

A Portrait of False Teachers, Part 1

2 Peter 2:1-3

61-16

We are refreshed again tonight as we go to the Word of God and look at 2 Peter chapter 2 verses 1 through 3 as the text for the revelation that God will give to us through His Word. Second Peter chapter 2 verses 1 through 3 in our continuing study of this great epistle. Let me read these verses to you, beginning in verse 1. "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words, their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

This passage poses some questions. Is there a more serious crime than falsifying the truth of the Word of God? Is there anything worse than lying about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit or the meaning of Scripture? Is there a severer crime than teaching the devil's lies as if they were God's truth? Is there anything more infuriating to God than misrepresentation of His Word? Is there a worse hypocrisy than saying you speak for God to the salvation of souls when in reality you speak for Satan to the damnation of souls? Can there be a more heinous deception than being a false teacher in the church?

This passage answers a resounding "no" to all those questions. But such is deception being put upon the church by Satan himself. In fact, such deception is one of his primary operative tactics, to damn the souls of people to eternal hell. Satan has always endeavored to infiltrate God's people with those who say they speak for God but speak for him, with those who claim to speak the truth who in fact speak error. Because this is an age-old tactic of Satan, God has repeatedly warned His people about such false teachers.

If you study the Scripture starting even in the Pentateuch, you will be exposed to such warnings. If you were to go back, for example to Deuteronomy chapter 13 and just read through verses 1 through 18 you would find the Word of God says in that great chapter that any prophet who comes along and suggests any false worship or any misrepresentation of God, or any misrepresentation of God's truth was to be killed instantly. Such a death penalty was even to be applied within a family. Love for your family did not take the priority over devotion to God. So that chapter says if you find a false prophet, kill him, even if he's in your family. That chapter also says that any city influenced by lying prophets who in the name of the true God lead people away from the true God and the true way is to be destroyed, the whole city. God is very serious about this. You will go into chapter 18 of Deuteronomy and verse 20 and find the same kind of condemnation upon false teachers who infiltrate God's people.

In the New Testament there is a significant text that I would draw your attention to, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, which gives us a New Testament illustration of the same divine concern over false

teachers and over the settled deceptions of Satan as he infiltrates the assembling of God's own. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 13, Paul is referring to some who have come into the Corinthian church. He calls them false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, verse 14 says, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their deeds.

And here we have the same concept as we have in Deuteronomy and that is that God's people will be infiltrated by satanic agents who come in the name of the true God, the true Christ and represent Satan. Now Satan operates in many ways but we're talking about a very specific operative tactic within the community of God's people. He is very busy outside the community of God's people, espousing all kinds of false religious systems, everything from the Muslim faith to Buddhism to cults, oriental religions, and forms of Romish religion which are nothing but ritualistic. And the gamut of all of that from the most primitive animism, poly-demonism, polytheism to very sophisticated world religions, Satan is operative in all of that, but we're talking about his very specific operative tactic of infiltrating the church, infiltrating the people of God. And as we learn from this particular passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, sin never approaches us as sin, Satan never comes to us as Satan, sin always comes to us as pleasure and Satan always comes to us in the name of Christ, in the name of God. Error never comes to us as error, error always comes to us as truth, but it isn't.

The servants of Satan who propagate sin and propagate error never come as the servants of Satan; they always come as the servants of God. They're always disguised as righteous and truthful servants of God. They are the most dangerous, religious teachers who name the name of the true God and name the name of the true Christ who pervert the truth, who are satanic emissaries espousing demon doctrine.

And in the Scripture they are never tolerated. They're never tolerated as sort of partially right and needing to be helped along to the fullness of the truth, they are totally denounced, condemned to eternal damnation. There is a power in a person behind these false teachers and that is Satan. He was, he is and he always will be working to destroy the plan of God until his final end.

And so, in the church at Corinth as in Israel of old, as in all the churches where he can find access, he will plant his false apostles. It is most likely that the Corinthians had no idea that these quote-unquote "super apostles" were false apostles. They had no idea that these quote-unquote "servants of Christ" were servants of Satan. They had no idea that these representatives of heaven were really the agents of hell. Because they always pretend to be other than they are, but in this text of 2 Corinthians 11 Paul made no hesitation in calling them what they were, even though they associated themselves with Christ, they associated themselves with the truth of God, they associated themselves with the work of God, they associated themselves with the church of God, he says they are false apostles, deceitful workers, and they are disguised as angels of light but in truth are angels of darkness.

