

## Guarding against False Prophets and Their Destructive Heresies

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### Guarding against False Prophets and Their Destructive Heresies

*But there were false prophets also among the people, as there shall be also among you false teachers, who shall bring in by the bye destructive heresies, and deny the master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction; and many shall follow their dissolute ways, through whom the way of the truth shall be blasphemed. And through covetousness, with well-turned words, will they make merchandise of you: for whom judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction slumbers not. (II Peter 2:1-3)*

*This, a second letter, beloved, I already write to you, in both which I stir up, in the way of putting you in remembrance, your pure mind, to be mindful of the words spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Lord and Savior by your apostles; knowing this first, that there shall come at the close of the days mockers with mocking, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for from the time the fathers fell asleep all things remain thus from the beginning of the creation. For this is hidden from them through their own willfulness, that heavens were of old, and an earth, having its subsistence out of water and in water, by the word of God, through which waters the then world, deluged with water, perished. But the present heavens and the earth by his word are laid up in store, kept for fire unto a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But let not this one thing be hidden from you, beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some account of delay, but is long-suffering towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will*

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*come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise, and the elements, burning with heat, shall be dissolved, and the earth and the works in it shall be burnt up. All these things then being to be dissolved, what ought ye to be in holy conversation and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements, burning with heat, shall melt? But, according to his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, as ye wait for these things, be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless; and account the long-suffering of our Lord to be salvation; ... Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things before, take care lest being led away along with the error of the wicked, ye should fall from your own steadfastness: but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (II Peter 3:1-15, 17-18)*

*Lord, we thank You, because You have loved us to the uttermost, not only because You so loved us that You bled on the cross and died for us, with Your body broken, but also because You love us and want us to come often to break the bread to remember You. You want us to do so until You come again. Lord, we are so willing that when we do this our hearts will be given to You again and that once again we put ourselves under Your feet, so that You may have absolute authority upon us. May Your kingdom come among us. May Your will prevail among us. Then we can hasten Your return. Lord, You have heard all the praises of Your saints. You have seen the hearts' desire of Your saints. We pray that You accept all these. For this reason, may You come back soon. Lord, we thank You for letting us to gather together as such. We hope that, when we gather again, we shall meet with You in heaven. Now we put this last hour in Your hands. Lord, what You want to speak to us, please speak. Your servants are listening. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

Peter knew that it was about time for him to leave the world. So he wrote this letter. In his own last hour, he was willing once again to do his duties to remind brothers and sister that today the grace of God comes to us with a purpose. God desires us to be a people who wait for and hasten the return of our Lord. Why did God give us all

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things which relate to life and godliness? Why did He give us the greatest and precious promises? The purpose is to help us to be a people who will wait for and hasten His return. Since we have received such mercy and such grace, if we are not ones to wait for and hasten His return, then we really put the grace of God as useless. We pray that God have mercy on us so that His word as recorded in II Peter would be carved in our hearts and that we can be especially diligent, particularly in the forming of the character of Christ in us. Those who truly wait for the Lord's return and those who truly hasten His return may not necessarily be the ones who have done a lot of work. No matter how many works we have done on earth, we cannot hasten His return. Those who can hasten His return are the people whom He considers to be properly adorned and ready. To be properly adorned and ready does not refer to something outward. It refers to the inner character that is ready. In other words, by His grace we can be transformed into His image. Only when we can truly be conformed to His image can we touch His heart and hasten His return.

Dear brothers and sisters, in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, we see one that looks like the Son of Man walking among the seven lampstands. What is He looking for when He walks among the seven lampstands? He speaks to every church, saying, 'I know your works. I know you have many works. I know you have much knowledge.' But these things are not what the Lord is looking for. He is looking for Himself among the seven churches. He has revealed Himself and entrusted Himself to the Church. Now He is coming to see if He can find Himself in the Church. If the Lord can find Himself in the Bride, it would be like when Adam saw Eve, he said, 'This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. And this is me.' That is to hasten the return of the Lord. So, how we hope that we, as individuals or as a group, be especially diligent on this matter.

We have already said that it is not our natural diligence that can make this happen. We should be diligent to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, to accept the promises of God and to be people who are willing to listen and obey. The Holy Spirit was sent to the earth for this very purpose. His work is to glorify Christ and to conform us to the image of the Son of God. Therefore, brothers and sisters, this is the very heavy burden in the heart of Peter.

