

# Peter Warns the Church against False Teaching

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 30 April 2017

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[ 0 : 00 ] Now let's turn to 2 Peter, after that outburst. It's just so lovely to hear you singing like that. Let's turn to 2 Peter, chapter 2, which you'll find on page 1018 in our church Bibles.

2 Peter, chapter 2. 2 Peter, chapter 2.

The apostles and the prophets. And he's going to bring in a great contrast, as you'll see here in chapter 2. So chapter 2, verse 1. 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 or their pernicious teaching. And because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words.

[ 1 : 32 ] Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment, if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserve Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued righteous lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard, then the Lord knows how, to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.

But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing.

They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin.

They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed, accursed children. Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray.

[ 3 : 39 ] They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Baal, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression. A speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them, the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. 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.

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them.

The dog returns to its own vomit and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. Amen.

[ 5 : 01 ] The word of the Lord. May it be a blessing to us this evening. Well, let's turn again in our Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 2, page 1018.

And my title this evening is Peter warns the church against false teaching. Now, as we turn to this second chapter in 2 Peter, I think we're all aware that it's a difficult chapter.

And I guess that your heart may have been sinking slightly at the prospect of listening to a sermon on this chapter. I must confess that as I began my preparations a week or two ago to preach on this chapter, my own heart was rather heavy.

I do remember doing some preaching from 2 Peter years ago to the congregation that I was serving at the time. And I remember giving them two or three sermons from chapter 1 and two or three sermons from chapter 3, but nothing from chapter 2.

The fact was I chickened out. I didn't touch it. I found the prospect, quite honestly, too daunting. So I took the coward's way out and said nothing. But that won't do.

[ 6 : 15 ] That won't do because God has put every chapter into the Bible for our instruction and ultimately for our comfort. And as we often say to our Cornhill students, there are no no-go areas in the Bible.

So I'm having to eat my own words. The preacher is not at liberty to pick and choose. It's all here in the Bible to be opened up and it all needs to be pressed into our understanding.

But ultimately, of course, we shall be much stronger for it. Now this chapter, above everything else, is a great warning to Christian people, a great warning to the church.

We take our warning notices seriously when we're out of doors in the country. If you see a sign that says, Danger, 30,000 volts, stay clear, you stay clear, don't you?

Because the warning is there for your protection. And it's just the same with the warnings of the Bible. They're here for our protection. Because the God who warns us is the God who loves us.

[ 7 : 13 ] And he warns us because he loves us. And the purpose of this chapter is to warn the church about the danger of false teaching and false teachers. Now you'll see that Peter expresses himself very strongly here.

There's a sense of crisis in the way that he writes. In this chapter, he's opening up to us a glimpse of the great warfare which continually exists in this world.

And that is the warfare between truth and falsehood which is also a warfare between wholesome living or godly living and immorality. Because truth, gospel truth, produces wholesome and godly living whereas false teaching always issues in godless living and immorality.

Now one of the striking things about this chapter is just how long it is and how detailed it is. It's not enough for the apostle simply to say to us beware false teaching.

He develops his theme in a most determined way. He delves right back into ancient Bible history so as to show his readers the long roots, the historical roots of godless behavior.

[ 8 : 26 ] That's why he takes us right back to Noah in verse 5 and to Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 6. To Balaam, the son of Baal in verse 15 whose story is told in the book of Numbers and he quotes from the book of Proverbs in verse 22.

So he's showing his readers that false teaching is not just a problem of the New Testament era. It has been around for millennia. It's one of the characteristics of the way that men and women rebel against God.

Let me very quickly list for you the characteristics of false teaching that Peter describes here in this one chapter. These people are verse 1 secretive.

They teach heresy verse 1. They deny Christ verse 1. They deny the atonement the master who bought them. They are given to sensuality in verse 2.

They cause Christianity to be blasphemed verse 2. They're greedy verse 3. And that makes them exploitative verse 3. They are ungodly verse 6.

[ 9 : 29 ] Lawless verse 8. They indulge defiling passions verse 10. They despise authority verse 10. They are bold willful and fearless verse 10.

And blasphemous verse 10. They are irrational and ignorant verse 12. They revel in daylight hours verse 13. They are blots and blemishes verse 13.

Deceivers verse 13. Adulterous insatiable greedy and accursed verse 14. They've gone astray verse 15. They are springs and clouds that produce no water verse 17.

