

Sound Doctrine-How Can I Be Sure

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our prophet, teacher, Savior, and Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

As I said last week, this second letter of Peter was most likely written by a second-generation Christian who was also a follower of the Apostle Peter. It was written in the literary form of a final testament. The author used this literary form in order to capitalize on the authority of Peter's word in the early Church.



(SLIDE) By using these supposed words of Saint Peter, the author gained credibility with his audience in the hope of encouraging them to remember the gift of faith given to them by the grace of God. He also wanted to issue a warning to the Church regarding false prophets and teachers. If that's your goal, what better name to invoke as the author of your letter than the name given to the first human to recognize Jesus as the Son of the Living God and the long-awaited Messiah. That man was of course Simon, called Peter by Jesus. The author retells the story about the time when Jesus took Peter, James, and John, his three closest disciples, up on the mountain top where Jesus met with Moses and Elijah.




(SLIDE) During their visit they talked about Jesus' exit strategy from this life and his resurrection to eternal life. During their conversation, Jesus was transfigured right before their eyes. His face glowed like the sun and his clothing was brighter than any bleach could wash them. God's voice boomed from Heaven telling the three hapless disciples, Jesus was God's beloved and they

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should listen to him. Our text for today begins with Peter reminding the Church that this isn't a myth, nor some idle tale. This was a real event that really happened, and Peter can attest to the truth because he was there and saw Jesus Transfigured with his own two eyes and heard God's voice with his own two ears.


Having established his credibility and authority, the author warns his readers and all of us who still read his letter today, about all the false prophets and false doctrines that will surely come along after Peter is dead and buried. Warning of false prophets and teachers is nothing new, even during the time of Jesus. In his first major Sermon we call the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus famously warned,

(SLIDE)  "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits."

(Matthew 7:15-16) If Jesus had to warn his followers and then Peter also felt the need to remind the Church regarding false prophets, how much more do we need that warning today. I mean in today's environment, we can't even trust the nightly news to be true, let alone the Good News that happened 2000 years ago. I wonder if there might be some way for us to tell the difference between the truth and false prophecy. Right here in our reading for today Peter tells us no prophecy originates from humans, but rather it comes from God through God's Holy Spirit. That's my first test for determining the truth or fiction of a modern-day prophet. My second test is sort of like the first, but with a subtle difference. We can't always know if a



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teaching comes from God, but we can test it to see if it's grounded in the Word of God found in the Bible. In other words, does this doctrine carry the authority of scripture and is it Biblically based. If not, then run away, ignore, or rebuke the person bringing that teaching or prophecy because sound doctrine originates with God, is recorded in the Word of God, is consistent with the whole revelation of God, and leads to good fruits of both spiritual health and godly living. On the contrary, false doctrine originates with humans or demons, is foreign to or different from the Word of God in the Bible, is inconsistent with the whole revelation of God, and leads to bad fruit like spiritual weakness and ungodly living. It must pass all of the tests in order to be sound. If it fails one, it fails all of them.

Can I give you an example you might be asking yourself... Well, I can think of several. The first one that comes to mind is *the heretic*. A heretic is someone who teaches what blatantly contradicts an essential teaching of the Christian faith. In the early Church a man named Arius taught that Jesus was either human or divine, but not both at the same time. This was determined to be false and against what Jesus himself said and taught during his time here on earth. Arius was exposed to be a heretic. Another obvious example is *the Charlatan*. This is the person who uses the office of priest or pastor for personal gain. During the early 16th century, Pope Leo X commissioned Johann Tetzel (SLIDE)  to peddle indulgences offering the forgiveness of sins for a price. The money went from

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Germany to Rome and was partly used for the construction of St Peter's Basilica.

(SLIDE)  I say partly because Pope Leo used the vast amount of cash raised through the sale of indulgences to fund his extravagant lifestyle. Lest you think the Charlatan was only confined to the Middle Ages, here's a couple of names you might recognize from today's Christian scene: (SLIDE) 

Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar and others.

Besides the *heretic and charlatan*, other false teachers include *the prophet, the abuser, the divider, the tickler, and the speculator*. Each of these false teachers and prophets distort the message of the Gospel in some way.




(SLIDE) *The prophet* claims to speak for God, but the teaching is not based in scripture. You can validate a teaching by testing it against the whole of God's Word. The Word of God is consistent from age to age. *The abuser* uses the position of Pastor or Priest to gain power and to abuse their parishioners through manipulation in order to gain a sexual pleasure. *The divider* tries to use God's Word to separate and destroy the Church which is the Body of Christ. Remember, on the night Jesus was betrayed he prayed for the unity of all his followers.

Anyone who uses God's Word to divide the Body of Christ must be considered a false prophet and rejected. *The tickler* cares nothing for the Word of God, but only what people think of them. They manipulate and distort the Word of God so that it's pleasing to their followers. In the Bible this is referred to as tickling the ears of


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the believers. It's giving them only what they want to hear, not what God wants them to know. Finally, *the speculator*... The speculator loves novelty, originality, or speculation. Teaching focused on speculation displaces the sure and steady doctrine of Scripture. The Speculator tosses aside the bulk of the Bible's content and the weight of the Bible's emphasis while obsessing about trivial or novel matters. Old, time proven truths are easily discarded in favor of the newest fad or trend.

If you think about these types of false prophets and teachers even for a moment, you'll be able to pick out the fake versus the true doctrines without breaking a sweat. The pastor who needs a private jet to do God's work is probably a fake prophet. The pastor who is involved in a sex scandal is most certainly an abuser, I don't care how much he or she cries on TV... (SLIDE)  I'm embarrassed to admit this, but the biggest threat to sound doctrine doesn't come from pimps, politicians, or power brokers on Wall Street. The biggest threat to Christianity comes from within, from it's Pastors. I will tell you right here from this pulpit, I'm not immune from any of these false teaching temptations. Many times I've wanted to throw out the appointed scripture because it was too hard to preach. I don't mean the language was too difficult to understand. I'm talking about all those times when I wanted to tickle your ears and give you just what you wanted to hear instead of preaching strictly the Gospel message. Our Good News

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for today is the Word of God will stand, even through my own poor preaching.

(SLIDE)  The Gospel, Good News of Jesus Christ does still stand and it stands in stark contrast to the World News tonight or Fox News Alerts... The Gospel has withstood every false doctrine so far thrown at it by all the purveyors of perversity for over 7000 years if you include all the false prophets from the Old Testament times as well. You are all a big part of ensuring the Good News is carried into the next generation free from false claims and bad doctrines. Martin Luther preached on this when he said God allows these false prophets in order for God's people to test them and prove the truth of the ones who are speaking the true Gospel. That's right, one of your jobs is to test the voracity of my preaching. You are the final arbiter keeping me on the true path of the Gospel.

We can no longer simply accept what our religious leaders feed us without filtering it through the test of these false categories I've listed. If I fall into one of these categories of heretic, charlatan, prophet, abuser, divider, tickler, or speculator, or if you watch a televangelist or listen to a podcaster preacher be aware of their words and the doctrines they are preaching. You are equipped with everything you need to test their preaching and teaching. Don't be afraid they might know more than you. Study, pray, ask others, and then address the issue directly with me or whoever is advocating a Word that isn't from God.

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May God give you the knowledge to discern the truth from all the fake Good News that's out there. May God's Word convict you of your sin, but also give you peace in knowing God forgives you infinitely and loves you unconditionally. May you never be led astray by my or anyone else's false teaching. Amen.