

Be Alert
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2 Peter 2:1-3,17-19; Jude 17-23

Opening: What do we mean by “quack medicine?” Why are people susceptible to quack doctors or their “remedies?” How can you avoid being taken in by quacks?

Quack doctors peddling useless or harmful treatments and remedies prey on the desperation of those who need healing or relief from suffering. They claim false authority; they prescribe destructive remedies; they resist correction; they exploit the vulnerable; they are prideful and self-promoting; it’s all about the money.

Quack doctors have a lot in common with heretical false teachers who distort God’s word. Quack doctor can cause physical harm while claiming to provide healing; false teachers are worse because they can cause eternal harm with their destructive heresies.

The point: Just as we should be alert to avoid quack medicine, we must be even more alert to spot and run from false teachers who masquerade as messengers of God. In today’s text Peter and Jude warned the early church about false teaching. In our application today we will look at how we can avoid this kind of deception.

The concept of false teaching and false prophets is mentioned repeatedly throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus said, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matt. 7:15-16) He also said, “...false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders...to lead astray...even the elect.”ⁱ

Based on scripture, who was the first false teacher? (2 Cor. 11:3) If someone is intentionally teaching false doctrine they are an “agent” of the first false teacher! Paul went on to say in **2 Corinthians 11:13–14 (ESV)** — **13** For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Let’s look at what today’s text tells us and how we can apply it today.

2 Peter 2:1–3 (ESV) — 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. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.
2 Peter 2:18–19 (ESV) — 18 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. 19

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

- Let's look at how Peter described these false prophets in verses 1-3 & 17-19:
 - Secretly – They don't blatantly deny Christ and the truth of scripture. These "con artists" mix truth with lies like mixing poison with real medicine.
 - Destructive heresies – Serious error that can cause eternal destruction.
 - Denying the Master – Denying or distorting Who Jesus really is.
 - Many will follow their shameful (sensual) teaching – *Swindoll: "If you want to build a big following...develop a religion that removes the restraints on people's sinful behavior..."*
 - The "way of truth" will be blasphemed – False teachers bring shame and ridicule on Christianity when their hypocrisy is exposed.
 - In their greed they will exploit the innocent – It's all about the cash!
 - They brag about themselves – Bragging doesn't make them a false teacher, but narcissism makes me suspicious of their motives.
 - They entice by sensual passions – That word "entice" means baiting the hook by minimizing sin. Usually, false teachers indulge in immoral behavior, especially sexual sin, and encourage others to do the same.
 - They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you.ⁱⁱ We are ALL sinners and no preacher is perfect; but a false teacher's "fruit" will show.
 - God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - They are doomed to blackest darkness.
- So, how can we spot a false teacher? Let's look at several examples.
- What do they say about Jesus?
 - *"Any teaching that redefines the person of Jesus Christ. Doctrine that denies the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, His sinless nature, His actual death, or His physical resurrection is false doctrine."*^{iv}
 - Jesus is not just a "good teacher" and He has no equal (new prophets).
 - Do they deny or even cast doubt on his resurrection?
- What do they say about the Trinity?
 - They may say the word "trinity" is not in scripture.
 - Jesus said, "Go and make disciples...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." Matthew 28:19 (ESV)
- What do they say about God's word?
 - Do they say scripture is from God (inspired by Him), the ultimate authority for living the Christian life and without error?
 - 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."
 - Do they pick and choose verses or teach the "whole counsel" of scripture?
 - Beware a teacher that says any part of God's word is irrelevant for today.
- What do they say about salvation?
 - Do they teach many ways to God? Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