They're boastful foolish and sensual verse 18. Slaves of corruption verse 19. Entangled in defilements verse 20. And finally in verse 22 in moral terms they lick up their own vomit and wallow in the mire.

Well that's all just from within this one chapter. Surely the apostle is meaning to shake us up and to shock us by describing these people in such gruesome detail.

[ 10 : 36 ] Now don't forget that Jesus was equally detailed and vivid in his description of what comes out of the human heart. Like Peter he didn't just say from within the human heart comes sin.

He said out of the heart of man come evil thoughts sexual immorality theft murder adultery coveting wickedness deceit sensuality envy slander pride foolishness.

The apostle Paul several times in his letters produces similar lists of sins. Now friends let's thank God that the Bible is so detailed and thorough and insistent in describing the thoughts and actions and motivations of human beings when human beings go wrong.

And if we ask why all this detail why all this digging around in the vile swamps of the human heart the answer must be that if we're left to our own devices if we avoid reading this kind of chapter we will never realize just how corrupt we are by nature and how much we need the gospel of salvation.

If we're left to our own devices we will think of ourselves as the world thinks in other words that we're all rather nice and kind that no influence of teaching can possibly corrupt us that the people described as false teachers in the Bible are nothing worse than colorful eccentrics or mavericks but the Bible insists on going into these painful details at length in order to wake us up to the dangers that we're in to the dangers that threaten the church and have threatened it from the time of Noah right down to the present day.

[ 12 : 22 ] Peter's message to his readers back then and to us today is take warning. We live in a situation of battle and warfare. The Christian life is very difficult and if we're to survive intact we must leave naivety behind.

We must grow up into maturity and ensure that our churches are not invaded by the kind of evil teaching that will lead us astray. Now the false teacher as Peter makes it clear here in verse one is not an outsider.

Peter says there will be false teachers among you. In other words it will be insiders usually professing Christians and quite often people who are acknowledged as leaders in congregations.

Paul had said exactly the same thing back in Acts chapter 20 when he was speaking to the church elders at Ephesus. From among your own selves he said men will arise speaking twisted things.

Dangers arise then within congregations, within denominations, within groups of churches. And today of course we have the added element of internet communication. You know how many churches including our own make their teaching sermons available online.

[ 13 : 39 ] So it's not as though a congregation is cocooned against the influences of other teachers from all over the world. We also have thousands of books available to us in a way that was simply not possible in the days of the apostles.

Many of those books are a great blessing to us but many of them can bring in false teaching. Well let's turn now to the text. My plan is to spend two weeks, not just tonight but two weeks in this chapter.

This week we'll look at some general principles that Peter is teaching about false teachers and next week we'll get into some of the details a little bit more closely. So here's the first thing that we need to grasp.

Peter is saying learn discrimination. Learn to be discriminatory. We mustn't be squeamish. We mustn't say for example, oh I could never categorize Mr. So-and-so as a false teacher.

If we're squeamish in that kind of way we shall never grow up into maturity. Look at Peter's method here. He's presenting us with a great contrast between the true teacher and the false teacher.

[ 14 : 47 ] He's been describing the true teacher in the last paragraph of chapter 1. And we saw last week the true teacher verses 16 to 18 a first of all the apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus.

And secondly in verses 19 to 21 the Old Testament prophets whose teaching is true because they spoke from God verse 21 as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In short then the true teaching is the Old and New Testaments the teaching of the prophets of old and the apostles of Jesus. But chapter 2 verse 1 and here's the contrast.

false prophets also arose among the people. That means the people of Israel in the Old Testament times. Just as there will be false teachers among you among the Christian churches.

So Peter in the clear way in which he sets out his material is discriminating between the true and the false. Now for us today by what standard do we exercise discrimination?

[ 15 : 51 ] how can we tell whether a teacher who professes to be a Christian is a true teacher or a false teacher? Well the answer is we must follow Peter's method.

Peter is showing us that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments is the truth. So when we listen to a teacher, especially a teacher that we're not familiar with and therefore we haven't learned to trust, we have to ask if his teaching accords with the teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

We ask, what is this man's attitude to the Bible? Does his teaching show clear signs of glad submission to the Bible or does he give the impression of being superior to the Bible as if he knows rather better than the Apostles and the Prophets?

