "God, I've been listening to something and I don't know if it's water or a mirage. Give me discernment. Show me the truth."

Or maybe it's simpler than that. Maybe the problem isn't that you've been fooled by a fake — it's that you don't know the real thing well enough to recognize one if it walked up to you. If that's you, don't be ashamed of that tonight. Just tell Him: "I want to know You well enough that nothing else can pass for You."

Wherever you are, just talk to Him. He already knows.