

En Garde

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- [0 : 0 0] Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word, even though sometimes what we read in it might be pretty full on. But we thank you, Father, that it always speaks the truth, and it always speaks the truth for our good.
- And so help us, we pray, to understand your word tonight and to live in light of it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I thought I'd start with some French.
- It's on the next slide, this French phrase, mise en garde. Does anyone want to have a guess at what that phrase means? There's a little sign next to it to try and help you work it out.
- Mr. Willet, French. That's right, that's why I said Willet. Close.
- No, it just means warning or caution. Like on the next slide, this is actually a picture that's on cars, so that they don't put their hand in the radiator fan at the front of the motor.
- [1 : 0 3] Anyway, that's what they've got in France. It means caution. And if you do drop the mise bit, you've got the en garde, which does mean be en garde, or be alert, be ready. Which is why it's often used just before fencing.
- So on the next slide, that's where we probably know the phrase from. You know, you're ready, you're on guard, fight. Well, chapter 2 of 2 Peter is essentially a mise en garde, a caution to Peter's readers about false teachers.
- I remember there were false teachers saying that Christ will not return to judge in the future, therefore you're free to live how you'd like in the present. And so Peter writes encouraging his readers not to be carried away by this false teaching.
- How? Well, by both growing and guarding. The last two weeks have been particularly focused on the growing part, but this week is about the guarding, which ironically will also involve growing.
- But we'll get to that later. And Peter begins with a sketch of the false teachers, point 1 in your outlines and verse 1 in your Bibles. He says, But there are also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.
- [2 : 1 3] There will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth, the gospel, into disrepute.
- 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.
- Peter begins by warning his readers not to be naive. Perhaps his readers are reluctant to call these people amongst them false teachers. And while we're not to be eager to label, you know, false teacher on people's Facebook pages and so on, nor are we to be naive about their existence.
- Peter says there have always been false teachers amongst God's people. And we heard about it in our first reading from Jeremiah, didn't we? And just as there was always false teachers amongst the past, so there will always be in the future, sadly.

It's just that they won't be obvious. They won't go around with warning sirens on their heads and false teacher on their t-shirts. And so Peter describes briefly this sketch of what false teachers are about.

[3 : 31] And he describes three things, their teaching, their character and their judgment. So first in their teaching, verse 1, it's often introduced secretly. You see that? A bit by bit, often with a bit of truth mixed in, because as they say, the best lies are half-truths.

And so false teachers will rarely say that the Bible is wrong. They rarely would be, you know, that blunt about it. Instead, they'll still quote scripture, but often taking it out of context or twisting it to suit their purposes.

In fact, many will often use the Old Testament without showing how it's fulfilled in Christ, because that's easier to twist. I've heard a couple sermons from Brian Houston, the leader of Hillsong.

That's exactly what he does. He'll even change Bible translations during his sermon to say just what he wants it to say. But whoever the false teacher is, their teaching is also destructive, we're told here, and denies the sovereign Lord Jesus.

Or in verse 3, it's based on fabricated or made-up stories that might entice people. And so in Peter's case, you know, the made-up story that denies that Jesus will return in the future.

[4 : 51] And so, as I said, it means you can live how you like in the prison. And that would appeal to some Christians who are struggling with sin. As such that, verse 2, many would follow the depraved conduct of these teachers.

This is what makes their teaching so destructive, as Peter calls it. Because it would lead people away from Christ and into sin. Which would then also cause the gospel to be mocked, or the way of truth to be brought into disrepute.

Of course, their teaching also reveals, secondly, their character. I mean, why do you think teachers say, false teachers say what they say? It's to excuse their character. And what's more, we're told in verse 3, they make up stories to exploit people because of their greed.

I mean, we heard about one from Gillian tonight. You know, that lady who sells holy wine to get rich. Or what about this guy on the next slide? Joel Osteen. He's a false teacher.

Wow. His teaching is about the prosperity gospel, or what they've called now, word of faith. They've changed their name. He says, God wants you to be rich and prosperous in this life. And the more you give, the more you'll get.

[6 : 06] So on their website, when you click on the give button, it says this on the next slide. Down the bottom there, it says, giving is a biblical principle. That's true. Always has truth in it, these lies. Biblical principle.

When lived out, produces a rich harvest in our lives. And it's a little bit vague, but when you listen to his sermons, which I have, it's clear he's talking about promotion.

He uses the word promotion. And riches now, in this life. That's the prosperity gospel. And why does he do that? Well, firstly, it appeals to our sinful nature, doesn't it?

I mean, who doesn't, deep down, want to be rich in this life? We kind of all do, don't we? But it's based on fabricated stories or twisted scripture.

And yet millions follow him. And now he might believe these fabricated stories himself. I suspect he might. But then again, when you look at his house on the next slide, maybe he's exploiting people, perhaps.

[7 : 05] But you see, they introduce heresy secretly or manipulatively to excuse their own behavior. And then out of a desire for greed of money or fame or success.

I mean, Brian Houston, his aim is to have a Hillsong Church every country of the world. To grow his church, not God's kingdom. And so whether it's greed for money, greed for success.