I'm afraid the church today is a bit witless on these matters. It has become very tolerant of error, and it literally absorbs the very deception that Paul warns about and Peter warns about. The cry today is for everyone to agree with everyone, to tolerate everyone who names the name of Christ no matter what he teaches. This sort of endless tolerance has produced indifference to truth. Mark that. Tolerance has produced indifference to truth. The church is witless, careless, foolish, blind.

Paul's approach was quite different, so is Peter's. Their approach was to identify the opponent, call him what he was, and fight him on the basis of a passion for the truth. D.A. Carson wrote of this passage in 2 Corinthians, "If we are embarrassed by the force of Paul's denunciation, our embarrassment may only be testimony to the degree by which we have departed from the apostolic gospel." If it embarrasses us that the apostle Paul calls some in the church who name the name of Christ false apostles, deceitful workers who are headed for destruction, and if we think that's a little much, it only indicates how far away we are from battling for truth and how tolerant we have become.

He also writes, does Carson, "The Germans have a wise saying. The saying is this, "Tell me with whom you are fighting and I will tell you who you are." Fifty years ago, J. Gresham Machen used to tell his students that the most important issues are not those on which men are agreed, but those over which they fight. That's wise.

Why? Because Satan will always attack the most important issues and so they always become a battleground. Satan's operation is to falsify God's truth from inside the church, through people who name the name of Christ, and thus to deceive and distort and ultimately to damn people to hell who think they have the truth when they don't. The most deadly of these deceivers obviously come in the name of Christ. Therein lies their deadliness.

That is exactly what is on the heart of Peter in this tremendous 2nd chapter of his second letter. Now going back to that 2nd chapter, let me remind you that this is the core of his letter. The letter is a warning about false teachers and their teaching and here in this middle chapter of these three brief chapters he describes the false teachers. He wants us to know what they look like. He wants us to know what they act like. He wants us to know what they talk like. He wants us to know how they function and operate. So he describes them in this chapter all the way down through verse 22 in very, very graphic detail.

And I might note for you that this is almost a direct parallel to the little epistle of Jude. If you were to read them side by side, you would see amazing parallel. You say, "That proves what?" That proves the urgency of the Holy Spirit in repeating the same thing twice in the New Testament. Jude and Peter both inspired by the Holy Spirit to say essentially the same thing about false teachers, because they are such a great danger to God's purpose, His people, and His plan.

Now remember the overall view of the book we've been giving you. We told you that chapter 2 is really the heart of it as he describes false teachers. Around that chapter and around that description he gives the defenses and they're all based on knowledge. You can't be deceived if you know truth. Chapter 1, he pointed out you must know your salvation, and then you must know your Scripture. Chapter 3, he will point out you must know your sanctification, the true pattern of sanctification. If you know those things and you recognize the false teachers, you have your defenses set.

But as we come to chapter 2 his concern is that we might know them and recognize them and so you have here a portrait of false teachers, to help us recognize them and their lies. Now you will notice that as verse 1 begins, the language appears to be prophetic. "False prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you." It sounds prophetic, it sounds future, and it is. It indicates that false teachers will come.

In verse 2, again the future is still emphasized. "Many will follow. The way of truth will be maligned. In

their greed they will exploit you." There's no question that he is seeing this in the future. But it isn't long in this chapter before he begins to function in the present tense. Starting in verse 10 and flowing through the rest of the chapter he's talking in the present tense. And so the future is now.

Peter says it was this way and it will be this way and it is this way, right now. The passage certainly is predictive of future times, but it was also true of the present time when Peter wrote. It was relevant then as relevant it is now.

So Peter is telling us what we need to know for now and what they needed to know for then. This is eminently important material.

Now he has a lot to say, it takes him twenty-two verses to get it all out. But he starts off with a simple sketch in verses 1 to 3. It's as if he takes some time with this portrait. First he sketches it and then he fills in all the color. The color starts to come in verse 4, but 1 to 3 gives us the sketch of the portrait of false teachers.

Let's see how he introduces the subject, verse 1. "But," we have to stop there for a moment. It's an important transition. There shouldn't even be a chapter break here. This should be verse 11 because it follows immediately on the prior verse. He says no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will. That's not how God's Word was written. But men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. He says God's sure word, God's true word was written by eyewitnesses inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen the very Word of God, so that Scripture is not the invention of men but the sure word of God. God has had His men, God has had His prophets and they wrote His Word, men from God. But, but Satan has always had his men, his prophets, his teachers, his apostles. That word "but" is a very, very important transition. We need to be alert. Yes, God has given us a true, sure word that came through true prophets, but Satan also has his own prophets just as God has His. The word also there in verse 1 is important because it too speaks of this contrast.