Now I'm well aware that it's not easy sometimes to exercise this kind of necessary discrimination and it's certainly unwise to be in too much of a hurry to categorize somebody as a false teacher.

For example, at our Cornhill training course, we listen to practice sermons every week from our students, two or three or four sermons. Some of the practice sermons are very good and are a joy to listen to, but sometimes a student misses the mark rather badly and gets the wrong end of the stick in teaching a passage.

[ 17 : 10 ] Now when that happens, does the tutor say, well, you'll have to leave the Cornhill training course today, you're obviously a false teacher. Well, of course not, of course not.

The tutor points out where the sermon has gone wrong and then the tutor and the student and the rest of the class all work together so as to understand the passage more accurately. That's how teaching takes place.

It's how learning develops. We make mistakes, we learn from the mistakes and then we make progress to a better understanding of what the Bible is saying. In the same way, we recognize that two teachers, who are both fundamentally true teachers of the Bible, may differ on certain secondary points.

For example, one teacher believes that the Bible supports the position that only adults should be baptized. Another teacher believes that young children of Christian parents should properly and rightly be baptized.

But those two teachers don't think of each other as false teachers. Each thinks of the other as a true teacher who is truly submitted to the Bible's authority, but who takes a different view on a secondary issue.

[ 18 : 20 ] So let's not be hasty to brand people as false teachers. The way Peter describes false teachers in this passage reveals a very different type of person, a person with a fundamental commitment to ungodliness and immorality.

So friends, we mustn't be afraid to be discriminating. Peter is teaching us to discern, to be willing to say, this is true, but this is false.

That's a big part of Christian maturity, to be able to say, this is true, this is false. However, we live today in an age that is not favorable to discriminatory talk.

One of the great features of the modern Western world is its unwillingness to say that anything is wrong. I remember being at a conference of Christian ministers some 25 years ago, where one of the main speakers was a fine pastor from Los Angeles called John MacArthur.

And John MacArthur said to this gathering of ministers, there has never been an age before now in which Christian ministers have shown such inability to exercise discrimination.

[ 19 : 30 ] Christian ministers. I can tell you that comment sunk into my soul. Unwillingness to exercise discrimination will eventually lead to incapacity to exercise discrimination.

The lines become blurred in a person's thinking until there are simply no lines left. But the very essence of the Bible is to draw lines between truth and falsehood at every turn.

Almost everything the Bible says involves drawing lines. Just think of the first verse of the Bible. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now that verse is drawing sharp lines between truth and falsehood at several points. That verse is saying, no, you're wrong. First, to the person who denies the existence of God.

In the beginning, God. Secondly, to the person who says that the universe came into being in a random and unaccountable way. That's what so many people think these days. And thirdly, to the person who says that human life on planet earth cannot possibly have any meaning.

[ 20 : 36 ] The whole Bible presents us with a contrast between what is true about God and what is false about God. So Peter's second letter is just one passage amongst hundreds where the true and the false are being starkly contrasted.

Our problem today is that the nature of society makes us fearful of drawing lines between the true and the false. We can become fearful for our very safety. Just think of the great issues which the church is having to face today.

There's the issue of the truth of Christianity over against the falsehood of other religions. There's the issue of salvation and judgment, the reality of condemnation and hell for those who refuse to bow to Christ.

And particularly today, there's the issue of homosexuality and transgenderism. Now, a church leader today can be cowed into silence because he fears that if he teaches the Bible's teaching about these things, he might get a brick put through his window or a hate-filled antagonist who might search him out and kill him with a knife or a rifle.

So he says to himself, I'd better keep quiet about those things. Fear stops him from teaching the truth of the Bible. He's afraid to be discriminatory, so he stops teaching the truth.

[ 21 : 57 ] Peter never stopped, did he? And what happened to him? He was crucified in Rome. Paul never stopped. And what happened to him? Beheaded in Rome.

Jesus never stopped, and we know what happened to him. It's no wonder that Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross. That means prepare to die and follow me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was put to death just before the end of the Second World War, used to say, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. To hold the Bible's distinctions between the true and the false will inevitably lead some Christians to an early grave.

So there's the first thing. Peter shows us by his example that we need to discriminate. Now second, Peter shows us that false teaching is initially hard to detect.