That's what they're after. And it appeals to people's sinful nature, which entices them away from Christ and the lines, the gospel. And so because of this, the third characteristic is their judgment.

Verse 1 says they will bring swift destruction on themselves on judgment day. Or verse 3, their condemnation has long been hanging over them. Their destruction is not sleeping. It's ready and waiting for them on the last day.

Well, the rest of chapter 2, Peter then unpacks these three character traits of false teachers in rather colorful language, doesn't he?

[8 : 09] Which brings us to point 2. And each section highlights one trait in particular, though often the other ones are also mentioned alongside. And so in verses 4 to 10, he focuses particularly on their certain judgment.

See verse 4? He says, You see what Peter's saying?

He's giving example after example from the Old Testament. Firstly, from angels, probably a reference to Genesis 6, where the sons of God came down and married the daughters of earth, if you remember that reference.

And then there's the example of the flood. And then Sodom and Gomorrah. Example after example of how God does not let the ungodly get away with it. Their judgment is certain.

And if that's the case, then so is the judgment of the false teachers, certain. You see verse 10?

[9 : 57] He said, This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desires of the flesh and despise authority, like these false teachers. Now, yeah, there is encouragement here for us who seek to follow Jesus, too, because verse 9 says God knows how to rescue the godly from trials, which is very reassuring, isn't it?

Whether it's giving us a way out of temptation, or whether it's giving us strength to persevere through a difficult time. But his main point is that the judgment is certain for these false teachers.

And that's what he goes on to now describe. The false teachers and their character of arrogance and corruption. You see, in verse 10, he's talking about their judgment for their corrupt desires and their arrogance that despises authority.

Well, now he then unpacks this character, starting with their arrogance in verse 10. He says, You see, These kind of teachers, they despise authority.

They heap abuse. They weigh into arguments they've got no idea about, like irrational animals. And we see some of this arrogance today. It doesn't sound like arrogance, though, when you listen to these false teachers.

[11 : 45] Teachers, they come across as humble, loving, genuine people. But you see, if you despise the authority of God's word, if you reject what the Bible says because it doesn't make sense to you, or you don't like it, then is that not the height of arrogance?

To say that doesn't fit with what I think, as though God answers to them? Isn't it claiming that you know better than God? It doesn't matter how these false teachers sound, but if they reject the Bible, they are arrogant.

They're despising authority. This guy on the next slide, his name is Steve Chalky. He's a leading minister in the UK. He calls himself an evangelical Bible-believing Christian.

And yet, he's been teaching for the last decade that the cross of Christ was not about Jesus taking God's wrath in our place. It was not Jesus taking our punishment for our sins.

And his view is growing. He's the one that says that if you claim that Jesus took God's anger and punishment for our sins, that's divine child abuse.

[12 : 55] That's how he puts it across. He kind of forgets that actually Jesus willingly went. He chose to go. In fact, just last month on YouTube, I had a look to make sure I did my research, and he's still defending his view just last month.

When you watch this YouTube, he doesn't sound arrogant. He sounds like a nice guy. You know, genuine and caring. You see, by not submitting to the plain teaching of the Bible, it is actually arrogance.

Or take the controversial role of men and women in marriage and church. I've heard people say, even at our church actually, oh, that's the Apostle Paul. He's grumpy today in our passage.

As though this bit is no longer God's word. And others say, oh, the Bible can't possibly say that because it doesn't fit with my experience or my view of equality and love.

But who defines equality? Who defines love? Who defines what is actually good for us? Us or God? I was at a conference just the other week, and the Bible teacher at the conference said in passing, not that I want to assign God a male or female gender.

[14 : 11] Just in passing. And the irony was that we're teaching on John chapter 10, where Jesus calls God his father. And Jesus calls himself the son.

Now, I don't let my shock come across as harshness. We need to be... These things are sensitive issues for some people. We need to be gentle, but we need to be firm. And it's the height of arrogance to think God's word must submit to my experience or my values.

To twist the Bible to make it fit. But this is what these false teachers are like. They are arrogant. But they're also corrupt. You see verse 13? Verse 13, they will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.

So there's judgment again. But here's their corruptness. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you, with eyes full of adultery.

They never stop sinning. They seduce the unstable. They are experts in greed and a cursed brood. They have left the straight way and followed the way of Balaam, son of Beza, who loved the wages of wickedness.

[15 : 27] 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. You see, their character is thoroughly corrupt, isn't it?

They are lustful. They want to excuse their own wrong desires. They are greedy, like Balaam, who did not love the wages or money, who loved the wages of wickedness.

They seduce. They never stop sinning. It's pretty full-on language, isn't it? I was trying to work some jokes in tonight. It's really hard.

But you see, Peter is deliberately full-on because, remember, he's dying. And he doesn't want to see his readers swept away by these false teachers.

He's literally dying to caution his readers, lest they be carried away. Because their teaching is empty, though enticing.

[16 : 32] Verse 17. These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them, 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.

