

A Portrait of a Wolf, Part 1

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2 Peter 2:1

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Well, as we turn our attention back to God's word for today, I want to call our focus to 2 Peter. And if you recall from last year if you were with us, we started this study early in the year and we were able to get through chapter 1. And in order to jump back in right into chapter 2, we don't just want to airdrop in and not know where we are. We want to have some context. So we're going to spend some time looking back at what we've studied in order to kind of get a runway for where we're going.

I've entitled this study Established in Truth, and that's not original by the way. I just steal it right from Peter, but I'll give him attribution. He says in verse 12 that he wrote this letter in order to establish you in the truth that you already know, and that's kind of the thesis statement of the whole book. I want to establish you in the truth of Christ and not let misunderstandings or false teachers or false hope get in your way.

See, Peter, as he's writing this, knows that he's about to die. He's sitting in a Roman prison. He knows that at any day he's going to have a date with the Roman executioners. And being a faithful man of God, an apostle, a prophet, and a pastor, he wanted to leave for his church, and indeed for the entire church, a final farewell and a last will and testament and a legacy that would serve to instruct believers for all time. Though this letter was initially written to his local church audience, which would've been a group of churches in Asia Minor in the first century that is kind of modern-day Turkey along the Mediterranean coast, he actually has written this letter, if you are in Christ, directly to you.

If you read chapter 1, verse 1 with me again, it says this, "Simeon Peter," interesting note that he's using his old Jewish name. He's not saying, "I, Peter, am the King of the Apostles" like some churches might have us believe. He's saying, "Simeon." I'm the one that Jesus found on the shore, the Sea of Galilee, Peter as servant, and yes, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Not apostle. But Jesus called me to this ministry so I will serve him by being an apostle. So the Holy Spirit establishes force, his calling, his heart and his authorship right from the beginning.

He goes on to say, "To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours." Now, is that some kind of mystical like, "I'm a super Christian, so this letter's for me?" No, we understand that Peter was not a super Christian. He was only empowered by the Spirit to do what he did. He would've fallen away otherwise. So he knows that this faith of equal standing with his is that, "I have no standing outside of Christ. So my faith comes because Jesus paid it all on the cross and I rely on Him for His righteousness and to pay the penalty for my sin." And if that is you friend, then Peter has written you a letter. It's as if he folded it up and put it in your mailbox and wrote it

for you. He wants you to know that He wants you to be established in the truth because this world will tell you lies.

So we want to recall the big picture of Peter's letter here as it's broken down in three chapters, and that's kind of the three easy divides of this book. It's nice and easy to follow. Now there's some tough stuff in here we're going to work through, but it's easy to follow what he's doing. And so you can see these three main divides. Chapter 1, Peter teaches us about the nature of the Christian life. He addresses for us our blessings in Christ being Christians, our complete and sufficient source of biblical wisdom found in God's word, the blessings of being saved by Christ and sealed in Christ, our confidence in his saving work, the practice of godly virtues that showcase the transforming power of Christ in our lives, and the unsurpassed glory of Jesus on that mount of transfiguration and the perfect trust we can have in his divine word.

Chapter 2, as we'll come to see, discusses the warnings against false teachers. It outlines for us their nature and their character, their objectives, their plans and their appetites. It will also tell us about their impending destruction that is coming on them for their deeds. It will teach us how to mark and avoid these people.

Chapter 3 then will remind us about the certainty of Jesus Christ's earthly return. You see, in contrast to what the false teachers will tell you, in chapter 3, they say, "Where is the promise of his coming? All things have continued on since day one. We can get away with whatever we want. We can do whatever we want. We can worship him however we want." That's what they're going to tell you. And what Peter instead is going to do is focus on the truth and the hope that all Christians have, that indeed you will be redeemed fully by Christ when He returns and establishes His earthly kingdom.

That's a fantastic and wonderful chapter, but we're not there yet. Chapter 2 is also wonderful. It's a little bit darker. Anyone like Star Wars? It's kind of like Empire Strikes Back. It's a little darker, but it's really good. So we're going to get through it, but I want you to understand the apostle's drive for why he's doing what he's doing and where he's taking us. You see, Peter's not about to die and simply just saying, "Hey, make sure I get the credit. Okay, follow me and not them." That's not what he's doing here. Rather what Peter is doing is he's undergirding all the sweet truth, the encouraging truth that he just talked about in chapter 1, delivered to the church through the apostles from Christ himself. But he wants to note that even in the sweetness of fellowship, even in the safety of the body of Christ, that danger lurks in our midst.