And so Peter says false prophets also arose. In addition to the men moved by the Spirit of God, holy men who spoke for God, true spokesmen, there were also false prophets among the people, false ones. Let me give you a little sense about what he's saying. The phrase "among the people" is important. What's he talking about? There were false prophets among the people. What does he mean by that, what people? The phrase "the people" is used in the New Testament of Israel, of Israel. It refers to Israel. In Luke, for example, chapter 2 and verse 32, it talks about Thy people, Israel. In Acts chapter 26, a couple of times in that chapter, once in verse 17, talks about delivering you from the people, meaning the Jewish people, and from the Gentiles. Then in verse 23, that He was to be...the Messiah was...a light to the people and to the Gentiles. The people — definitive definite article — is Israel.

So, Peter says, "False prophets also arose among Israelites, among the Jews." The pseudo-prophets moved in Israel. We just pointed out Deuteronomy chapter 13 where God warned way back in the Pentateuch, the first set of books ever penned, that the false prophets would come and they had to be dealt with harshly because they would infiltrate the people of God. There's a certain danger in false prophets outside, but the greater danger is when they get inside and they claim to belong to God, the true God. The Old Testament makes it clear that all through the history of Israel they were busy, they were effective.

Read Jeremiah, particularly chapter 23, and listen to him speak about the false prophets in Israel who were leading the people astray. Just a few verses will suffice. Chapter 23 verse 14, "Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood, and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisonous water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land.' Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord.'"

In verse 21 He says, "I didn't send these prophets but they ran. I didn't speak to them, but they prophesied." False prophets. And Jeremiah 6:14 says the false prophets were saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. They weren't telling the truth. Judgment was coming, not peace. But they were saying what the people wanted to hear and they were lying because they were emissaries of Satan who wanted to keep the people in sin and lead them away from repentance.

Ezekiel shows the same concern about the false prophets. I'm sure you're familiar with Ezekiel chapter 13 in which the prophet of God speaks of those false prophets, and again in verse 16 he says, "These prophets who prophesy in Israel see visions of peace for her when there is no peace." The next verse he's told to set his face against those false prophets. "Those false prophets hunt down the lives of My people," He says. No wonder Jeremiah said that an appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land, chapter 5, the prophets prophesy falsely.

It's always been that way in the time of Israel. They always were around. In the time of Jehoshaphat, you remember the story, the false prophet Zedekiah, 1 Kings 22. Zedekiah put on his horns of iron which he was going to use for an object lesson. And he predicted that Israel would push the Syrians out of the way as he pushed with these horns of iron that he wore. Micaiah, the true prophet of God, said, "If you go to battle with Syria, you won't not only win, you'll be massacred." Well Zedekiah was popular and the people believed the deceiving, lying, satanic prophet. Jehoshaphat believed him, accepted his word, went to war with the Syrians and was massacred.

In the days of Jeremiah, Hananiah prophesied the swift destruction of Babylon as if it was the word of God. But Jeremiah, the true prophet, prophesied the servitude of Israel to the Babylonians. And though he lied, Hananiah was popular and the people believed him and they hated Jeremiah. Read Jeremiah chapter 28.

The people were so deceived and so won over by the false prophets that Isaiah says the people asked the prophets, and this is what they said, "You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words and prophesy illusions," chapter 30 verses 9 and 10. They were literally victims of the false prophets.

So Peter says in verse 1, "But false prophets also arose among the Jewish people." That's the way it always was. And I think he sees not only into that history that we know as Old Testament history, but I think he was thinking there as well of the time of our Lord Jesus, even the time in which Peter was living when false prophets dominated Judaism. All Peter would have to do would be to remember the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew chapter 7, the words of our Lord in verse 15 who said, "Beware of the false prophets who are coming to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous

wolves." Jesus is saying to the people of Israel, the false prophets are here, their labels we know, Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes. They're not only wrong, they are deadly. They are ravenous wolves, ferocious. They'll not only deceive you, they'll destroy you. And they're dangerous because they come in sheep's clothing. What is sheep's clothing? Well sheep's clothing is wool. Who wears wool? Prophets. They don't come as false sheep, folks. That's not the idea, they come as false shepherds. The shepherd wore the wool garment, the prophet wore the wool garment. It was the garment of the shepherd and the garment of the prophet. And those who come in sheep's clothing are coming in a wool garment as if they are true shepherds and true prophets, but underneath the garment is a wolf.