They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity, for people are slaves to whatever has mastered them. You see, their teaching is empty, like a spring without water is empty.

They mouth empty words, words which promise freedom from sin when they themselves are enslaved and knee-deep, actually neck-deep in sin.

It'd be like going to a doctor for help when the doctor's not a real doctor. Last year, a man on the next slide called Raphael, he was jailed.

He's a Melbourne guy because he forged a medical university certificate so he could con Melbourne patients. Can you imagine finding out, you know, this guy's a fake.

[17 : 46] All his promises were empty. That's what these false teachers are like. They promise a lot but deliver nothing because it's empty.

In fact, what's worse than that, they actually entice people away from Christ into sin. I remember a church near where I grew up, the youth group leader, this was a while back, I'm getting old, but I still remember vividly that this youth group leader started sleeping with his girlfriend.

Now, just to be clear, God thinks sex is great, but only in marriage. Yet, instead of repenting, this youth group leader started teaching the old line, well, if you love each other, it's okay.

But the thing is, real love would wait. You can only give your virginity once, although there is always forgiveness. Now, this line of arguing, of course, was enticing for the older teenagers, wasn't it?

You can imagine, I guess. They were being enticed to follow this false teacher's teaching, which was really an excuse for his own corrupt behavior.

[18 : 58] That's how it works. And before long, there was all sorts of people having to be called in, and this guy stepped down, and I won't go into it. But false teaching is dangerous stuff because it entices and leads others away from Christ.

And in the end, this false teacher's behavior, well, all their behavior, in the end, shows their true colors. Verse 20, it says, If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in the truth and overcome, sorry, entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to return their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 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. Here, Peter says that if these false teachers were genuine Christians and fell away, then they would be worse off now than they would have been before they became Christians.

But verse 22 suggests they were never really Christians in the first place. They may have looked like they were Christians, they may have looked like they escaped the corruption of the world, but by going back to their old ways proves they weren't genuine to start with.

[20 : 19] Just as it's in the dog's nature to return to its vomit and sniff around or in the pig's nature to go back and wallow in the mud, so it is with a false or fake Christian's nature to go back to their non-Christian ways.

But what does all this mean for us who do have a genuine knowledge of our Lord and Saviour? Well, again, this chapter is pretty full-on, but it's meant to be because it's a warning, a caution, a mise en garde that we might be on guard.

How? Well, firstly, by being alert to the possibility of false teachers and alert to the teaching of every teacher. At first, the possibility.

Peter has reminded us that sadly, there will be false teachers amongst our churches. I wish there wasn't, but God tells us otherwise. I'm not suggesting again we form a posse and go hunting.

That's ridiculous. Or if someone teaches something incorrectly one time, we then suddenly label them a false teacher. It's got to be a pattern of behavior. But we cannot be naive.

[21 : 29] They will rise up amongst our churches and maybe, God forbid, even here at HDD. So we need to be alert to the possibility. And we also need to be alert to the teaching of every teacher by checking against God's word.

That's why we ask you to have your Bibles open and follow along. It's why we take you through the text to teach you so that you can check it out for yourselves.

And if you think we've got something wrong, then please talk to us. Because given the judgment that awaits false teachers, I really don't want to be a false teacher for many reasons, actually.

Yeah, I should be clear about that. But we're to be alert. We're to be alert to the possibility, but also to every teacher's teaching.

And the second thing we need to do is, as I said before, actually grow. And that's the other side of our summary verses. So on the next slide, remember these from the end of the letter. Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless and fall from your secure position, but grow.

[22 : 44] It's the other side of the coin. Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. You see, guarding and growing are two sides of the one coin. And we're to grow in both biblical truth and godly character.

I once heard that those who worked in the treasury department, this is going back a while now, they used to study the real notes, the real money, so they could spot a fake one. That's the same for us.

We need to keep studying the truth of the Bible, keep growing in the truth so we can spot what is fake. Especially for us who teach, whether it's one-to-one or Sunday school or youth group or Bible study, so that we can teach the truth and not false teaching.

But we're also to keep growing in godly character. Remember, one of the ways false teachers entice people away is by appealing to their sinful desires. And so the more we grow in godliness, the more we'll be able to resist those desires and not give in to the teaching.

And the more we grow in contentment, the less likely the teaching of, you know, Joel Osteen or Brian Houston will appeal to us. The more we grow in finding our identity in Christ, the less likely the false teaching of finding our identity in our gender or sexuality will appeal to us.

[24 : 04] The more we grow in our willingness to suffer for Christ, the less likely the false teaching that waters down God's word, you know, to avoid persecution will appeal to us. See, we need to both be on guard and grow that we won't be carried away.

Be on guard, alert to both the possibility of false teachers and the teaching of every teacher and continue to grow both in biblical truth and godly character. Peter says, you've been forewarned now, so be on your guard.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for even this solemn passage, but like a lot of warnings, they're not always happy, but important.

And so Father, we pray that you would help us to heed this warning tonight that we might not ever be carried away by false teaching, but that we might continue to serve our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose for us until we see Him face to face.

We ask it in His name. Amen.