Look at verse one. There will be false teachers among you who will secretly, secretly bring in destructive heresies. J.B. Phillips translates it. They will be men who will subtly introduce dangerous heresies.

[ 23 : 10 ] Secretive and subtle, not obvious. So these people will not be wearing a big badge on their coat that says, I am a false teacher. They will put themselves forward as true teachers.

Jesus makes exactly the same point when he says, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. If the wolf came in wolf's clothing, we'd immediately recognize him, but he comes like a sheep.

It's only later on that the fruits of his influence become obvious. Jesus goes on, by their fruits you will recognize them. But it can take some time before the fruits of their influence appear, because initially they can look good and true.

Their false teaching is secretive and subtle, not obvious. Let me give some examples of how false teaching can be hard to detect. It can be presented as something exciting and new.

It's often described as a new wave. Whenever you hear that phrase, be suspicious. New waves usually turn out to be old fallacies. Some of you may remember something called the Toronto Blessing, which took place about 30 years or so ago.

[ 24 : 25 ] What happened there was that there were various churches in the city of Toronto in Canada who became excited by what they reckoned were manifestations of the Holy Spirit. People started falling over in church services.

Some of them were roaring like lions and braying like donkeys. Now, I knew a number of pastors in England who actually got into an airplane and went across to Toronto to spend a week or two there to observe all this so that somehow they could bottle it up and bring it back to their own churches.

But it was a silly excitement which did nothing to promote serious evangelism or godly living. It was patently nonsense. Then some years later when I was at Burton on Trent, one or two of the local churches there had people who were claiming that their teeth were being miraculously adorned with gold fillings.

Did you have that in Glasgow? Gold fillings in the teeth? Come and look at my teeth, they said, and you'll see the power of God. Now, it was absurd, of course.

The problem is that some people really believed it and got very excited about it. But a person who builds their faith on that kind of nonsense rather than on the Bible is likely to crash and burn as a Christian.

[ 25 : 41 ] So we mustn't be gullible and think that a thing is true because it's new. Then secondly, a false teaching can be hard to detect because it's popular.

People can feel that because something has the weight of popular opinion behind it, it must be right. It's a kind of democracy gone to seed. Look at our verse two because we see it here.

Many will follow their sensuality. That word sensuality could be translated their pernicious teaching. Many will lap up the falsehood. One of the great falsehoods of the last 150 years or so in the Western world is the idea that the Bible can no longer be really trusted as being true, that it's a collection of cleverly devised myths, that it's fairy stories or moral fables.

That's the way the man in the street will often think of the Bible. So people say, no one seriously believes the Bible in our modern day. Certainly no cultured or educated person believes it.

And if you listen to a radio program like the Moral Maze on Radio 4, where current moral problems in society are discussed, if anyone tries to bring in the Bible as a serious contributor to ethical discussion, it gets dismissed very quickly and often contemptuously.

[ 27 : 02 ] The Bible, my dear, so old-fashioned. Who wants to take us back to the morals of the 18th century? Now look on down our page in chapter 2.

Peter writes here about Noah in verse 5. I'm thinking of popular pressure here. Peter describes Noah as a herald or preacher of righteousness.

Now think of the way that Noah preached righteousness. He was building a huge boat miles from the sea in a sun-scorched desert. And presumably as he built, he was telling his neighbors and contemporaries that the reason for this ark was that a judgment by flood was coming soon.

But nobody repented. The weight of popular opinion was entirely against him. But the world that refused to believe his message perished. The weight of popular opinion was against him, but he was right.

He was vindicated. Then look at the next verse, verse 6. The whole population of Sodom and Gomorrah was turned to ashes, and only Lot and his daughters were rescued.

[ 28 : 10 ] They put their trust in the Lord and obeyed his command to leave the place. But the whole of popular opinion was against them. And it's this pressure of popular opinion which can intimidate a Christian leader into submission.

I was listening not many weeks ago to a recorded sermon from a pastor in the south of England. He was the senior pastor of a congregation down there. And in the course of his sermon he said this to his congregation.

I've agonized over this now for some years, but at last I've changed my mind on homosexuality. I now believe that it's right and proper for love to be expressed physically in same sex relationships.

And he was inviting his congregation, of course, to follow his lead. And I realized as I listened to this recording that I was listening to a man who had become a false teacher.

He'd given way to the pressure of popular opinion. He'd reached a point where he said, because the majority now seem to believe this, it must be right. So first we need to discriminate.

