



Escaping Heresies

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This morning we thinking about *destructive heresies*. Now I know heresy sounds like medieval doom and gloom, but there are heresies today, ideas and philosophies that steer us away from true reality of life with God. If you were being steered away from true reality, wouldn't you want to know? Wouldn't you want someone to tell you about the danger? *Warnings* can be awfully good. When I sit down with a couple in premarital counseling to *warn* them of conflict they typically say, "Oh, we don't need that. We never fight." To which I want to say, *exactly*. You're naïve. Conflict is coming, and if you heed my *warnings* you'll escape a lot of trouble. *Warnings* about false teachers appear frequently in the Bible. Do you heed them? Do you know what heresies you're prone to believe? Or do you naively read over them? Peter insists *detect false teachers, escape destructive heresies, and fear God*.

Detecting False Teachers

At the end of chapter one, Peter tells us the Scriptures are written by men who spoke from God, but then in 2:1 says *but* there are also those who speak *not* from God. Just as there were false prophets in Israel, so also there *will be false teachers* among us. A false teacher is someone who *seeks to manipulate your beliefs away from what's true to get you to go along with what's not*. Gillette, the best a man can get. America runs on Dunkin'. L'Oréal: "Because You're Worth It" We laugh but they appeal to elitism, the best, populism, America, and vanity, patently avoiding what's true or bending the truth. Peter says there will be manipulators who will seek to destroy you. Shifting from the present to future tense he *emphasizes that false teachers reappear with every generation, within every culture, seeking to undo every church*. Who are they? In Peter's context they are people who *deny divine judgment and reject the return of Christ*. And as we'll see a little later, these are quite alive today. Now, it's important to recognize there are false teachers **inside** and outside the church. Those inside the church use the language of the Bible, twisting and distorting it as Peter says they do with Paul as the rest of the scriptures (3:16). Cults like JW, Christian Science may come to mind. But there are also false teachers **outside** the church. They typically use different language but are an equal, if not more insidious threat. Outside teaching is easily and unknowingly smuggled inside the church. Both false teachers are hard to **detect**. They don't wear T-shirts with the word HERETIC emblazoned on the front. St. Paul: I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert" (Ac 20:29-31). We have to be alert because it's not obvious. Jesus describes the "wolves as having sheep's clothing" (Matt 7:15). They look like sheep, like you and me, *but underneath they are ravenous, driven by ulterior motives, willing to slaughter the church in their thirst for influence*. **How do you spot them?** First, know your Bible. Know the truth well. If we know the original, the counterfeit is easier to spot. Second, know the Spirit who speaks the truth. This means your knowledge needs to be active, relationally engaged with the Spirit who convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Intellectual knowledge isn't enough. There are many intelligent people who have been duped by untrue philosophies. Your knowledge has to be paired with bold, spiritual conviction, conviction that is loving enough to challenge false teachers and protect the flock. Third, wolves in sheep's clothing will ask you to choose

them over the others. They will urge you to decide between friendship to them and faithfulness to the church. They will even insist you follow them. **What are the signs?** Secret meetings, questioning other leaders, gossip, and alliance building. They try to build a following and consolidate it. This can happen in a Bible study, a City Group, a clique of friends. It's up to all of us, church, to know our Bibles, walk closely with God, and have courage to exhort one another whenever manipulators arise.

Identifying Destructive Heresies

You say, That sounds fine and good but what kind of things should I be looking for? Peter calls them “[destructive heresies](#)” (2:1). What are those? Well, this brings us back to the claim of the false teachers who *denied divine judgment and rejected the return of Christ*. Now, at first blush this heresy may seem irrelevant. But if you take a closer look, you'll see it's incredibly pertinent. Notice the two heresies are related. *If Christ does not return, there will be no divine judgment, and if there is no divine judgment, then there's no moral imperative. Morals become a matter of private choice*. Live and let live. No Jesus, no judgment, no judgment, no moral accountability. If the cats away the mice will play. Which is precisely what Peter goes on to say, “[many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed](#)” (2). Or verse 10, “[those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority](#).” Suspend the return of Christ and you ship off the moral standard. Authority affects morality. Remove the authority, reduce the morality. When I was in college, I slowly removed God's authority, his Word, from my life. Reading the Bible and attending church less frequently, I reshaped my morality. I became sexually promiscuous, sleeping around because I wanted to play by own rules. I fashioned my own judgments to fit my moral choices. Now, if you had asked me in the midst of all that if Christ was going to return someday, I would have said absolutely. Nothing was wrong with my theology; it was my authority that was faulty. This is what manipulators do, they draw you to an authority other than God. What was the real authority ruling my life? Me, not Christ. Heresy leads to sensuality. **Sensuality** is repeated 3 times (2,7,18) in the chapter. Despite the sexual overtones, it actually means is lawlessness (8) and can take all kinds of forms from greed to selfishness. Whatever form it takes, sensuality snaps natural boundaries, breaks ethical barriers, and is accountable to no-one. Without a law to obey, it is beholden to no one but Self. And here's where the old heresy comes quickly up to date. We too are tempted to relocate authority, from God to Self. Like the false teachers and those that followed them, we create convenient truths for comfortable moralities. In our CGs, we are tempted to **neglect justice/mercy/evangelism**, insisting that we need more time together before serving others, which is actually just a way of saying me first. Lawless greed causes us to neglect others. Lawlessness also shows up in the way we **judge the public but not the private**. We insist on accountability and transparency for public figures but not for our private lives. The government, politicians, CEOs, Hollywood actors, and sports personalities are accountable to us, but we are accountable to no one. We'll judge Anthony Weiner, Clinton, Trump, Kardashian without a moment's self-reflection. In the private world of Self there are no clear rules; there is no real definition. The church is pushed into the realm of the public, while we remain hidden in private. As a result, the church can become something we judge but cannot judge us. We expect transparency from leaders while harboring personal sins. Financial giving, sexual activity, martial issues, parenting methods become taboo. Why? Because the real belief is in the private Self. The result is stinginess,