And from chapter 2, verse 1, Peter sets out to play the role of protective shepherd in his final correspondence before his execution. You see, shepherding is a privilege and shepherding is indeed a joy in God's family. We get to lead people through the calm waters and green pastures of God's word and it's a wonderful blessing to do that. People that show Christ's glory to the church. However, shepherding is also dangerous. You see, shepherds would spend their days protecting their flock and they would spend their nights with one eye on the sheep and one eye on the trees, one eye on the hills. Always looking for danger and always ready and willing to die in the place of their sheep in protecting them from wild beasts.

Professor Joshua Van Ee says this about being a shepherd, "Sheep and goats are easy prey. Thus the shepherd must be vigilant, protectors. Sometimes endangering their own lives. Even if a shepherd is able to drive off these dangerous predators, the flock will most likely scatter and need to be regathered." Remember that he goes on to say, "This example shows how close a bond there was between a shepherd and his sheep. He was their constant companion and would need to know them individually and intimately to properly care for them. The sheep would learn to trust their shepherd following his lead and listening to his voice."

Now, ultimately as the church, we know that Jesus Christ is the great shepherd of the sheep. He says in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me." However, in the structure of the local church that Jesus has given to us, pastors, which is a word that means shepherd, are the under shepherds for Jesus who serve this role in the local church until Christ returns. And thus Peter serving as a shepherd to his audience begins his defensive, his sheep, with a warning against those who would introduce danger into the flock, creeping in like wolves from the outside infiltrating and bringing in danger.

So as we jump into our text for today, Peter switches gears, kind of a difficult passage. From this beautiful exaltation of Christ and the church and the truth in chapter 1, he switches gears. He warns true Christians about false teachers that will most certainly appear among them and in their midst and from their midst. And he does so by painting what a portrait of a wolf looks like among the sheep. He does that by giving us four actions that will teach us to defend ourselves against false teachers.

So four actions, you'll see those as the outline in your note sheet. And as we get into this text, I want you to remember Peter's intent. Peter is a shepherd. Peter loves you. He wants to protect you, as do your pastors here at Redeemer. We don't try to tell you follow us and not them because we're better than they are and you know we're going to build our kingdom here. That's not the point. These kinds of passages can seem somewhat heavy, but they're important in the role of the protection of this family. You must know what you're up against.

And by the way, as pastors and teachers and shepherds, we are never going to shy away from difficult texts at Redeemer Bible Church. And so what we're going to do is we're going to read 2 Peter 2 verses 1-3 together. Our verse today will be verse 1, but if you would stand for the reading of God's word. If you're new with us, we stand for the reading of God's word out of reverence knowing that these are the most important words that we'll hear today.

And the text says this, "But false prophets also arose among the people just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality. And because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep."

Very encouraging, uplifting words today, right?

Amen.

Not always, but they are necessary for us to study. You may be seated. And as always, with a passage like this, we must go to the Lord and ask for wisdom. So pray with me. Father, it is by your providence that this is the next verse in the study. As exposers, we do not shy away. We don't skip over hard passages or pick and choose what we want to preach. We're encountered with the word and we address it and we see what you want us to learn. So please, Father, teach us. Be faithful to us, to teach us and instruct us in your way this morning. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.

It's morning somewhere. So remember that as we are going into this passage, we're coming out of a section. We're moving into a section rather of warning and we're coming out of a section of what a true Christian life looks like and what true blessing in Christ looks like. And now Peter is going to show you a portrait of a false Christian, and in particular a dangerous false Christian who is seeking to be a teacher in your midst.

So as we turn to the text and you see in your outline, the first action that you have to recognize to be able *to identify and defend yourself against false teachers is this, the reality, wolves are going to arise in the church.* That's **point #1.** It's not a unique thing for the church, but it's the same motive here that we see in these two different groups that Peter talks about, and that is infiltration and division. He first talks about false prophets who arose among the people, and that is of course referring to the nation of Israel. As we learned from the Old Testament, there were many who came from among the people who claimed to be the mouthpiece for God. This happened numerous times more so than we can count, but it was enough for Jeremiah 14:14, the prophet Jeremiah to write this. "And the Lord that is Yahweh said to me, 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or even speak to them. They're prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination and the deceit from their own minds!'" Not a very good portrait of prophets, but that's what Jeremiah says they were.

