

“Falling” - Part 1

2 Peter 2

by **Pastor Tim Dodson**
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2 Peter 2 *1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. 4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; 6 and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; 7 and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) — 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, 11 whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, 13 and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. 15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. 17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. 20 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*

Peter had opened his second letter on a positive note. He was calling on the believing church to walk in diligence and certainty in a faith that comes through a very real knowledge of God and His Word. He desired to see his “children in the faith” walk a whole relationship with Christ. One that is balanced in faith, knowledge, and self-discipline. He wanted us to be sure of where we walked and what we believed. Mankind has always been susceptible to both laziness and self-delusion. It is so easy to believe we are OK when we are not. The “three-times-denied-Christ” Peter understood this and wanted us to also.

Peter wanted us to continue to move forward. To not rest on past achievements and past successes. He seemed to inexplicably see that many believers and church fellowships are apt to live a purely negative ministry and never build anything. Those that spend their time constantly in attack mode, too busy tearing down to ever operate in the “construction team” of the greater church.

And now, in chapter two, he deals with the flip side. He warns those who are of the “happy camp” of Christianity, those so focused on the positive and the moving ahead that they never watch their backs, and are subsequently picked off by the enemy who is subtly creeping into the camp to rob the believer even of the rock of his foundation.

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”

It appears that Peter is seeking to balance the Christian perspective. Something that seems so absent in today's churches. We tend to be a generation of extremists, and thus our journey down “any street” America would take us through the doors of church after church, each swinging wildly from one extreme to the other. Some just want to feel good all of the time, some are angry and want to stay that way, some are lost in the semantics of King James only, others in orthodoxy, and others a mere liberal community club.

In his efforts to instruct the church in this balanced theology, he sets down the message of chapter one and now turns in chapter two to the very real issue of false teachers and the defending of the faith. Certainly these are needed aspects of our Christian lives, but again we must look at this issue in the light the whole letter and the whole message of the Word. Important issues, no doubt, but as always we are to approach such in the context of balance. He wants us to **build and defend**.

Most of us are familiar with the scriptural account of the “wheat and the tares” in Matthew 13. The heart of what we find in that story is that in the vast field of this world and our lives, there is both the “wheat” and the “weeds” and they are growing side by side each other. Essentially they are indistinguishable from one other. This fact is a reality outside of the church in the world at large, as well as within the church, amongst the faith community.

The premise behind that story, as well as the one before us here in 2 Peter, holds within it the tale of the ‘boiling frog.’ The idea in that saga is that if a frog is dropped into boiling water, it will immediately jump out of the pot. But if that frog is placed in cold water and the pot is placed over a flame and slowly heated, the gentle increase will lull the complacent frog through comfort and apathy, and he will eventually die, never sensing the danger...or at least sensing it too late. This is the heart of 2 Peter chapter 2.

The Evangelical Lausanne Movement defines a nominal Christian as "a person who has not responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord"...[he] "may be a practicing or non-practicing church member. He may give intellectual assent to basic Christian doctrines and claim to be a Christian. He may be faithful in attending liturgical rites and worship services, and be an active member involved in church affairs."

American Reformed theologian Douglas Wilson disagrees with the category of "nominal Christian" and argues that all who are baptized enter into a covenant with God, and are obliged to serve him; there is, therefore, "no such thing as a merely nominal Christian any more than we can find a man who is a nominal husband". There are, however, "wicked and faithless Christians."

We are regularly reminded that not all those who begin this “Christian race” will finish it. The reasons, the excuses, the attempts at justification are many...*will be* many. Peter, still attempting to get the reader through to the finish line in one piece, goes on in chapter 2 of his second and final letter, warning that the dangers to our faith come from outside the church, inside the church, and ultimately inside of ourselves. The cold hard fact is that this is a **war**. Such is a lesson that some of us will make it through, and others of us will not. For some, it will be a time of epiphany, and others the beginning of apostasy. But no one will escape it. No one will avoid it. It is a crossing we all will take part in.

We are living today in a time of pervasive and unprecedented onslaught against the church. A church that has withstood crucifixions, martyrdom, and countless persecutions. We have survived swords, bullets, and political prohibitions. Any full frontal attack has been beaten back and the church has endured. But now it seems, with our

attention on the front door, the enemy has slipped in the back and has operated quietly, incognito, to chip away at both our resolve and our dynamic. Today, through slow doctrinal compromise and methodic assimilation, the church has allowed the world a foothold *inside* the greater church. So much so that the very definitions of “Christian” has all but been lost and the narrative that encompasses the Christian experience has been so watered down that the term “disciple of Christ” is meaningless in the greater culture around us.