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Today, we are in the end time. I Peter has pointed out that the end of all things is at hand. When we come to the end time, we can say that it is the darkest hour. In Isaiah 21:11-12, it says, 'He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire; return, come.' At night, watchmen are established. These watchmen stay awake. In the dark night, men all fall asleep. But some watchmen stay awake and watch if there is any motion in the dark night, to see if there is any work of the enemy. Otherwise, the enemy would start to work in darkness. Being a watchman, he is awake. Other people do not know what is going in the night. But the watchman knows what is going on at night.

So, somebody asks the watchman, 'Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?' Then the watchman says, 'The morning comes, and also the night.' Indeed, now is the darkest time. But in the darkest hour at night, the morning shall come soon. The answer of the watchman is positive, not negative. He does not mention the night first and say that everything is hopeless. He answers, 'The morning comes.' Because the morning is coming, the night becomes the darkest and the deepest. You will inquire. You shall ask what of the night. Otherwise you will be deceived by the enemy. The enemy may have already come, and yet you do not know. So, you should ask the watchman. Not only you should ask, you should also return. There are many reasons for you to return, to come back to God. You have to come. You have to come before God.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, when we are in the darkest hour in the night, do not despair and take a negative attitude. We need to see that the morning is coming. Our Lord is returning. The day of God is at hand. For this reason, the night is the darkest. We are not people who are asleep and confused. We know what is happening today. The condition of the day will lead us to see that the morning is at hand. Therefore, we have to ask and come to God to repent. We have to acknowledge that, unwittingly, in the dark night, darkness may have an effect on us, confusing us so that we do not find our way. But, if we ask, we shall be enlightened. We can then repent and return to the Lord.

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In the darkest period of the history of the Israelites, some of them were taken to Babylon in captivity. Some remained in Jerusalem. The condition of these who remained in Jerusalem was really miserable. Their spiritual condition was pitiful. If they did not repent, Jerusalem would be destroyed. All those who remained in Jerusalem would then be taken in captivity to Babylon. Then, among the people in exile, God raised up Ezekiel. God said to Ezekiel, 'Son of man, I have appointed thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, and thou shalt hear the word from my mouth, and give them warning from me.' (Ezekiel 3:17) God wanted Ezekiel to be a watchman. He should listen to the word of God and give warning to Israel. If God told Ezekiel that a certain man was evil and that he should die, and if the watchman warned that person, and that person repented, then that person would be saved. The watchman would also be innocent. But if God said that the person did evil and should die, and if the watchman did not do his duty to warn that person, that sinner would surely perish and the watchman would be condemned. If a righteous man fell and God wanted the watchman to go to warn him, and if the man repented, he would be saved. Then the watchman would be without fault. But if the watchman did not warn him, the righteous man who fell would be punished and the watchman would also be punished.

So Ezekiel acted according to the word of God and warned the Israelites that remained in Jerusalem. But very regrettably, they did not listen. They would rather listen to the false prophets. At that time, there were many false prophets, both in the place of their captivity and in Jerusalem. False prophets said, 'Peace! Peace! Not only Jerusalem will be kept safe, but those who have been taken in captivity will also return after two years.' But when things are fulfilled, it will become clear who are the false prophets and who are the true prophets. So the watchman has to do his duty to warn men.

But, brothers and sisters, a watchman has another duty. In Isaiah 62:6-7, it says, 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, Jerusalem; all the day and all the night they shall never hold their peace: ye that put Jehovah in remembrance, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' The duty of a watchman is not only to watch during the night to see if there is any activity of the enemy. There is another duty which is very

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positive: he has to call to God day and night. He shall not rest, and he shall not let God rest. He shall bother God to the extent that God cannot but do His work quick. Although the condition of Jerusalem was so miserable, the heart of God was for Jerusalem to be praised. The condition of Jerusalem as compared with the will of God was like earth as relative to heaven. But these watchmen stood on the side of God. In such a hopeless condition, they stood on the side of God and said, 'God, stand up and do Your work, so that Jerusalem can be praised.' Originally, Jerusalem was shameful because it had shamed God, but God was to rise up and work so that Jerusalem could be praised. When men saw Jerusalem, they would praise God. This is also a duty of the watchman.