And you know what? The people of Judah knew that's who they were. And here's their response to them from Isaiah 30, verse 10. This is what they're asking of these false prophets, "Do not prophesy what is right. Speak to us soothing things. Prophecy illusions." This is nothing new. Sound familiar? God's people have always been attacked by lies and by counterfeit versions of reality from those who would deceive them for their own personal gain. And I tell you what, it's much more comfortable to tell people comforting words of illusion and to have them be your friend than to tell them the truth.

And by Isaiah's example, that's what these people were after. They deceive themselves into a false gospel. And we see that example in two Timothy 4:3 where he says, "Hey, I just got a way of saying you must be faithful to be a teacher of God's word, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed," rightly dividing the word of truth. And then he says, "For the time is coming when people will not endorse sound teaching. But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions."

Does that sound familiar? Sounds like Israel in Isaiah 30 and it sounds like the church today in many places. But God gave clear instructions to Israel on how to deal with these fake prophets. If

a prophet came along and did not have a 100% track record in speaking for the Lord accurately, he was to be executed. Deuteronomy 13:5 commanded Israel to do this, thus says the Lord. But what did they do instead? They embraced the false teachers and asked them to tell them lies. And then what did they do with the real prophets? They killed them. That's wickedness. That's pure wickedness.

But just like Israel had false prophets from among their ranks that is born of the nation, looking like everyone else, and by all rights pretending to be righteous in front of the people, the church in the same manner will have false teachers arise from our own numbers. MacArthur puts it this way that false teachers are not bred outside of Christianity. They're always made inside the church, half in and half out. But eventually, they reject the truth and try to seduce others in their attempt to fulfill their own self-gratification. And that's their goal. Self-gratification, not Christ exaltation.

We'll learn more about those motivations the next time we're together. But Peter uses a word here when he says, "And false teachers will also be among you." Just be, they'll exist. They'll just arise. They'll appear. They don't march into the room with a big flag that says, "Hi, I'm a false teacher. Please follow me instead of your pastors." That's not what they do. They simply show up like everyone else does. By implication, they do so quietly, they do so peacefully. By all accounts as well, they look like they belong.

And I want you to notice the surety of Peter's words here. "False teachers will most certainly appear among your ranks. And these false teachers will be known by their fruits." They'll have the characteristic of wanting influence. They'll want to lead. They'll ingratiate themselves to gain position and authority in the church. You must be vigilant in wielding that influence. The text goes on to tell us of a second action that we must recognize as a defense against false teachers. Not only will they most certainly appear, and not only will they seek to wield influence, but we're also told **#2) *wolves will tell lies to the church.***

Second part of the verse, Peter goes on to say that false teachers will secretly bring in destructive heresies. There's a couple of things we want to note about this phrase. First one is that their deception will be foreign. It will come from the outside. It will look different. It will be different than scripture and different from the church's teaching. That's what's meant by secretly. It doesn't necessarily mean they're doing it subversively, although that's part of it. It means foreign. So they're not going to announce that they're coming in to do this. They're not going to announce that you should follow their different teaching. They're not that blunt. They're not going to broadcast that they want to contradict godly leadership. And by the way, Peter here is assuming a faithful local church. If there's an unfaithful local church, we have a different conversation. But this is what they're going to do, they're going to come in secretly and introduce outside foreign teaching and theology from the Bible and from what a faithful local church would teach. And it also means they're going to be skeptical, cause you to doubt the authority and leadership of a local church.

Second, they are going to do this in the shadows. Most of these individuals are going to show up to church, Bible in hand, looking to make friends, looking to make connections, looking to serve, looking to give, and they're going to speak some truth. Because what do we know about counterfeits. If I handed you a hundred dollars monopoly bill, would you be like, "Great, I can go buy groceries"? You'd be like, "What am I getting this fake money for?" But if I hand you like a legit, real... I mean you can't tell the difference. I want to trick you. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to get as close as I can, but pull you just far enough away to be away from Christ. That's what they're going to do. That's what false teachers did. That's what false prophets did. If they didn't have 100% track record, remember what MacArthur said? Kind of half in, half out. They'll look like us, but the discerning ear will note only the partial truth.