This method of his attack is essentially quite simple. It’s just the premise of the boiling frog. Slowly, ...steadily, ...quietly. Now we are coming to realize that entire concepts, word meanings, standards of morality, and institutional norms have been slowly manipulated in order to skew the view of truth, faith, power, authority, relationships, and human interaction. How does one clearly describe a situation when the words used mean different things to different people? Often even the *dictionary* definitions are debated and rejected! Along with such, no longer is there consensus as to what a Christian even is and what the practice of faith is to encompass. Issues that were clear and undeniable 50 years ago...*obvious ‘no-brainers,’* are today openly debated, argued, and finally rejected on grounds of the even more nebulous concepts of tolerance, love, acceptance, choice, lifestyle and social reform!

Today we protest the use of violence by burning cars and buildings and meeting out personal hurt, terror and upheaval. *'Tolerating you'* now means that I must *support* you and the decisions you make, and *'loving you'* means I let you do whatever suits your fancy no matter the danger to you or to those around you, without warning or intervention. Since the definitions have changed, and what is ‘normal’ is anything but, the church has little hope that it can endure unaffected and scriptural understanding and practice will remain static. And while we acknowledge that all of this is indeed an issue, rarely if ever do we realize it is an issue to us personally. Because subtly and clandestinely we ourselves over time become the standard...the righteous line. **We** decide what Christian means, what ministry looks like, and what faith is.

It is in this environment that the church today is trying to operate.

However, the fact that Peter is herein warning us about false teachers and false prophets tells us that on some level this issue is not a new one. Misinformation on various levels has been a tool of Satan from the very beginning, where he said to Eve *"has God really said...."* and *"you will not really die..."* Why would Satan need to design new attack plans when the 'old and true' methods are so successful? Unless we as Christians grow up and learn to seek the truth...the *facts*, we will corporately continue to lose ground.

*"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' —which you have not known— 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. **So you shall put away the evil from your midst.** ([Deut 13:1-5](#))*

"...the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' — when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. ([Deut 18:20-22](#))

Sooner or later all these false teachers get around to messing with even the person of Christ Himself. This is the most damnable heresy of all. The act of altering the message the very person of Christ, His deity, His single path, His grace, and the free gift of salvation. Such a list goes on and on.

The cults of the world can generally be recognized in this area. The question must be asked of any pastor and church: "who is Jesus Christ?" Within the answer lies the truth of their ministry. Some add to His words, some subtract, but all those who stand apart from God eventually rob Him of sovereignty and His absolute.

Usually these false teachers are better known for what they *deny* than what they *affirm*. They deny the inspiration of the Bible, they deny the sacrificial death of Christ and His resurrection, they deny salvation by faith alone, and even the reality of the coming judgment and hell.

The reality is that we can never let our guard down. We can never settle into spiritual lethargy and prideful exclusivity. **Arthur Pink** says "False prophets are to be found in the circles of the most orthodox, and they pretend to have a fervent love for souls, yet they fatally delude multitudes concerning the way of salvation. The pulpit, platform, and pamphlet hucksters have wantonly lowered the standard of divine holiness and so adulterated the Gospel in order to make it palatable to the carnal mind."

John Piper says "Chapter one (of 2 Peter) is mainly an encouragement to avail ourselves of God's power to lead lives of godliness and love. Chapter two is mainly a warning against the destruction that will befall those who don't avail themselves of this power. If chapter one is the carrot, chapter two is the crack of the whip over our heads. There are no commands, no admonitions, no imperatives in chapter two; just pure, terrifying description of what will happen to those who fall prey to the false teachers in the church."

If the Word of God...the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the answer, then such must be central to all that a church body does and all that we are. "Precept upon precept...line upon line" as Isaiah 28:10 tells us. Otherwise we eventually live out Isaiah 29:13... "Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the precepts of men..."

We must note that the Peter text says that these 'false teachers' will be 'amongst you.' Not 'out there,' but *in here*. We must never get the idea that it is safe here in the walls of a church, or safe within the greater church world. Pastor **Rob Salvato** in a message on this issue said the following: "...when it comes to the church today there are some who feed their flocks what amounts to spiritual ice cream, cake & candy – feel good sermons – whose aim is to make people feel happy and to help them feel good about themselves. Sermons where people are never CONVICTED ...never CONFRONTED or CHALLENGED – although that congregation may be happy, they are not healthy. Then there are other "spiritual leaders or movements" who feed their congregations and followers of what amounts to poison ...causing their congregations to never come to life but remaining dead in their sins."

Peter is not herein alone in his concern. Scripture is full of warnings on this matter. Paul joined the warnings saying "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock & from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." ([Acts 20:27-32](#))

Despite such repeated and overt warnings, we can so easily dismiss the danger as not a concern for me personally or not a concern for us as a body. I assure you, we are not safe...*you* are not safe! This issue has taken innumerable individuals out of the fight over the years. We all have lost friends, family members, brothers and sisters to this issue. All of them no doubt heard the warnings and believed themselves to be beyond such a ruse... too smart to be fooled...their spiritual prowess too keen to fall into such traps. But fall they did. To false teaching, to emotional doubts, to lies and innuendos. And the secondary fact remains: **few return**. Few that fall out will find their way back again. Because only through deep humility is such possible. Lies take us out and our pride *keeps* us out!