- Do they teach salvation can be earned? Salvation is “by grace...through faith [in Christ]...not...works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph.2:8-9)
- What do they say about hell? Do they say anything about it?
 - Jesus mentioned, taught about or alluded to hell over 70 times. He spoke about hell more than any other figure in the Bible.
 - When asked which doctrine he struggled with most R.C. Sproul replied: “Hell.”^v Hell is unpleasant but denying it is editing Jesus’ teaching.
- What do they say about obedience to the commands of scripture?
 - License – They teach that grace gives us a pass on obedience.
 - Jude (Jesus’ other half-brother) warned in Jude 4 about ungodly people who “secretly slipped in”...to “pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”
 - Legalism - The belief we are accepted by God based on their own law-keeping or moral performance, rather than solely by grace through faith in Christ. Legalism can also manifest as adding man-made rules to God's law. See Jesus’ words in Luke 11:37-54 and Paul’s in Colossians 2:20-23.
 - Teaching license makes you popular – Do whatever you want!
 - Legalism makes you a manipulator – Do as I do, or you are wrong.
 - Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands.” (John 14:15)
- What do they say about faith?
 - “Prosperity gospel” - False teachers who distort the Bible’s teaching about faith to manipulate people for their own purposes of power and profit.
 - Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)
 - “Word of faith” – If you have enough faith (and give me your cash) you WILL be healed (on demand.)
 - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 tells us the Apostle Paul prayed three times for his “thorn in the flesh” to be removed, but God replied, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul was not healed despite his faith and prayers, showing that God does not always choose to heal, even for the most faithful believers.
 - If you have enough faith, you will have a trouble-free life – Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)
- What do they say about repentance from sin? Do they talk about it at all?
 - Jesus talked a lot about repentance. Specifically, regarding teaching He commanded: “...repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47)
- Beware of calling something “heresy” that is NOT heresy:
 - Heresy is an error that strikes at the heart of the gospel (such as denying Christ’s true nature, the Trinity, or the resurrection).
 - Debatable issues are disagreements over interpretation or practice that, while important, do not invalidate the gospel message or Christian identity.
 - Many issues that divide Christians-such as baptism, predestination, church government, or worship style-are significant but not heresy.
- How can we AVOID false teachers?

- KNOW scripture – Don't just read a verse here or there, study God's word.
- Christ followers should ask the Holy Spirit to help us spot false teaching.
- Test all teaching – Evaluate teaching based on scripture and sound doctrine. (1 John 4:1)
- Be a part of a Christ-centered, Bible-teaching church.
- How can I know a church is that kind of church?
- Be prayerful in your search first and foremost.
- Here are some good tips from the ministry of "Leading the Way":
 - **Faithful Preaching of the Bible** - The church consistently preaches the Word of God in its full context, focusing on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sermons should convict hearts and encourage transformation, not just offer motivational or feel-good messages.
 - **Jesus is Central in Worship** - Worship should focus on glorifying Jesus. Excellence in worship is good, but the primary goal is to lift up Christ.
 - **Emphasis on Fellowship, Community, and Discipleship** - A Bible-believing church prioritizes deep, Christ-centered relationships and mutual support, reflecting the early church's example. Members are encouraged to carry each other's burdens, grow together in faith, and engage in meaningful community life.
 - **Active Gospel Outreach and Missions** - The church must have a passion for sharing the Gospel locally and globally, following Jesus' Great Commission.^{vi}

So, What's the Takeaway?

Jude 17–23 (ESV) — **17** But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. **18** They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." **19** It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

- That is the problem of false teaching; what is the solution?

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, **21** keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. **22** And have mercy on those who doubt; **23** save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

- There is our ACTION LIST for avoiding false teachers:
 - Build yourself up in your faith (Bible study).
 - Pray for the Holy Spirit's discernment.
 - Abide (remain) in the love of Christ. (John 15:9)
 - Lovingly help those who may have fallen into the grip of a false teacher to return to the true teaching of God's word.
- False teaching is no small matter. That's why we must BE ALERT!

ⁱ Deut. 13:1–3; 2 Thess. 2:9–11; Rev. 13:13, 14; 16:14; 19:20; [Acts 8:9]

ⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Mt 24:24). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (2 Pe 2:17–19). Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (2 Pe 2:3). Tyndale House Publishers.

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/false-doctrine.html>

^v <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-uncomfortable-subject-jesus-addressed-more-than-anyone-else/>

^{vi} <https://ltw.org/read/article/4-signs-youve-found-a-bible-believing-church/>