They're not going to come directly to this inner circle first. They're not going to come to the pastors unless they know the pastors are weak. Then they'll kind of ingratiate themselves right away at the top of the food chain according to their mind. In reality, pastors are at the bottom. But what they're going to do is they're going to hover around the periphery and they're going to look for weak points of entry into the body. People who are easily influenced. They're going to befriend you. They're going to start asking questions. "Hey, what'd you think of the sermon today? Do you really think that he got it right? You know I have this different take on that passage. Maybe you and I and a couple of others, and maybe we can build a little group and we can get together and talk about it. No, no, no. The pastors don't need to know. It's okay. We'll just make it our little group. It'll be a special little group."

You see what they're doing? They're carving you off. That's the mentality. What you need to understand is that this is the singular objective of subversive, covert and foreign teaching that is brought in from false teachers. It is meant to divide you from your faithful shepherds to introduce division into the body of Christ. You see, the Bible makes it clear, and false teachers hate this by the way, that a godly qualified obedient to Christ's plurality of elders appointed to local church ministry is invested by Jesus the authority to lead, teach, admonish and shepherd the local flock of God. Any attempts to usurp that authority granted by Jesus is by nature division.

Parents, let me ask you a question. If somebody came into your house and started parenting your children differently than you would and just be like, "No, it's okay. You can eat all the candy you want. No, you can watch eight hours of TV today. It's fine. No, don't listen to your parents," is there anything righteous about that? Is there anything okay about that? No. They're your children God gave you to steward. And in the same manner, this is the authority and structure that God has given a local church. And thus Titus chapter 3, verse 10-11 tell us exactly how to deal with divisive people. It says this, "As for the one who stirs up division after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned." Does that sound like a true sheep or a true teacher? That sounds like an believer to me.

If you pay close attention to that last phrase, self-condemned, we're about to see that come to pass. So wolves or false teachers, creep into the flock of God, attempting to do so quietly,

unnoticed and gain a comfortable level of trust from the congregation around them. Once they've established that trust, they begin to campaign with teaching foreign to the church. "Hey, did God really say? Maybe this is a different view?" And they're meant to break you off from the pack. That's what they're trying to do. They want to isolate you from your shepherds. Don't fall victim.

So not only do these false teachers, these wolves introduce different teaching and different practice, which is by nature, heresy, which means a faction. Factions by nature are divisive even though it might look righteous, even though they might couch it in a way that looks better. Remember, counterfeits look real, right? We must be vigilant. We must be literate enough in scripture to be able to tell truth from error. And if you're not there yet, rest assured that godly leadership will help you along the way. We'll protect you. That's our job. That's what true shepherds do. And I will speak for our entire elder and pastor team that that's what all of us aim to do at Redeemer, is to point you towards Jesus.

And so we see that the secretive foreign and destructive nature of the factious teaching of these false teachers will show up in a faithful, unified church of God and will attempt to cause destruction through division. That's the whole game right there. It's the job of the shepherds to hunt down and destroy these wild beastly minded individuals before they pick off our people. Unless you think I'm being a gamesman or not very kind or loving with my words, look 11 verses later and Peter uses the exact same language. We'll get there.

Now, as a side note, I have to say a word to anyone who has come to Redeemer Bible church to stir up division or look for opportunities to pick off our people. We are a church that will faithfully shepherd the flock of God according to his word and nothing else. Shepherding includes the protection of God's people, these precious saints from you.

If you're sitting in this room or in the ministry center or watching online, if you've devised plans of coming here to Redeemer Bible Church and ingratiating yourself with our people and coming to pick off our people with your false teaching, if you are, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:13, a deceitful workman, disguising yourself as an apostle of Christ, I'm telling you right now, get up and leave. You're not welcome here. You will not find peace here. You're wasting your breath. Because as God's appointed leadership of this congregation, we will instruct people in the truth and we will find you. We will mark you out and we will showcase publicly who you are to our church family so they will know to be leery of you. And we will expedite your removal from our congregation. We will protect the flock of God that God has given us in the way that Christ has called us to do so. We might take some bites and scratches along the way, but I guarantee you, the heart of all of us as pastors is we would lay down our lives if it meant that you were faithful to Christ. That's our heart. Back to the text.