They disguise themselves as shepherds. They disguise themselves as pastors. They disguise themselves as prophets. They appear orthodox. They speak favorably about God. They associate with the people of God. But they are children of the devil. Jesus said of those Pharisees and scribes, false leaders, they are whited sepulchers; on the outside whitewashed, on the inside they stink with the stench of dead men's bones. They are the wretched, the worst, they are deceivers.

In Matthew chapter 23 the diatribe that Jesus gives against them is almost so vivid that it chokes one who reads it. He describes them with a series of woes. He damns them. He condemns them for their falseness, calls them snakes, hypocrites, blind guides who appear righteous on the outside, but inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

And so, not only in the ancient times of Jewish life, but even in the present time where Peter was alive, they were around. And so Peter writes, "But false prophets, along with the true prophets, also arose among the Jewish people." And then he moves to the future, "Just as there will also be false teachers among you." It isn't going to go away. It was true among God's people Israel, note this, it will be true among you. What does he mean by that? The church. "Among you" is the church. "The people" is Israel. The "you" is the church. And if you study through the New Testament you'll find a number of interesting phrases. The church is warned about false brothers, false apostles, false speakers and now false teachers, *pseudodidaskaloi*, false teachers. The false prophets the Jewish people had to endure are matched by the false teachers the church has to endure.

And our Lord said it would be so. We aren't surprised. You just need go back to Matthew 24 and you remember these verses. The Lord said it was going to happen. He says in verse 4 and 5 of the Olivet Discourse, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in my name saying I am Christ and mislead many." Verse 11: "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." It's pretty typical, pretty routine. False teachers, verse 24, false christs, false prophets will arise. He's looking ahead to the end times. And so from now on, Peter says, till the very end, expect false teachers, false prophets with subtle, satanic deceptions who are going to do everything they can to confuse you. They aren't on the outside, they're on the inside. Like Acts 20, "Perverse men arising from your own selves who will lead many astray." It's predictable.

Paul wrote the Galatians in chapter 1 and said, "Look, who is preaching to you another gospel?" In chapter 3 he says, "How could anybody lead you who have begun in the Spirit to think you could be perfected in the flesh? Who is messing with your minds?" The Judaizers; they were everywhere.

Jude speaks of the same thing. Jude verse 3, "I have to write to you to contend for the faith." Why? Verse 4, "Certain persons have crept in unnoticed," have crept in, false teachers, false prophets, they creep in, they come in. They get right into the fellowship. In fact, Jude sees them even at the Communion table. In verse 12 he says, "They are like hidden reefs in your love feasts." They're right

there at the table with you, like hidden reefs to wreck you, right in your love feasts, right at the Lord's Table with you. They're intimate, they're close. They're subtle.

This is a prophecy, dear friends, that we have to take note of because it is reality. They're in the church today. The church, as I said, is somewhat witless in discerning the reality of this. In Acts 15:24 you remember the letter was sent and it said, "We have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with words unsettling your souls." And the Jerusalem Council has to write letters to the churches and say we're sorry to hear that some have come and unsettled your souls. In Romans chapter 16 and verse 17 Paul says, "Brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned. Turn away from them. They are slaves not of our Lord Jesus but of their own appetites and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." They're going to be there. You better be alert to them.

So, beloved, it's always the case. In the past, at the time of Peter, in the present, right down to the future, to the end when the Lord comes, they'll always be there. And they're going to infiltrate. Now let me give you a few points that you find in this little portrait, and we can't cover them all but I'll just give you a couple tonight.

Number one, their sphere of operation, their sphere of operation; and I've already said that but let me just nail it down for you. Verse 1: "Just as there will be false teachers" here it is "among you." They were among the Jewish people and they will be among you. Now listen carefully, this kind of satanic, false teacher Peter is writing about does not operate in a pagan environment. Satan has some operatives there. But this kind of operative is in the church naming the name of Christ in your midst, in your fellowship, in your denominations, in your schools, in your seminaries, in your pulpits, in your classes, in your leadership. They have gained positions of power and prominence and respect and prestige and honor and respectability and responsibility. They gain footholds in high places. These are prominent people in Christianity that he's talking about, not outsiders. And when you have a mentality in the Christian church that just says, "Well, we accept them all because they name the name of Christ," that subtlety just opens the whole church wide for Satan to deceive and to damn people.

