

How Then Shall We Live?  
Week 10: Recognize the threat (2 Peter 2)

We are in a series called, "How then shall we live." We are trying to answer that question **with the help of one of Jesus' inner circle, Peter.** Peter wrote two **brief letters** to some of the earliest Christ followers. They were living in a **culture that was not in agreement** with what Jesus taught. **Jesus was revolutionary in that Greek, Roman culture.** To live for him was to live differently and that is what Peter was trying to tell them and now trying to tell us. **Our culture is not the same,** and living for Jesus isn't dangerous for us like it was for these people. But similarly, our culture in a **post-Christian world full of fear, hopelessness, consumerism, and confusion, we need help knowing how to live** for Jesus like Jesus right now. Maybe we won't be thrown in jail, but we might be **marginalized, labeled, or certainly not cheered on.**

Today we are picking up in **2 Peter, chapter 2.** Many of us are using these **journals.** If you would like one, we want to give it to you as a **gift,** in the hopes that you will **use it to better hear God speak** through his Word. Also, you received an outline with announcements on the back. If you are using the journals, **you won't really need to follow the outline,** but please keep hold of it, because **there is one part that I want to challenge all of us to join in on.** Also, there are **pens** in the seat backs if you need something to write with. You can put it back or take it home.

**Let's begin reading at verse 1.** We will **not read every word** of chapter 2. I encourage you to read the whole thing if you haven't already. **Also read Jude,** which is another brief book, added to the 2 letters from Peter in this journal. It's only 24 verses, but **Jude echoes the same thoughts** as Peter does in today's chapter.

**But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you,** (Why the future tense? Peter is quoting Jesus' words when he said that there will be those coming who will teach what is contrary to what he taught.) **who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.<sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.<sup>3</sup> 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. 2 Peter 2:1-3

**Now we get to the point of this letter.** As I said last week, someone is muddying the water, confusing God's people, and even leading them astray. Now we get to find out who these "false teachers" are.

**The apostle Paul saw a similar thing** happening in a church in Galatia. Here's how he describes these same kinds of people. <sup>4</sup> **Even that question came up only because of some so-called believers there—false ones, really—who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations.** Galatians 2:4

**Keep in mind that in both cases above, the threat is from within.** These are people who consider themselves Christians and may have started genuinely following Jesus, but they are no longer following what the eye witnesses, like Peter and Paul have taught.

**It is imperative that we...Recognize the threat.**

**There are all kinds of things to be afraid of in this culture.** But these same things come into our churches in more subtle ways. Now the threat is not just out there.

**This threat, the cool non-conformist kid who comes to school and makes fun of the rules, the teachers, the assignments, and even the point of the whole thing.** This cool kid doesn't seem to have a care in the world. He does his own thing, marches to the beat of his drummer and, after all, he's in my class. **How dangerous could this be? Wouldn't I love to be as free as he is, so unafraid of parents expectations, grades, graduation, college, and career.** His words sound true.

Here's the first thing to know about these false teachers, this threat from within... **This is nothing new.** They were false prophets of old, and now false teachers. **And they continue in our time.**

"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." Ecclesiastes 1:9

Now it's time to use our heads so that we can recognize this threat.

16 You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Matthew 7:16 Fruit is what something produces. When a plant is first breaking through the ground, it's hard to tell one green thing from another. This can continue as the plant grows, but the one sure-fire way to tell what kind of plant it is happens when that plant produces something that can be used. In some cases, it is something that nourishes others or simply contains a seed whereby the plant can reproduce.

They are producing bad fruit that is leading people away from the real thing. How do we recognize this threat from within, these false teachers? You have to first...Use your head... And that means you will see this, They are driven by pleasure

Write across from verse one, "They are driven by pleasure."

Why is he talking about their lifestyles? Here's why. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality... That's what that word "sensuality" is all about. Seeking pleasure.

As I read this, underline anything that describes these false teachers and then make a list in your journal page. Mark anything you see as I read verses 13-16. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. That's code for they were brazen, without shame in doing what is contrary to following Jesus. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. <sup>14</sup> They have eyes full of adultery, this is cleaned up for an audience of all ages, but it really means that they will jump in bed with anyone who is willing, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! <sup>15</sup> Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, <sup>16</sup> but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. 2 Peter 2:13b-16

They seem cool, free, natural, less bound by guilt and fear...