So not only does Peter show us that there is a certainty that these false teachers will arise among faithful local churches and not only does Peter tell us that they will show up quietly, secretly, and try to divide, conquer, and destroy you. But the third action that we must recognize really to see them in order to defend against these false teachers is this, ***wolves will deny the Lord of the church. This is a watershed statement.***

Here's also where the text can take a confusing turn if we don't understand exactly what Peter's saying. You see, Peter adds to the third part of the verse here that they'll secretly introduce destructive heresies and then they'll go on even denying the master who bought them. Now, does that confuse you? Jesus doesn't buy false teachers. So what do we mean here? If they're really false and they're, as we're going to learn, going to be destroyed and destroyed harshly, is Jesus really their master? Well, this is where we use scripture to clarify other passage of scripture. Jesus said in John 10:27 and 28 as we saw a little bit before, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. And by the way, I give them eternal life." Not eternal destruction, right? Eternal life. "And they will never perish."

That doesn't sound like what we just heard. And John 14:21 says, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." So we're getting some clarification that these people who claim Christ, yet deny their master, what are we seeing here? What we're seeing is Peter kind of using a turn of phrase, a bit of sarcasm and hyperbole. It's not above a first century Jewish fisherman to use sarcasm. These guys, this is the way they would talk to each other. So these false teachers, Peter, is saying, "You're publicly claiming Christ. You're publicly claiming that Christ is your master and yet your actions most certainly demonstrate that your hearts and your motives are for the gratification of your own flesh and for the honor of your own name." And so Peter's retort here is a condemnation, "Even denying the master who bought you." Can you hear him saying that? It's like misreading an email or a text message, like you kind of missed the tone. We have to see this here because the rest of scripture would eliminate anything else. So if you're going to claim Christ and yet act in a manner that publicly rejects him, then you have rejected the master that you have publicly professed and you have profaned his name. That's what Peter is saying here.

So we don't have a theological problem. This is not Christians who lost their salvation because they got into bad teaching. As Justin Peters has said, "God doesn't turn goats into sheep. You're either born a sheep or you're not." Meaning that God sovereignly knows and keeps his people as we saw from John 10. And I'll clarify for our context, I'll add this. God doesn't turn wolves into sheep. You're either born a lost sheep who Jesus seeks and finds and grows and nurtures and protects always, or you're born a wolf and he's going to kill you.

Folks, it's not loving to allow wolves, false teachers to remain in the sheep pen thinking that we might win them with love. We will know them by their fruits and by their actions. These wolves will never be sheep. We must get them out of our fellowship. And we will know them by their actions. In fact, what's the modern way to say this? Wolf's going to wolf. That's not going to change. That's their nature. That's who they are. And once again, unless you think I'm being too harsh or unloving or unkind with my language, let's read on because Peter himself says the very same thing in our ***fourth and final action, which is this, wolves will die outside the church.***

See, Peter finishes up this verse by stating, "Clearly, unequivocally that these false teachers are actively bringing upon themselves swift destruction." By their actions they're demonstrating their heart, and destruction is coming upon them. And you see there's an interesting thing at play here.

Because what are the false teachers attempting to do when they come in? Secretly introduce what? Destructive heresies. Their aim is your destruction with their teaching. They want to pull you away from the life of Christ and the life of his body and bury you in your own self-righteousness and sin.

Wolves, by the way, don't befriend sheep. They devour sheep. They intend to destroy you with their destructive heresies. But as we know from the life of Joseph, this beautiful biblical axiom truth, that what man meant for evil, God intended for good. God will turn that motive on them. He will showcase them. He will expose them and He will destroy them. And he exposes them by the church faithfully pointing out who they are and removing them from their fellowship.

So as we'll see in the rest of this chapter, the portrait of a wolf, what the fate of a wolf is. To summarize, God will destroy them in judgment. We will see a full picture of that. There's another category I want to discuss and that is want-to-be sheep. There are those who are in our midst who don't yet know Christ. They're here. They're among us. These are the people who are truly susceptible to these false teachers. They'll introduce division in the body and they'll pick off those who the Lord is pouring into their life truth and they'll pull them away from the truth because the kingdom of Satan feels that incursion into their kingdom and souls being rescued and they want that to stop.