Brothers and sisters, it seems that God has set up Peter as a watchman. So when he wrote this letter, he did the double duty of a watchman. He reminds us what great grace God has given us and how glorious the will of God has on us; so we should not despise ourselves. We have to rise up, be diligent and pursue. We have to yield ourselves in the hands of God so that the Holy Spirit can work on us until we are conformed to the image of the Son of God and until the Church becomes a glorious Church suitable for the glorious Lord. This is one aspect of what Peter reminds us of in I Peter. But on the other hand, because the night was deep, many children of God did not know what of the night and fell asleep. Enemies have done many things during the night, but the people do not know. So, Peter, being a watchman, writes to warn, saying, 'You have to be careful, to be aware of the positive will of God. You have to guard against the activities of the enemy in darkness.' So in II Peter, there is much warning about things to guard against. But these words are not totally negative, for the purpose is that we should be clear so that we may not slip.

So this morning we have to mention some things that we should guard against, for we are in the darkest hour of the night. II Peter tells us there are two things we should guard against. On one hand, it is within the Church, some things that the enemy does within the Church. On the other hand, it is what the enemy does to the Church from outside. II Peter Chapter 2 tells us how the enemy in darkness enters into the Church to do something to confuse brothers and sisters. Chapter 3 tells us how the enemy, from the standpoint of

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the world, attacks the Church, so as to prevent us from becoming people who will wait for and hasten the coming of the Lord. The enemy is not willing to see the coming of the kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters, we are told in Chapter 2 that there were false prophets among the people in the past history of Israel. At the time when the spiritual condition of the Israelites was at its weakest, it was the moment when God sent prophets among them. God loved His people; He was not willing to see His people fall like that. So He sent many prophets among the Israelites to advise them, to reproach them and to restore them. But these moments also saw many false prophets. True prophets were those who were called by God. The word of God came upon them. They were the holy men, moved by the Holy Spirit to speak the word of God. The purpose was for God's people to return to the will of God. False prophets were those who were not sent by God; they spoke by their own will to deceive people.

This is what we are told in Jeremiah Chapter 14. Jeremiah was one of the prophets raised up in the last days of Judah. The word of God came upon him. He was of one heart with the Lord, and he walked with Him. When he saw the condition of Israel, he wept. His tears were the tears of God. In tears, he called God's people to return. But God's people did not listen; their ears itched. They wanted to hear only what they wanted to hear. So the enemy raised up many false prophets who would say whatever the people wanted to hear. Therefore, false prophets were always welcomed. The real prophets then were abused. Jeremiah was much persecuted because of this. This was the condition of God's people in the past. At the darkest time, the activity of the enemy was most fierce. So, there were many false prophets.

How about now? Peter said, 'There shall be also among you false teachers.' Of course, the reference to 'the future' by Peter would mean 'the present' to us. Now among us there will be false teachers. God did not speak to them. II Peter 2:1 tells us that these teachers 'shall bring in by the bye destructive heresies.' These false teachers, by their own will, stealthily came among God's people with their destructive heresies.

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The word 'heresy' may be very vague in our feeling. We do not even know what 'heresy' refers to. In the original language, the word 'heresy' in English is actually just a transliteration of the Greek. By itself, it has no meaning. If you want to find out its meaning, you have to go to the original Greek. Then, what does it mean in the original Greek? It means 'one school of opinions'. A group of people who have their own opinions create a school of opinions. They want to replace their obedience to the truth with their school of opinions, thus resulting in divisions. The result is sects. Galatians Chapter 5 tells about many carnal things, one of which is heresy. And heresy is nothing but leads to sects. So here you see: when men, by using their own opinions, establish a school of thoughts to replace the truth of God, the result for sure is division and the creation of sects. This is the original meaning of the word 'heresy'.

What does it mean by heresy? Heresy opposes truth. The truth comes from God. Heresy comes from man. The truth is Christ; the Lord is the truth. What does heresy mean? Heresy is man. It says here in II Peter that they deny the master that bought them. The word 'master' here is a very strong, harsh word in the original language. The word, when translated into English, is not pleasing to us. If directly translated, it is not elegant, because the association in our mind is horrible. The word 'master' in the original language, when translated into English, means 'DESPOT'. In Chinese, it means 'horrible emperor'. This word, if translated in a nicer way, means 'MAJESTY'; it means he is a great majesty, having absolute power. He does not have to answer to anyone. But everyone has to submit to him absolutely. Not only should everybody have to submit to him absolutely, but also absolutely obey him. This is majesty. And this Majesty purchased us with His own blood. So, to Him, we are the slaves of His love, no longer having any rights of our own or any positions. To Him, we only have absolute obedience to do His will. We belong to Him. He does not have to explain to us. When He has a command for us, we only obey. We have to acknowledge Him in this way.