You say, "Well can you be more specific? Give me an illustration of how this operates." I will. Turn in your Bible to 2 Timothy 4 and I'll give you a specific illustration of how it works. I want you to notice verses 3 and 4 here, and this is real insight into Satan's strategy. How in the world does he get one of his operatives, one of his false apostles, false prophets, false teachers into a significant ministry? Here's one way and there might be a number of them, but here's one.

In verse 2 Paul tells Timothy, "Preach the Word." Man, he says, you preach the Word all the time, in season, out of season, when it seems fitting, when it doesn't seem fitting, all the time preach the Word, reprove, rebuke, exhort. It doesn't say coddle, cajole, make them feel good. It says hammer on them, reprove, rebuke, exhort, be patient, but preach the Word.

Why? Because the time is going to come when they will not endure what? Sound doctrine. "But wanting to have their ears tickled they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." Here it is.

How do you get to that last part where the church turns to myths? Follow the process. Follow the process. Step one: The church catches the flavor of the culture. The church begins to feel the world and enjoy it. The church doesn't want to endure sound doctrine anymore. It doesn't want strong preaching. It doesn't want reproof, rebuke and exhortation. It doesn't want the Word in season and out of season. The word "endure" means "hold to," or "support." The time comes when they don't hold to sound doctrine. They don't support it anymore. They're not interested in it. Sound doctrine, by the way, is the word from which we get the word hygienic doctrine, healthy doctrine, healthy teaching, the teaching that brings health and wholeness and vitality and life and strength and maturity to the church. But this is step one. The church begins to catch the flavor of the culture and it's not interested in sound doctrine anymore, doesn't want sound biblical teaching anymore, doesn't want confrontation, doesn't want rebuke, doesn't want exhortation, doctrine.

What does it want? Well, verse 3 says they want teachers who tickle their ears. Well what does that mean? Teachers who say things that are pleasant, say things that are very pleasing, say things that are positive, affirmative. They don't want any negatives. They want to hear things that make them feel good about themselves, that give a pleasing feeling to their ears. Why that? Well, they want to accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own lusts, their own desires. They want the man in the pulpit to say what they want to hear, just like the prophets mentioned in Isaiah 30. Don't tell us the truth, tell us pleasant things. Say pleasing things to us, feed our self-centered needs, feed our desires. They want teachers that will say what they want to hear, who will please them, who will give them what they want. And that's the new hue and cry today. People are all the time saying, you want to know how to preach? Find out what your people want to hear, find out what your community wants to hear, that's how you win them, you say what they want to hear. They play into the hands of their *epithumia*, their desire, their self-desire, their self-centered desire, their selfishness.

They aren't concerned about God. They aren't concerned about worship. They aren't concerned about doctrine. They aren't concerned about being confronted regarding sin. They aren't even concerned about truth. They're concerned about personal satisfaction and having their needs met. They want the teacher to feed their ego, to make them feel good about themselves. They want to be entertained. They want to have their self-esteem bolstered. They want to be satisfied. Everything has to feed them. They don't want teachers who offend them. They... They want teachers who entertain them. They want to feel good. So they select a mass of teachers, it says in verse 3, they go out and accumulate a mass of teachers who feed their desires. As someone said, if they want a golden calf, there are plenty of ministerial calf-makers who will accommodate them.

The result, verse 4, "They turn away their ears from the truth." We have a lot of popular preachers like that today, entertaining people, giving them messages of self-esteem and ego building that make them feel good about themselves. And they can go to church and never be confronted in a negative way. It's all sort of a ear tickling kind of mentality. The sad reality of it is they're playing into the hands of Satan because what will happen is those people, in demanding that, will accumulate teachers who will turn their ears away from the truth.

That word "turn" there is to twist or dislocate. And once they're dislocated from the truth, they're wide open to Satan's influence. They want good feelings. They want sensations. They don't want anything deep or profound or convicting or confronting or God exalting. The truth doesn't tickle your ears; it pounds them, it burns them. They want them tickled. So in come the comedians and the psychologists and the self-esteem purveyors and the prosperity gospel preachers. And Satan has

moved into the church. That's right where he wants to operate.