So we must understand that sometimes there are people in our midst who do not yet know Christ. We must evangelize them, give them the truth and stand between them and false teachers, defend them against self-righteous human doctrine and point them to Christ. Oddly enough, Peter addresses this judgment that false teachers are going to face in chapter 3. We saw already they're denying Jesus is ever going to come back. "Where's the promise of his coming? Things have continued since they have since the beginning and we can kind of get away with what we want. So you can follow me in my version and everything's going to be fine. Why do you have to do it their way? This way is better. It's more fun." We hear that all the time too because these people reject any notion that their high-handed rebellion against the King of the universe will ever face any kind of consequence. But we know better. Don't follow them in.

So we've analyzed this verse and this kind of portrait, Peter's introduction of a portrait of a wolf or a false teacher. And now we have to ask the question, what do we do with this information? How do we respond? What can we do to protect ourselves from these people? How do I know that I'm not becoming a victim of these people? How do I know I'm not acting like these people? These are the questions we want to take away, the answers to these questions and kind of what do we do? What do we practically do to protect ourselves?

Knowledge is power guys. Number one, we want to start with the acknowledgement of the reality that this trial will most certainly come to our church. And by the way, it already has. We have encountered many false teachers here at Redeemer. These guys come in, they ingratiate themselves into our church. They start making friendships, they start groups, they start factions. They start openly being divisive and they turn people against the pastors. This has happened in the past. We have fought them off. And it'll happen again in the future and we will do the same.

Know that they might approach you with teaching that's divisive with questions about your pastors. With, "Does the Bible really say that? Maybe we ought to believe this." These are the kind of conversations. They're not going to come in with a pitchfork and a red tail. They're going to come in with a Bible under their arm. And guys, by the way, we don't hide what we teach. You can find our doctrinal statement on our website. Everything that we teach has been pulled out of scripture and laid out and is biblically grounded. So when somebody comes into our house, into our family and brings in teaching that is different, that is foreign, meant to divide you away from your pastors, know that that's going to happen.

Second, know the motive of these false teachers is to gain your trust, to ask you for help gaining influence and to cause you to doubt the trustworthiness of your pastors. That's their goal. What was the first three words that Satan said in the Bible? Does anyone know? "Did God really say?" Is that four words? "Did God really say?" He didn't come in and be like, "Eve, ha-ha-ha" and he's all scary. He just was, "Hey, did God really say that you couldn't eat any of the trees in the garden?" And Eve, all of a sudden she's kind of thrown back. She's like, "Well, I don't... Well, yeah, I mean he said, no, we can eat the other, but... Yeah, I can't eat this. Oh, I can't even touch this tree." See now she's confused on what's even true. She's adding into what God said. So they're going to look for ways to confuse you with truth. So when this happens, you need to understand that it's going to happen.

And friends, if you have questions about our doctrinal statement or the way that we do things here, please come and talk to the pastors. We're pretty nice guys. We'll have this conversation with you. We would love to share these things with you. In the contrast, backroom conversations, gossip, slander, doubt, all of those things are tools of Satan. Don't fall victim to them and don't participate. Instead in good faith, come to us. We would love to convince you that we study the Bible and follow Christ and Christ alone.

In a sidebar, I want to clarify something for you, that you don't have to agree with everything that's in our doctrinal statement. What this text is talking about are damnable heresies, different gospels, different modes of salvation. So we're not saying if you have different views on the spiritual gifts, you must leave. We're not saying that. We can fellowship just like Christians have over the centuries with differing theological perspectives and march into heaven with joy together in Christ. Okay? That's not what this passage is talking about. It's talking about those who would deny the very Lord who they claim purchased them. And that's the ultimate path, the end that their path takes them on. We have to be careful watching them and seeing them and identifying them as they walk that path so we don't walk it with them.

Third, when you encounter these people or conversations, make it known to the pastors. That's what we're here for. You know, shepherds are trained to beat off wild animals, to get rid of them from the congregation, from the sheep pen, to ward them off. That's what we are trained to do, is when we see false teachers, to encounter them and to scare them off because they will not be welcome here. So we are here for your protection and care. A sheep against the wolf, who's going to win? The wolf probably. Most likely, right? But a sheep against an army of trained

shepherds? That wolf is going to run for the hills. Remember, he called us to this role. He use us. Let us help you, let us protect you and point you to Jesus into his word.