What is heresy? Heresy brings in a different attitude towards this Majesty. To put it lightly, they do not respect this Majesty. They do not have a single-minded, absolute obedience to this Majesty.



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Outside of Him, they have other kings. They have given their hearts, their love and their loyalty to something else. Severely speaking, they deny this Majesty who has purchased them with His own blood. In a word, heresy is not taking the Lord as the center.

The will of God is that His Son should be the center of the universe. Christ, the Son of God, is the head of the Church and the center of the universe. This is the truth. All other doctrines emanate from this center. All have to be summed up in the center. It is like a wheel. At the hub is the center. That center is Christ. He is the truth. He is the sum of the truth. All truth and all doctrines come from Him, and all are summed up in Him. In the Bible, all kinds of doctrines are like the spokes of a wheel emanating from the center and reaching the rim. What is that rim? Broadly speaking, it is the universe. More restrictively speaking, it is the Church. All the doctrines and all the truth in the Bible center on Christ, and from Christ, they emanate out, reaching into the Church. The Church is one that receives and contains all the truth of God; not only one, but all the truth of God. When the Church is seeking the truth, she will meet Christ. If these doctrines do not give Christ to us, then they are not the truth. What is heresy? Heresy is not holding Christ as the center. It takes one doctrine and pulls it longer beyond what God has defined.

Why does heresy deceive people easily? If it is totally lies, people can easily detect it. But if the lies are mixed with the truth, covering the truth, this can deceive people the most. This is something seemingly right but actually wrong. Then this is heresy. Anytime a doctrine is extended beyond what God has defined, it becomes heresy. Or, if a doctrine is shrunk and made shorter than what God has defined, then it also becomes heresy. Look at the spokes of a wheel; they all emanate out from the hub to the rim. None of the spokes can extend outside of the rim; otherwise, the ride would be very uncomfortable. Actually, the rider might even fall off from the cart. If the spokes are too short, not reaching the rim, then the wheels would collapse, throwing the rider out. So, brothers and sisters, when you see someone, not publicly but stealthily, add some of his own ideas onto the truth, even though it sounds reasonable and seems like coming out of the Bible, then you have to take caution, because the result is that we would be led outside of our Lord. It would take away

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the center; it would not bring Christ to us. If we accept these things, what we have is man, not the Lord. These are the heresies that destroy us.

But, amazingly, Peter said that there would be false teachers in the future, bringing in destructive heresies and even denying the master that bought them. Yet, in II Peter, Peter did not explicitly tell us what these heresies are. What are the heresies that he was talking about? He did not tell us. He just said that heresies would come and false teachers would come. But who are these people? What is their end? How men are going to be influenced by them? But Peter did not say what these heresies are. Why? Because the enemy is too deceitful. From generation to generation, the enemy has used different heresies to deceive people.

For example, the Corinthian church. In I Corinthians Chapter 15, we see there was this doctrine stating that there is no resurrection. Since there is no resurrection, then people can just eat and drink, and the next day, they die. Since there is no resurrection, then we can just eat and drink and be merry, because when we die, everything will be gone. So this heresy made the believers at Corinth indulge in their own desires. This is the heresy that Satan used in the church of Corinth.

When you come to the Galatians, you see that Satan used another heresy to trap them. These people had accepted the gospel, being the early fruits of Paul. But heresy entered, bringing in legalism to mix up with grace and teaching them that it was not sufficient to believe in the Lord Jesus but that they had to observe the law and receive circumcision. Paul pointed out that this was not the gospel, because people who so believed did not depend on the Lord but on themselves.

In the church of Colosse, the believers really pursued the Lord; they wanted to be perfect and they wanted to know. Then the enemy introduced the 'Colossian heresy' to them, bringing in philosophy and mystic things, so-called gnosticism, i.e. things pertaining to knowledge. They also added something that has to do with rituals, claiming that with all these people can be made complete.

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Thus, people failed to hold fast to the Head.