sexual sin, marital chaos, anxious parents who cannot say no to their children. Lawlessness will eventually lead you to remove yourself from church altogether, because the authority of the Self can have no competition, not from the community, leaders, or Christ himself. **The real, controlling belief is the Self.** Peter says this [Lawlessness blasphemes the way of truth](#). [Blasphemy doesn't mean you don't agree with the truth; it means you defame the truth by the way you live.](#) When I confessed my promiscuity to my father, he said to me, *Jonathan when are you going to keep the integrity of God's Word?* That's a question we all need to answer every day Are we going to keep the integrity of God's word—be true to God—or be true to the subjective, manipulative Self? Now in case you think I'm being too hard, consider the fact that Peter calls the gospel "**the commandment of the Lord and Savior**" (3:2). If you were to describe our church to someone, you wouldn't say it's a "commandment of the Savior church," but it is. You might call it a gospel-centered church or a gospel-preaching church but we are also a gospel obeying church, a church that holds the commands of the Savior in high regard. [The gospel is something to be obeyed, not merely something to be believed.](#) Because Jesus is not a proposition; Jesus is a person. Now, some of us prefer the flipside of the heresy, not the lawless gospel but the **graceless Gospel**. We might look down on those who lack our fire, our commitment, our piety. You find yourself shaking your head saying, Can you believe so and so? Instead of being brokenhearted for those entangled in sensuality, you turn aside at them. They rarely enter your prayers. The graceless person looks to prove what they know instead of minister to who they know. They lack compassion for the struggling, the sinning, broken. They peer down from the tower of self-importance unwilling to throw a rope, lest others ascend to their heights. Destructive heresies? Absolutely, we can be destroyed from the inside-out (graceless gospel) or the outside-in (lawless gospel). Either way, Peter says be alert!

Fearing God

We've looked at detecting false teachers, identifying destructive heresies, now finally—the motivation to do it—fearing God. In verses 4-10, Peter challenges the false claim there is no judgment by showing how God has already judged with three examples. These case studies in judgment progress in time and scope. First, **angels** (and we'll get into the details of all this when we get to Jude). [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](#)" (4). He essentially says, if angels don't escape judgment then do you really think you will? Next, the ancient world, **earth**. God judged the earth and wiped it out with a flood. Next, the **cities** of Sodom and Gomorrah, ["he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly"](#) (6). From the greater to the lesser, Peter shows how God has already judged each of these, making the case that he will judge again. And the reason for judging each one was the same reason judgement is promised to the false teachers—*manipulated authority and morality*. The angels rebelled against God's order and purportedly slept with humans. The people of the flood were ungodly and did what was right in their own eyes (Gen 6:5). The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah pursued sensual living and lawless deeds. Each time they took authority and morality into their own hands, and each time God dealt out judgment. [It would be unwise to bet against God with this track record.](#) We all do well to tremble before God, to **fear** him as Noah did, ["By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household"](#) (Heb 11). Reverent fear. Do you fear the God who

grants life and takes it? If you're not afraid, be afraid. Don't blow off God's warnings and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble. Think twice before clicking on a porn link, gossiping about a friend, being disrespectful to your spouse, hopping in bed with someone, or running down the church. There is no public/private divide. Jesus is Lord of all and will judge all. Have fear *but also have **faith*** because this is also the God who saves. In each of the case studies, we also see the rescuing love of God shining through. Among the angels, there are those he preserved, among the ancient world there was a household he saved, and in the cities, a man rescued. Though we are all deserving of judgment, Jesus saves. Jesus is the better Noah, not only a preacher of righteousness but the possessor of righteousness. Put your faith in him, not in your law-keeping, and he will carry you through to a better world. Peter concludes "[the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment](#)" (9). Are you not afraid? Be afraid. If you're afraid, have faith, the Savior is coming. If God is for us who can be against us?