And so, Paul says to Timothy, "Timothy, preach the Word because as soon as you abandon preaching the Word and give in to the other things, Satan has infiltrated the church and the people are turned from truth to myths." We have it. And if you come along and preach the strong truth and you call the false apostle false apostles, you will be damned by, as I said, a witless church that has become indifferent to truth because it wants to be tolerant of everybody who names the name of Christ. That's one way he gets in. The sphere of his operation is in the church.

Secondly, the subtlety of his operation, and we'll just close with this one, the subtlety of his operation, the false teacher. Verse 1 says it very explicitly, "Who will secretly introduce." Secretly, it isn't going to be open, it's going to be subtle. Jude 4 says, "They creep in unawares." They sneak in under cover. The verb used in Jude 4 speaks of a clever pleader attempting to beguile a judge, or a criminal secretly sneaking back to a place from which he was banished. The word "to creep in" means to go down into and alongside, a very vivid word. They... They come down in alongside you. There they are in the garb of a shepherd. And they "introduce," interesting word, it means to smuggle in, they smuggle in, creeping along under cover to get alongside. They're never straightforward, they're never honest, they're deceptive, sneaky, under-cover. They parade themselves as Christians, pastors, preachers, evangelists, teachers, and they sneak in. It's never overt.

That's why it's so tragic when the church makes a virtue out of tolerance to the point where it's so tolerant that it is intolerant of truth. And in come the sneaky deceivers with their destructive heresies, or heresies of destruction, or heresies that damn. Heresies; that word is used often in the New Testament, translated sects, like the Pharisee's sect. And even the critics in Acts who wanted to discount Christianity called it a sect. The word in its original meaning means that which is an opinion. It came to mean a self-designed religious opinion. That's what heresy is. It's not the truth, it's somebody's concoction. That's the sense it's used most often, the idea of a sect that has concocted its own truth. That's heresy. These self-invented opinions lead to factions, they lead to dissent, they lead to division. Read 1 Corinthians 11:19, Galatians 5:20 where the word is used there and it speaks of factions or dissent, or division. They come into the church with their own humanly devised stuff and they fracture and divide and split the church.

And they're doing it. They're doing it all over the place in the name of Christ. And the people who stand for truth are condemned and the church is fractured.

These are destructive heresies, the genitive, heresies of destruction. The word basically means damnation. It's used five times in this letter and it always means final, eternal damnation. It's used twice right here in the 1st verse, used again in the 3rd verse, used in the 7th verse of the 3rd chapter.

So that's their subtlety. They sneak in to a witless church, introduce popular new ideas that tickle the ears of the hearers, turn them away from the Word of God and ultimately they begin to purvey their error which will damn souls. It's really sad.

What it assumes, by the way, as a footnote, is that the church has unsaved people in it that they can dupe. It's amazing, they probably dupe many of the Christian people, but they can only bring to damnation the ones in the church who are not true Christians. But they tend to populate the church with false Christians who come for their entertaining, psychologizing, self-building messages. They

are men pleasers, Satan pleasers.

I hate to stop at this point, but I'm going to because the next point is the heart of everything. And that's the sacrilege of their operation, denying the Master who bought them. But I'm going to stop because there's so much I want to say about this that I don't...I think is going to shock you as you begin to really put it together in your mind that I don't want to be rushed, so we'll wait until next time. Let's pray.

Father, there's a passion in my own heart for truth, as You know. It well nigh consumes me. I don't want to be ungracious or unloving in any way, but I want to be zealous for the truth. I want to preach the Word, being instant in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all patience. Lord, I want to stay true to the Word of God. And it grieves me that there are many people who have caught the diseases of the culture and they...they don't want to hear the Word of God anymore, they don't want their sin confronted anymore. They don't want to hear sound, healthy, wholesome doctrine that can build them up. They want their ears tickled. And so now they're amassing to themselves popular preachers, teachers who will tickle their ears and entertain them, make them feel good, never confront the reality of their condition, who will turn their hearts from the sound doctrine, who will turn their hearts from the truth and lead them to myths, lies from Satan that can damn those in the church who need salvation by a false sense of it, and who can debilitate and neutralize the true Christians who become victimized by these false teachers. Help us to know that false apostles are the disguised angels of light who in truth are energized by demons to propagate satanic deception. Make us true to the Word. Help us to understand the sphere of their operation as among us and help us to know it is subtle. They don't announce it. They look like and sound like they belong but they deceive. They're everywhere. Give us wisdom, Lord. And help us to be faithful to the truth, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).