Now, when we read on and come to the Book of Revelation, we see the doctrine of Nicolaitanes. These brothers and sisters loved the Lord and were all kingly priests. They served the Lord in one accord. But the enemy entered among them, saying, 'Yes, you are priests and you need to serve the Lord. But you are lay people and are not worthy. There have to be clergy, specially trained so that they can do a good job.' This becomes the doctrine of Nicolaitanes, starting the difference between clergy and laity. Then came also the teaching of the prophet Balaam. His teaching was to make the Israelites mix with the other people. God intended them to be a separated people. But Balaam taught them they could mix with the others. Balaam coveted money, so he had gone this way. Not only this, but there came the prophetess Jezebel who was of course a false prophet, leading God's people into idolatry. As a result, they did not worship God Jehovah but Baal. 'Baal' means 'another Lord'.

So we see the enemies at different time and in different places use different ways and different heresies to deceive people. The deceived will then turn away from Christ and fail to be the ones that wait for and hasten the return of the Lord.

Then, what are the special characteristics that Peter shows us about these false prophets and false teachers? He points out that these false teachers do not acknowledge the Lord who bought them. In other words, they do not absolutely submit themselves to the Lord. If they can absolutely submit themselves at the feet of their Lord, they would not become false teachers, because they would not have their own teaching. They would have only the teaching of the Lord. When they bring in their own teaching, they try to mix their own opinion with the truth.

So, Peter here tells us that heresy is closely related to evil doing. Wherever there is heresy, for sure there is also evil works. There is a significant relationship between what we believe and what we do. Therefore, on these false teachers, we find evil works.

Thirdly, on these false teachers one other thing that stands

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out is covetousness. They covet money, high positions or authority. They covet these things for themselves, not exalting Christ. They always use clever words to promise people freedom, but actually they do not have freedom themselves.

The Bible tells us the judgement of God shall be on these people. God has already shown us many times in the past. When the angels did not keep their position in the past, God put them in Tartarus, the bottomless pit. When men in the world sinned, God used the flood to judge them. When the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were in sin and immorality, God reduced them to ashes with fire. So you see this is a very serious matter that we have to guard against.

We have to protect ourselves against all sorts of heresies, especially today. Heresies fill the Church. Some say today is a new age. Some would say that it is dominion theology. Some would proclaim prosperity gospel. Some would exalt one particular doctrine higher than what God would allow. These would all take us outside of Christ. We have to guard against these. We have to return to the word of God. The Bible tells us to build ourselves up on our most holy faith and keep ourselves in the love of God (Ref. Jude 20 & 21). We have to take hold of Christ as our center and do not let the enemy deceive us. All these would take place within the Church.

But the enemy also works against God from outside of the Church. At the end time, there are mockers. They say from the beginning of heavens and earth, all things have remained the same; where is the promise of His coming? Then they conclude that there is no such thing. They have forgotten that in the ancient past, these heavens and earth were once deluged with flood and perished. (It may refer to the time when God judged the universe after the archangel sinned.) The present heavens and the earth can remain because of the command of God. God says that one day He shall burn up these heavens and the earth with fire. All elements shall be burnt up.

Brothers and sisters, it is not that the Lord tarries. It is because of His long-suffering. He is willing that all are saved and no one should perish. So we have to account the long-suffering of our Lord to be our salvation. When the Lord comes and when the earth

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and the works in it shall be burnt up and all the elements shall be dissolved with heat, how much we ought to be holy and godly. We have to wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God. When the Lord comes again, to the unbelievers, it will be their end. But for us, that is the day when we shall be glorified.

So, Peter tells us that since we know these things, we shall not retreat but press on further. We shall press on towards the goal. Our goal is the Lord; we have to gain our Christ, as our Lord has gained us. (You know that the Lord has gained us in His eternal will, because whomever He has foreknown, He has destined them to be conformed to the image of His Son. Whom He has known, He has also called. Whom He has called, He has also justified. And whom He has justified, He has also glorified. This means that the Lord has gained us. Now the Lord wants us to gain the same by which the Lord has gained us.) Whatever the Lord has gained by possessing us, we ought to gain also for ourselves. Then we can satisfy the heart of the Lord. Then we can also be satisfied. May the Lord have mercy on us, so that we, as a people, may forget the things behind and press on towards the goal. May we shed away all the heresies that deceive us. By faith and through long-suffering, may we inherit the inheritance from heavens. Let us bow down and pray:

*Lord, we believe that You gather us together this time because of Your good will. We pray that, before we depart, Your will be accomplished. Make us a people who wait for and hasten Your return. Keep us until that day so that we may be found in You in peace. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.*