[ 29 : 21 ] Second, we must recognize that false teaching can be hard to detect. And third, we must recognize the connection between false teaching and immorality, immoral behavior.

Look again at our chapter. Verse 2, sensuality. Verse 6, the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. If you read the account in Genesis 19, you'll see that the men of Sodom were involved in homosexual gang rape.

Peter describes it in verse 7 as the sensual conduct of the wicked. Then look on to verse 10, the lust of defiling passion. Verse 14, eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin.

And then verse 18, sensual passions of the flesh. So false teaching is never just about errors in our thinking and our understanding. But here's the key question.

Is it false teaching that produces immoral living? Or is it the desire to live immorally that produces the false teaching? Now surely it works both ways.

[ 30 : 30 ] Look at verse 2. Peter says many will follow their sensuality. Now why is it then that so many are so ready to listen to false teaching? Why is it that if some clergyman, some minister puts forward a new theory that undermines the Bible's truthfulness, why is it that so many people follow him so readily?

Why do people lap up completely unsustainable ideas, such as the idea that Jesus had an affair with Mary Magdalene, or that David and Jonathan were homosexual lovers?

Why do people love to believe the clergyman who preaches that everything miraculous, everything supernatural in the Bible could not possibly have happened? There's only one answer to those questions, and that is that the false teaching makes it easier for them to live the kind of life that they want to live.

If they can say, but the Bible is not true, and God is not as the Bible makes him out to be, the next step is to say, I don't need to regard myself any longer as accountable to God.

I can live as I please and no longer be troubled by my conscience. There's a good example of this in George Gershwin's famous musical Porgy and Bess.

[ 31 : 46 ] Gershwin was a very talented American composer who was writing towards the middle of the 20th century, and he produced this musical show about a poor black man called Porgy who falls in love with Bess.

That's a rather touching story, and it has some great music in it. But one of the songs is called It Ain't Necessarily So. Hands up if you know that song.

It Ain't Necessarily So. Okay, quite a few of you have heard it. All right, do you know what it's about then? The strap line goes like this. The things you are liable to read in the Bible, they ain't necessarily so.

And here's one of the verses. Now Jonah, he lived in a whale. Yes, Jonah, he lived in a whale. Now he made his homin, that fish's abdomen. Yes, Jonah, he lived in a whale.

And then immediately the chorus strikes up. It ain't necessarily so. Ain't necessarily so. Now on the level of music, it's great jazz. But on the level of truth, it is Bible denial.

[ 32 : 48 ] It's false teaching. And popular music is one of the channels by which falsehood is pumped into the bloodstream of society. Now I don't mean that all popular music is bad, not at all.

But it's one of the doorways through which ideas that hold God in contempt can enter the shared understanding of a culture. There is something in the nature of man that wants to believe that the Bible's account of God is not true.

Because if we can dispense with the God who calls man to account, the God who defines sin and holiness, we start to believe that we can get away with immoral behavior.

The twisted heart of man will welcome false teaching because it excuses the way sinful man wants to live. Now let me just take one example. And I come back to this because it's such a pressing thing today.

And so many of our younger people haven't really understood this yet. Numbers of books and articles have been produced in recent years arguing that the Bible does not say that all homosexual activity is sinful.

[ 33 : 55 ] These books ask us to believe that the Bible's prohibitions were culturally conditioned. Applicable and appropriate perhaps in Jewish society back then in the time of Moses or perhaps in the first century A.D.

at a time when Christianity was new born and needing to define itself as a new force in the pagan world. But cultural conditions have changed, we're told. And we ought now to accept and welcome same-sex relationships of a loving, committed and permanent nature.

Now you can only read the Bible's teaching on homosexuality that way if you have a prior pre-commitment to the conclusion that you want to reach. You couldn't possibly reach those conclusions if you read the Old and New Testaments honestly.

The Old and New Testaments consistently, unambiguously condemn all homosexual activity as sinful. I was talking with an old friend of mine down in England a few weeks ago, a man who has a very good mind and is a very able writer.

And he told me that he's working at the moment on producing a 500-page book in which he is seeking to demolish comprehensively the kind of false teaching on homosexuality which I've just been describing.