**They separate the physical from the spiritual.** This is what we talked about last week. It's a philosophy or way of thinking that's called **Gnosticism.**

That word "**Sensual**" pops up several times; it means...**gratification of the senses, indulgence of the appetites (125)**

**Going on pure instinct means we don't reflect on what we are doing.** What is natural and, therefore, easy is not always what is right. **That's what we call our flesh,** which is not to be confused with our physical bodies. **The flesh is what is broken in us** that causes us to be drawn to things that God doesn't want, because we believe they will **bring satisfaction and peace.** They will not. **Scratch that itch once and you'll need to keep scratching.**

**This way of living is missing one key thing. It's the gateway, the open door for knowledge to help, and that is reflection.** Reflection gets us back to the knowledge of God. **Stop, think, reflect on what you are considering doing** and ask, "**Does this sound like a way Jesus would want me to think or to live?**" Reflection can be with **God's Word,** with **other believers** and with **my conscience.**

**Why does the salesperson say that this is a one-time offer?** Come back tomorrow and I can't promise you that price. **That's because he wants you to go with what will make you feel good, powerful, successful, attractive and up to date.** Reason is where you ask yourself **does this fit with who I am, whom I belong to and for whom I am responsible.**

**Sometimes it's easy to go right to sexual sin** because that seems to outsiders the only thing conservative Christians are concerned about, **ignoring greed and the misuse of power.** But this verse directly takes us there. **These teachers were obsessed. They looked at women as a means for pleasure.** And pleasure was the **ultimate truth.** That is **hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure over all else.**

**Hedonism can be about money and all of the pleasures, comfort, and security it can provide.** That is hedonism as much as the sexual stuff.

And, as we see in this chapter, one of the characteristics of these false teachers is greed. Look at verse 14 again, **"They have hearts trained in greed."** 2 Peter 2:14b The opposite of not being greedy is what Peter said in 1 Peter 5:2 that we should be eager to serve. Serving is about others, greed is about me.

Look at that phrase, **They entice unsteady souls.** 2 Peter 2:14b The idea behind this word, **entice**, is what the fisherman uses to lure the fish onto the hook. The fish isn't looking to get hooked, but **there is something desirable, something that triggers the fish to bite.** The lure is something that looks like the real thing, but isn't.

**This idea that we are free in Christ, fully forgiven because of Jesus and, therefore, I can do what I want with my body and lifestyle, sounds very enticing.** This separates the spiritual from the physical, **it has a hook.**

Look at that word **"unsteady"**. This is the opposite of what Peter spoke about in 2 Peter 1:12, **"<sup>12</sup> Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.** 2 Peter 1:12 This description of being **unsteady and, therefore, easily seduced or lured by a counterfeit, is in contrast to stability that comes from knowledge of the truth.** Peter again brings us back to **knowledge, knowing God accurately and intimately is key to stability in a culture that is moving in the wrong direction.**

**<sup>18</sup> For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.** 2 Peter 2:18 **These false teachers don't entice those who have a growing knowledge or relationship or love for Jesus. They entice those who are just hanging on. There isn't much of a foundation to get washed out by the offer of joining them in their so-called freedom.**

**Keep in mind that no one is without sin.** James 3:2 says, "We all stumble in many ways." **Falling back into sin does not make someone a false teacher who lures others away; it just means you are a broken person in a broken world. A person can be wrong and hear the truth and turn the other way. A person can sin, and repent without excuse, falling on the grace and mercy**

of Jesus. That is not what these false teachers are doing. **They are in full out rebellion against Jesus.**

**Let's use our heads.** This is **nothing new**, people leading others away. **If you see a focus on pleasure**, or getting yours from someone who is trying to say something about God, then watch out. **The next way to recognize the threat again means you must...Use your head...**Is there a focus on pleasure, but also **They deny Jesus' return and judgment.**

**If they are Gnostics**, therefore, there can be no return of Jesus and Judgment because the two don't mix, and **I am free in Christ.**

Back in **chapter 1**, we first saw this aspect of false teaching. **<sup>6</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place 2 Peter 1:6, 17b-19**

Peter is saying that **they have seen all of this as eyewitnesses.** They know who Jesus is and that **he will return and that will bring judgment.**

This theme continues into chapter 3. **<sup>3</sup> knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."... <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly... <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 2 Peter 3:3-4, 7 & 10**

**This is the one specific teaching error** or heresy is a denial of Christ's return and judgment. **That has a very direct application to this day.**

- Everyone goes to heaven if they are "good."

- You become an angel.
- Your spirit never leaves the ones you love...
- Or maybe this is all we have so live it up!