Fourth, remember that the intentions of these individuals is your destruction. No matter what they tell you. "No, you need a friend. No, this is fellowship. No, this is for your good." No, this is for your destruction. And in any other situation, do we run headlong into danger? Firemen, keep your hands down. I'm not talking to you. We love you. We're thankful for you. You do run headfirst into danger and that's great. But in any other situation, we don't do that. I don't run out on the freeway in traffic and play chicken just for fun, right? Life is too valuable for that. We have kingdom work to do. That would be foolish. And it would be just as foolish, in fact more foolish, to try to contend with false teachers without the help of your caring and loving shepherds.

So when we see the signs of people acting dangerously and divisively, ask yourself, "What are they doing? Are they demonstrating these actions? Are they trying to pull me down a path away from the safety of the flock and of my shepherds?" And if so, let us know and we will deal with them.

Lastly, yes, this is a read your bible more and pray more and come to church more sermon. That's the Christian life. And that even though it might sound like, "Ah," it is the most blessing and joy that you will find in this life is to be in communion with your God. This Bible, this book right here is what God gave us as his message. Everything you need for life and godliness and to protect you from harm and to protect you from lies and deceit is in here. You don't have to just believe what I say. Be like the Bereans with Paul, who was an apostle by the way, and they say, "I like what you said. Let me go check that. Oh yeah, there it is. Yep." And they would've rejected him if he said something contrary to what God had already said in his word. And you can do the same.

But in a church that is faithful to God's word, we direct you here because we have nothing to hide. God's word is laid out plain for you. And by the way, our fellowship with the Father in heaven through prayer, how do we gain wisdom? What does James 1:5 say? "If any of you lacks wisdom, what? Let him ask and he will freely and without reproach give you all the wisdom you need." Wisdom is just knowing how to live out this knowledge properly.

Lastly, being a faithful local church, one that points you to Jesus in His word. If you can't be with us, if you're watching online and you can't be with us, find a church that is purely defined by pointing you to Christ and His word the way it was intended to be known and where pastors will shepherd you and care for your soul and who are willing to take a bullet from false teachers for you. One where men lead with humility behind Christ. Not building their own kingdom, but stewarding Jesus family.

Jesus said of his people in Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." That's what's going to happen. As the world encroaches on us, those wolves will come in and there will be wolves among the sheep. It's the same dynamic. So how do we deal with them? We are wise as serpents and innocent as

doves. You remember the serpent in Genesis 3? It said the serpent was crafty. That by nature is not bad. That means he was shrewd. He knew how to manipulate the conversation and argument to see what he wanted Eve to do and what he wanted her to fall into. And so if we are as shrewd as serpents, what we can do is counteract that shrewdness and lead people towards the truth. That's where the innocent as dove's part comes in. We think and we know their tactics, but we stay in the righteousness of Christ unstained from sin in the process. That's what we must do. And in our context, we must be shrewd and wise with God's word, girding up the loins of our mind as it says in 1 Peter 1:13. That's that idea of grabbing our tunic like the old soldiers and tucking it in your belt so that when you run across the battlefield, you're not tripping over your garments. We have to be ready for battle. Always ready to defend, guard, and proclaim the truth against error, especially in the midst of our own family.

If we do that for one another, we'll be a very, very strong body, very cohesive body that it'll be very hard to get in and find any kind of traction here. So we want to protect each other. And if you don't know Christ, if you have not yet bowed the knee to Christ, the protection and love that you will find in Christ is incalculable, I call you to repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and all of us who are here, none of us who deserve the love of Christ, we can all attest to the fact that if you do so, he will protect you in the truth of His word and in his family. Amen? Let's pray.

Father, what an incredible weekend it's been. What a privilege it is to preach your word, to love your people, and to shepherd in the truth. May we always be a church that honors you. Never may we be a church that honors men or seeks to accomplish our own goals, but only one that stewards your family well, that exalts your name, that teaches your statutes until you return. We desire to give you all the glory and honor and praise at this church. Please Father, protect us from error, protect us from false teachers, and be glorified in our midst. In Jesus name, amen.