[ 35 : 11 ] I was very chuffed to hear that. I'm so glad that my friend who's very able is tackling this subject. And we need to pray for all such people that their ability as writers will be harnessed by the Lord for the demolition of false arguments and thus for the strengthening of ordinary Christians and ordinary churches.

Well friends, we'll delve further into the details of this chapter 2 next week, but let me finish this evening with one or two, a couple of practical hints and suggestions arising from all this.

First, we must expect the Lord's church to be frequently bombarded by false teaching because the devil never goes on vacation.

He's always looking for ways of undermining Christian morale and confidence in the Bible. Peter says, do you remember back in his first letter, resist the devil, firm in your faith.

One way of resisting him is by frequently encouraging each other to live the Christian life wholeheartedly and full bloodedly because false teaching will always encourage us to be disobedient, not only in sexual morality, but in a hundred other ways.

[ 36 : 21 ] Therefore, the kind of encouragement that we can give each other will very often be encouragement to be obedient. It may not seem like that always, but that's what lies behind it. Obedience to the Lord brings blessing and happiness, whereas disobedience to the Lord brings disaster and misery.

That's one of the Bible's constantly stated themes, and we know it's true. So we have a responsibility towards each other to keep each other on what Jesus calls the narrow path that leads to life.

But we need to be constantly encouraging each other because false teaching is in the very atmosphere that we breathe. It's everywhere. It comes to us through the airwaves, on the radio and television, on the Internet.

It seeps into our systems like fog seeping into a barn. But we must expect it because, as Peter says here in verse one, there will be false teachers among you.

There will be. Then secondly, without becoming obsessed with false teaching, let's listen out for it. Let's develop a nose that is able to smell it.

[ 37 : 31 ] I sometimes encourage our Cornhill students to listen to the religious broadcasting on Radio 4. And some of them look at me as if no sane being could possibly be interested in listening to Radio 4.

But I do encourage them to do that because I want them to know what's being said out there publicly in the name of Christianity. And I particularly remind them of Thought for the Day, weekdays at 745 and the Sunday morning service, which runs from 10 past 8 till quarter to 9 every Sunday.

Now, sometimes you hear excellent talk, excellent speaking that really does express the Bible's teaching. But that is the exception rather than the rule. The majority of what you hear arises from a way of thinking that rejects the Bible's teaching on salvation and judgment, rejects the Bible's teaching on sin and holiness, and rejects the teaching on the cross as the place where Jesus bore the penalty for our sins and propitiated the wrath of God.

But let me encourage all of us to develop an awareness of what is being said out there in public places and in many churches and in many churches in the name of Christianity, but not according to the Bible's teaching.

Now, as I say, I don't mean that we should become obsessed with false teaching, like theological bloodhounds baying for their prey. It is possible to become a hard-faced Christian who's always condemning other people.

[ 38 : 58 ] You've seen that, haven't you? Let's not be like that. We are above all good news people, people who pass on the glad tidings of a wonderful Savior. As the old hymn puts it, we have a gospel to proclaim, good news to men on all the earth.

So of all people, it's Christian people who know how to smile and who know how to laugh, not with the world's empty cackling laughter, but with the joy that our sins are forgiven and the gates of heaven are open to those who belong to Christ.

But let's follow the example of the apostles and of Jesus himself teaching the good news and drawing out its implications, pressing home how good and delightful it is, but also because we love the church, because we care about the state of the health of the church, understanding false teaching and how much damage it can do.

It dogged the heels of the New Testament churches, and it will dog the heels of the Lord's church until the Lord returns. It is part of the landscape. So let's take to heart this great chapter of warning, remembering the bitter outcome of false teaching.

Or as Peter says in verse one, 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.

[ 40 : 26 ] That's the reality. The bitter end of it all is destruction. So let's keep to the teaching of the prophets and the apostles. To hold to the good news involves continually distinguishing it from false teaching.

But it's the good news which brings joy to the Christian heart, and it's sticking to the truth of the Bible that characterizes those who truly belong to the Lord Jesus.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. We thank you, our gracious God, for putting these words into the heart and mind of your servant, Peter.

Thank you so much for his clarity and determination and insistence about these things. And we do pray that you'll help us to have something of his own spirit, that you'll help us to be willing to stick with the Bible, to stick with the apostles and prophets, to love them, to love the good news and to live by it, and to encourage each other to be obedient, because we know that's what pleases you.

So have mercy upon us all, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.