**Don't believe those fairy tales that are made to scare us into behavior and crush our freedom to seek pleasure.**

More likely **from within** the message will be a **gospel of forgiveness only** where there is no need for repentance and following Jesus obediently. I don't need to have Christ formed within me. **I don't need to use self-control, or seek virtue** like Peter talked about in chapter 1. **Everyone gets to heaven** because, in the end, **God is not about justice at all.**

**The threat is real.** It's always been here. But we have to use our heads, we have to know God and grow in that knowledge and then we will recognize the pleasure seeking, the deniers of the judgment to come where an account will be taken. You have to...**Use your head...They defy authority.**

**If there's no judgment then there certainly isn't any ultimate authority.**

They seem cool because they are their own person **marching to their own drummer not trying to fit into society's mold.** Nobody can tell them how to live their life. They are free because there is no king.

**There is no meta narrative or "this is the way it is."** There is no big story where God created everything and it was good, even perfect. Then sin brought separation from God and that brought death. We were hopeless until Jesus came and died to cancel the sin and, through relationship with him, the separation has been bridged.

**Here's how far off they were.** This is the drop the mic moment. **Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 ESV**

**Christ is not Jesus' last name** it = king, Lord, which is ultimate authority.

**Because of these two aspects** of these false teachers' lives (hedonism and defying authority) the way or **the church is made to look foolish** in the

eyes of the culture. **“They are free for all over there and keep your wives, daughters, and sisters away from those Christians.”**

The threat is real and it isn't just from out there. We have to...**Use your head...Recognize Jesus in others.**

**Who has been with Jesus?** This was what Peter said was the reason to listen to his words. He had been with Jesus. He's saying things that sound like Jesus.

**Who do you know that, even though they are broken, you can still be broken, you can tell they've been with Jesus?** How they live, although not perfect, reflects something of Jesus. **The aroma of Christ** is around that person. **Even in their mistakes, you can tell like Peter that they are being made new.**

Some who are trying to tell you how to live and about God, but you can **recognize the lack of Jesus in others.**

This is where Peter's emphasis on growing knowledge of God comes in. **If you know him, both head and heart, you will be able to recognize him in others.**

**Yes, there is a threat but remember this.** <sup>3</sup> **His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 1 Peter 1:3 NIV**

### **Aligning my Life**

The great Christian theologian and writer, J.I. Packer, used this quote from over 100 years ago in one of his books.

You live in a world where your soul is in constant danger. Enemies are around you on every side. Your own heart is deceitful. Bad examples are numerous. Satan is always laboring to lead you astray. Above all false doctrine and false teachers of every kind abound. This is your great danger. To be safe you must be well armed. You must provide yourself with the weapons, which God has given you for your help. You must store your mind with Holy

Scripture. **This is to be well armed.** Arm yourself with a thorough knowledge of the written word of God...Neglect your Bible and nothing that I know of can prevent you from error if a plausible advocate of false teaching shall happen to meet you...You are the man that is unlikely to **become established in the truth.** I shall not be surprised to hear that you are troubled with doubts and questions about assurance, grace, faith, perseverance, etc...I shall not wonder if I am told that you have problems in your marriage, problems with your children, problems about the conduct of your family and about the company you keep. The world you steer through is full of rocks, shoals and sandbanks. You are not sufficiently familiar with lighthouses or charts...You are the man who is likely to be carried away by some false teacher for a time. It will not surprise me if I hear that one of these clever eloquent men who can make a convincing presentation is leading you into error. You are in need of ballast (truth); no wonder if you are tossed to and fro like a cork on the waves. J. C. Ryles quoted by J. I. Packer was written over 100 years ago.

Would that be said of you?

**Right now, people are saying a lot of things about God and what it means to him, and a lot of it is nonsense. Will you be able to tell the difference? If you start looking like them and not Jesus, we all become powerless and appear foolish in a time of great need for the truth.**

**21 days of growing knowledge:**

1. **15 minutes in the Bible a day...**You could begin with your **table tent and continue with the chapter of 2 Peter.** Data shows that transformation happens once a person is in the Bible 4 days a week. So commit to **at least 4 days per week** in these last 3 weeks before resurrection Sunday.
2. **Pray this way**
  - **Praise: God I love you because you are...**
  - **Confess: I confess to you my sins of commission and omission.**

How am I promoting false ideas about Jesus? If you lead one of those little ones astray.

- **Listen: "Speak Jesus; I'm listening."**

**These questions are on your outline and announcements sheet that you received on your way in. If you are at home, write them down. What might**

**be the outcome of three weeks of praise, confession and listening?** This could be the **breakthrough** you have been needing.

**21 days of doing this, leading up to our celebration of Jesus' triumph over death.** Put it in **your phone right now**, even if it has to change

**Let's practice** this together. **If you want to take a posture** that helps you to pray best. If you would like to kneel, open your hands upward, or come to the prayer benches up front or simply sit with your eyes looking at the cross or closed. **I'm going to lead us through each of these three areas** of prayer, leaving time for you and God in silence.